

TOP STORY SPOTLIGHT

Column: "I'll be playing wheelchair pickleball": Age isn't a factor at the USA Pickleball qualifier

Skip Foreman

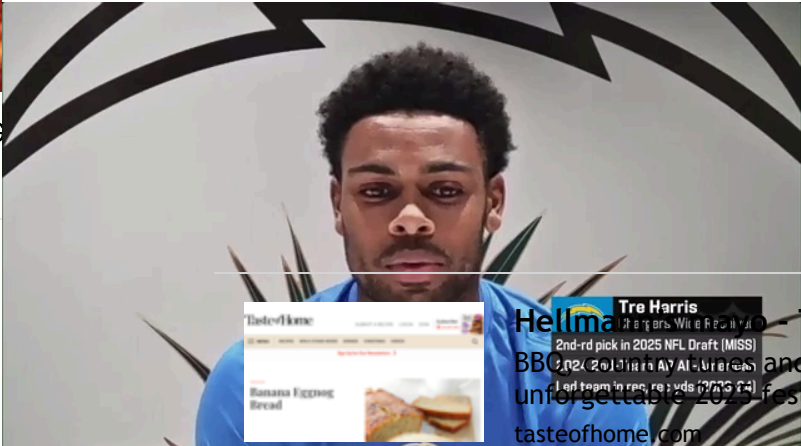
May 30, 2025



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Roger Gore returns a volley at the USA Pickleball G
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It takes baseball pitching great Satchel Paige to put the second day of the USA Pickleball Golden Ticket qualifier in perspective.

"Age is a question of mind over matter," Paige was quoted as saying. "If you don't mind, it don't matter."

To a host of participants inside the Special Events Center at the Greensboro Coliseum Complex, they certainly didn't mind, although it did matter to a degree. The competition, which began on Wednesday and continues through Sunday, is one of 19 held across the country. The winners will move on to the national championships scheduled for November in San Diego.

José Moreno, spokesman for USA Pickleball, said if people don't win here, there's still opportunities at the remaining venues. The lack of an age limit stands out.

"Anybody can play," Moreno said. "You can play with your grandpa. You can play with your son, your siblings. It doesn't matter. ... It's multi-generational. Doesn't cost much to play, and you know, this sport's not just a fad. It's definitely here to stay."

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And while there are plenty of young players up the game and run with it.



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"The fastest growing demographic is definitely that 18- to 35-year-old. But from our members, that 55-and-over is the majority because they've been playing these a lot longer," Moreno said. "They've been playing this in their communities, where now the younger folks have started to pick it up."

"But, yeah, there's definitely older," he added. "At nationals last year, our youngest was 7 and our oldest was 93 who competed at the national championships."

The history and the growth

Pickleball isn't new, not by a long volley.

The story goes that it was invented in 1965 by three dads on Bainbridge Island, Washington, to entertain their bored kids during a summer vacation. They had an old badminton court, a wiffle ball and some ping pong paddles. In developing the game, the dads improvised the rules, lowering the badminton net and using a wiffle ball with the paddles.

According to a USA Pickleball database known as Pickleheads, 4,000 new playing locations were added in 2024, bringing the total to 15,910 courts nationwide. That database now includes 68,458 courts, with 18,455 new courts added in 2024.

Also, Pickleheads says pickleball has been the **fastest-growing sport in America** for the past four years. As of 2024, there was an estimated 19.8 million players in the U.S., and the 2025 Sports, Fitness, and Leisure Activities Topline Participation Report estimates the number may be as high as 45 million.

It's also reported that participation in p
years.

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USA Pickleball says it continues to sup

And why the name pickleball? It was na
the inventing dads, or it was named for
"leftover" from other boats.



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Bored with retirement

Sonia Wriglesworth, 71, had retired from the Department of the Army after 30 years. Living in Whispering Pines, near Pinehurst, shoulder surgery prevented her from playing tennis.

"Somebody said, 'Hey, Pinehurst has something called pickleball. Go check it out,'" Wriglesworth said. "That's how I got started."

To say she's hooked is an understatement.

"I fell in love with pickleball, but I have evolved. I started out as a banger, hit everything hard," she said. "And then, as you go through the years, you get better, more refined, skilled, and so I love to go to tournaments."

On Thursday, Wriglesworth was playing doubles with 71-year-old Mary Altmeyer of Southern Pines. Altmeyer spent 35 years as a nurse anesthetist before moving to North Carolina. Sitting still wasn't sitting well with her.

"I moved down here from Pittsburgh because if you're going to retire, you need to be outside all the time," Altmeyer said. "And so, when I retired, it's like, I have to do something. I have to do something physical, active."

As opposed to Wriglesworth, Altmeyer wasn't a tennis player. But when she picked up pickleball, she also picked up a vibe.

"I did not play sports, but tried pickleball and thought, 'I don't think I'm competitive enough for this,'" she said. "I still don't Tre Harris provides insight to his rookie campaign so far 'The I... physical activity. It's a great social get-t

When their day was done, the two women drove back to San Diego. It was the first time the pair had been going for the national championship. Wriglesworth's enthusiastic partner to carry on.



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"I have met more people playing pickleball than I have ever met in my life," Wriglesworth said. "It's just a great, great thing to do, and anybody can play, and anybody can do it. Motion is the lotion, so you're constantly moving and it's just great. I can't explain it. ... It's my happy place."

Aggie Pickleball Pride

More than sufficiently braced to make sure he could play, Richard Shank also won a Golden Ticket in an afternoon match.

Ten years ago, Shank, an alum of North Carolina A&T, was playing a similar sport when he chose to make a change.

"Well, I was talked into it because I was playing table tennis and I was a tennis player before," he said. "But they finally convinced me to come in the gym and play pickleball, so once I came in, everything else was over."

The Golden Ticket carries added significance for the 75-year-old Shank.

"I have a cousin that lives there, so I want to go visit her," he said. "So I got a son in Pasadena, so I want to go visit him."

Shank has a list of achievements, including pickleball championships in Orlando and Fort Lauderdale in Florida, as well as at the Senior Games in North Carolina.

"I'm all over the place," he said.

As for the future, Plank sees more pickl

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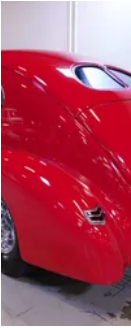
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