



# PICKLEBALL

**RAY COLLINS**

**The Other Side of  
Pickleball**



This is the third time I've started over and re-written this article from scratch. Every time I think I have my definitive conclusion on pickleball—I have another epiphany. Let's recap: Tennis is in my DNA. I come from a family of tennis players, played college tennis and I've been fortunate enough to cover and announce pro tennis matches much of my adult life. You get the idea.

And then came pickleball— “the fastest growing sport in the country.” I tried to avoid it at first. It lacked a certain elegance. I also didn't like the cacophonous noise of a whiffle ball off a paddle—but eventually the stars aligned and pickleball was hard to avoid:

Sarasota County extended the Legacy Trail into Payne Park, a couple blocks from our downtown townhouse—and the county built twelve new pickleball courts along the trail. It was time to get a paddle and find out what the fuss was all about.

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I went over, recognized a friend right away who got me into a game—and we were off! It turned out I actually was pretty good. I met about a dozen more people over the next hour and left with a smile and a new sport. I couldn't wait to go back!

Eventually I hit a bit of a brick wall: I did well until I got up against anybody with an ounce of patience, finesse or strategy. I would try to play tennis on the pickleball court—while my sage opponents taught me, what I've tagged, “The Discipline of the Dink.” Simply put—good players know how to drop-shot the ball repeatedly until newcomers like me lose patience and try to put the ball away--which usually causes that whiffle ball to come back even faster than I hit it.

I started getting frustrated at topping out so quickly--breezing through intermediate players but coming up short with advanced players. Also, being 6'2" is a double-edged sword: It helps with reach—but it is tough on the lower body since the ball barely bounces. I eventually had to play less often due to my sore back.

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I began wondering about my old friend called tennis. How silly to spend 50 years perfecting andm polishing a skill only to start over in another sport where I wasn't among the better players?

My first-time back playing tennis in months felt awkward. Tennis suddenly seemed slow after the rat-a-tat pace of pickleball. But there is a certain beauty to tennis—including the euphonic “thud” off the strings replacing the plastic “clack” off the paddle. I also found that I was bending my legs more, paying more attention to my fundamentals—and enjoying tennis more than I had in years.

I had a similar torrid affair with golf years ago. But once again, tennis patiently waited for me to come back, just like it did with pickleball. The bottom line—I don't have to choose. How nice to have that option.

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