



Over 100 locals play pickleball at the JCC in Marblehead.

Pickleball has become a big hit at the JCC of the North Shore

BY STEVE MARANTZ([HTTPS://JEWISHJOURNAL.ORG/AUTHOR/STEVE-MARANTZ/](https://JEWISHJOURNAL.ORG/AUTHOR/STEVE-MARANTZ/))

April 18, 2024



Here, at the Jewish Community Center of the North Shore pickleball courts in Marblehead, there is laughter, conversation, and friendship. Sweat and strategy. Light, hope, and charity. Fun.



(<https://sharsheret.org/>)

Elsewhere, well, there's the other stuff.

“It’s a great diversion from the world,” said Lisa Bornstein, 59, of Marblehead. “Once you’re on the court, you can’t think about the misery and sadness, your mind doesn’t go that way. You’re just playing.”

Pickleball is said to be the fastest growing sport in America, played by millions, fueled by its low cost, short learning curve, and an aging demographic who find it less injurious than tennis or racquetball.

Two years ago, JCC pickleballers could be counted on two hands. Today, the number is more than 100 – Jews and gentiles – from all walks of life, all shapes and sizes.

Andrew Dalton, JCC member operations director, said that pickleball is “a huge part” of his weekly gym schedule.

“We’ve been pushed to have more programming time, and it’s helped us keep members and pull in new members,” said Dalton.

The game is popular, Dalton added, because “it’s inclusive, you can have coed competition fairly easily, you don’t need immense running ability, and different age groups can play together. It makes a lot of sense.”

Bornstein’s pickleball group, which came together in 2022, numbers 32, give or take, with players from 40 to 80 years old. It stays connected by two text chains. One of the

regulars, Howie Seligman, 74, of Swampscott, plays three to four times a week, for three hours.

“It’s a great diversion from the world,” says Lisa Bornstein.

“You’re rotating in and out so it’s not a straight three hours,” Seligman

said. “It’s good exercise, and since I’m semi-retired it’s something to do.”

Another regular, Mark Foley, 59, of Swampscott, plays twice a week in winter, four times a week in summer.

“I love the social part along with the competition,” said Foley. “Win or lose you have a great time.”

Pickleball was invented in 1965 by then-U.S. Rep. Joel Pritchard of Washington state and two friends at his home on Bainbridge Island, according to the USA Pickleball website. Swampscott native Marty Orloff took up the game and spread the word locally in the 2000s.

The game is a hybrid of tennis and Ping-Pong, played on a court one-fourth the size of a tennis court. Players hit a hollow, plastic ball over a net with large Ping-Pong type paddles. Quickness and finesse are rewarded, both in blazing power shots and placement “dinks.”

Nothing about the game is identifiably Jewish, except perhaps the kibitzing and schmoozing it nurtures. Still, amongst the Bornstein cohort the spirit of chesed is distinctly Jewish. When one of the regulars, Fran Levy-Freiman of Swampscott, lost her husband, Steven Freiman, to pancreatic cancer in late February, many of her pickleball comrades attended the Shiva.

“The support comes in many forms, and it includes texts and emails checking up on you, food, donations, and most of all hugs,” Levy-Freiman wrote in an email. “The people that comprise the pickleball family have known each other for roughly a year, but it has resulted in instant friendships. Friendships that feel like you’ve known these people your whole life. Everybody and anybody offers you support beyond your imagination.

The camaraderie goes well beyond the court.”

Said Diane Knopf, a group regular: “Pickleball is how it started, but it’s become a social group. Lunch and dinners, and occasionally theater.”

Three indoor courts and four outdoor courts serve JCC pickleball, depending upon weather and other activities. The delicate task of scheduling falls to Dalton, who must find time for preschoolers, basketball, and open gym.

“I try to balance it out,” said Dalton. “If I had the ability, I’d give [pickleball] every hour in the winter and they’d be happy. The other

programs understand how big it's gotten. Having midday open court times has been great, but it takes time away from preschool."

Said Bornstein: "He has a tough job. He has everybody coming at him. We think our game is most important, basketballers think theirs is. He has to say, 'Listen, I can only do so much.'"

Some JCC players access indoor courts at various North Shore YMCAs. Mild weather opens numerous outdoor options, according to pickleheads.com. Marblehead favorites include Seaside Park and Veterans Middle School; Lynn's Clark Street Playground also is popular.

Swampscott recently voted down installation of outdoor courts at Phillips Park, with opponents citing "noise pollution" caused by the crack of balls on rackets. Outdoor courts at the JCC are closed before 8 a.m. and after 8 p.m. to accommodate residential abutters.

Pam Shorr, 66, of Swampscott, was one of the original players of the JCC group, also known as the Chickieballs.

"First day I met Sam, who was 92," Shorr recalled. "His wife had died. He said, 'I didn't want to keep on living, and then I discovered this.' He played two or three times a week. Pickleball had given him a whole new way of looking at things."

A retired Salem teacher, Shorr has taken lessons from five different instructors, and has come to appreciate the game's subtlety.

