



ISSUE: NOISE COMPLAINTS RELATED TO THE PICKLEBALL COURTS

By Lauren Poythress, Class of 2023, Centreville High School

As has been the case in many neighborhoods, our HOA replaced our outdated and under-used tennis courts with pickleball courts. For the third year in a row, pickleball is the fastest-growing sport in America. Factors contributing to its popularity include that it is easy to learn, fun to play, relatively inexpensive, and can be enjoyed by people of all ages. It's becoming especially popular with seniors, who often have more leisure time. It is an open-play format that allows players to play with many other players in a single session, making it an extremely social and accessible sport. It provides an opportunity to gather with neighbors and to make new friends. While many are enjoying the opportunity and convenience of playing in their own neighborhood, others are not happy about that proximity to their homes.

Noise complaints are on the rise. The pop pop or clack clack sound that the pickleball makes when coming in contact with the paddle was not anticipated when transforming the tennis courts to pickleball courts. Additionally, with it being such a social sport that many can play at once, the noise of people talking and playing has amplified the noise issue. The game of tennis is relatively quiet. The impact of the ball hitting the racket strings is very subtle compared to the popping sounds of the pickleball paddles hitting the ball. Although not a scientific statement, most will agree that one is louder than the other. Saying most means that not all agree. Some say that it's not a louder sound, just a different one. Regardless, the noise complaints are valid and need to be addressed.

In order to have some common ground, our HOA board must see and hear both sides. We must put safeguards in place to ensure that those who want to enjoy the neighborhood facilities will not disturb the ones who do not. A common sense compromise is to limit the hours of play to after 9 am and before 9 pm. Although that time range will not work for everyone involved, it should be suitable for most. Signs must be posted on open courts and neighbors must be respectful enough to abide by the rules. As with all rules, there are people who will violate them. If the violations occur after a verbal warning, a written warning will be issued. If the pickleball players don't obey the warnings, they will be fined and banned from using the courts.

Another possible solution is to require our neighborhood players to use a category of pickleball paddles that are considered "quiet paddles." They are designed to reduce the sound of the ball as it comes in contact with the racket. Additionally, pickleball companies are aware of the noisiness of the game and have developed balls made of a softer foam like material. The "quiet paddle" coupled with the softer foam ball should greatly reduce the amount of noise and therefore, reduce the number of noise violation complaints.

As our HOA looks at its 2024-2025 budget, we may consider other larger scale ways of solving the pickleball noise problems. The USA Pickleball Association recommends the use of a 1/8 inch thick "AcoustiFence" which serves as a noise curtain around the court. The AcoustiFence is made to be used in all seasons and all weather conditions. The claim is that this noise curtain reduces the noise levels by around half.

The board's decision to develop guidelines for the pickleball players will impact the HOA as a whole. The timeframe for play, along with the requirement of quiet paddles and balls should ease some of the frustration of those bothered by the noise, while allowing neighbors to continue to play a game they are growing to love.