“People hit it hard, but that’s only one shot,” said Shorr. “Lobs, dinks, and slices are hard to return. The perfect dink, you’re on the far-right corner and you slice it diagonally, as close to the net as possible, on the far-left side. There’s no way to get there.”

Shorr noted a growing divide between subtle/finesse players and fast/power players. The latter includes her husband, Frank.

“He likes a faster game, and it’s hard for me to keep up, which is frustrating to him,” Shorr said. “So, we’re not often [playing] together.”

Young pickleball hopefuls can take classes at the JCC taught by instructor Joe Santisi. Youth instruction will be offered on the outdoor courts during the JCC summer camp, Dalton said.

The Times of Israel reported last August that demand for pickleball is soaring at Jewish summer camps across the U.S. Camp Avoda, in Middleborough, and Camp Bauercrest, in Amesbury, were cited for their pickleball programs. One director noted that the game is particularly popular with kids who find tennis too difficult.

Pickleball’s multigenerational appeal is undeniable, Bornstein said, but it needs guardrails.

“My only complaint to Andrew – make that ‘suggestion’ – is when we do round-robins I don’t want to be playing with a 15-year-old,” said Bornstein. “They should have separate times. It’s awkward for adults to be around 15-year-olds. We don’t want to worry about what we’re saying. Plus, they would kick our butts.”

I’m on the court, holding a paddle, staring across a net.

Lisa Bornstein slaps a ball my way. I swing and send it back. Did it land inside the line, or beyond? Doesn’t matter.

I’ve caught the wave. Two waves, actually.

Pickleball. And gonzo journalism.

Diane Knopf asks if I’m going to play regularly. I’m a 72-year-old with two total knee replacements. Who likes to golf.

“I’d have to cut back on golf,” I tell her.

To which her disdain is unconcealed.

“Don’t you want a faster and more active game than golf?”

One Response

**Mary
Hobbins
DeChillo**
says:

April 14, 2024 at 9:02 am
(<https://jewishjournal.org/2024/04/18/pickleball-has-become-a-big-hit-at-the-jcc-of-the-north-shore/#comment-18493>)

Love this first-hand reporting from a nationally known sports reporter!

Reply

Your email address will not be published. Required fields are marked *

Comment *

Name *

Email *

POST COMMENT

TOP STORIES

Editorial: Happy Passover

(<https://jewishjournal.org/2024/04/19/editorial-happy-passover-5/>)

BY JEWISH JOURNAL

Washington sold out Israel's deterrence to save Iran's

(<https://jewishjournal.org/2024/04/19/washington-sold-out-israel-s-deterrence-to-save-iran-s>)

[sold-out-israels-deterrence-to-save-irans/](#)

BY YIGAL CARMON

Harvard assistant dean has a new book with a convicted terrorist murderer
[\(https://jewishjournal.org/2024/04/19/harvard-assistant-dean-has-a-new-book-with-a-convicted-terrorist-murderer/\)](https://jewishjournal.org/2024/04/19/harvard-assistant-dean-has-a-new-book-with-a-convicted-terrorist-murderer/)

BY MOSHE PHILLIPS

Israel reportedly strikes in Iran, days after fending off Iranian missile attack
[\(https://jewishjournal.org/2024/04/19/israel-reportedly-strikes-in-iran-days-after-fending-off-iranian-missile-attack/\)](https://jewishjournal.org/2024/04/19/israel-reportedly-strikes-in-iran-days-after-fending-off-iranian-missile-attack/)

BY JTA STAFF

Pickleball has become a big hit at the JCC of the North Shore
[\(https://jewishjournal.org/2024/04/18/pickleball-has-become-a-big-hit-at-the-jcc-of-the-north-shore/\)](https://jewishjournal.org/2024/04/18/pickleball-has-become-a-big-hit-at-the-jcc-of-the-north-shore/)

BY STEVE MARANTZ

Jewish Journal is reader supported

DONATE

[HTTPS://WWW.PAYPAL.COM/CGI-BIN/WEBSCR?CMD=_S-XCLICK&HOSTED_BUTTON_ID=Z5VSKBEUW2PQ6&SOURCE=URL](https://www.paypal.com/cgi-bin/webscr?cmd=_s-xclick&hosted_button_id=z5vskbeuw2pq6&source=url)

SUBSCRIBE

[HTTPS://JEWISHJOURNAL.ORG/SUBSCRIBE/](https://jewishjournal.org/subscribe/)

About Us

Contact Us

Advertise With Us
[\(htt](#)

Archived Issues
[\(htt](#)

Privacy Policy
[ps:/](#)

[\(htt](#)
[ps:/](#)
[/w](#)
[ww.](#)
[you](#)
[tub](#)
[e.co](#)
[m/](#)



<https://jewishjournal.org>

ter. k.co am m/
Xco f m/J com @Je
m/j ewi 2024/je wis
ewi shJ wis hJo
sh_ our hjo urn
ma) nal urn alof
MA alm Gre
/) a/) ater
Bos
ton)

□

<https://jewishjournal.org>

