





RACQUETBALL

WORDS BY:
RENN TRANI

PHOTOGRAPHY BY:
MAC WOOLLEY

For me, racquetball started as a cluttered dodgeball game, to just whacking the ball around, and finally actually playing the game.

It is a game from the tennis family, but played mostly inside and on a smaller court. A difference from tennis would be that you play next to your opponent as you both take turns whacking the ball against the wall. The ball is smaller and made of rubber, meaning it bounces fast and will likely hit you.

I am by no means a serious racquetball player, I'm not in the clubs, I wasn't raised on it, and I have no desire for professional play. But, I enjoy its ridiculousness, with its all-white uniforms, those skin-tight sport glasses, and the white box court with blinding lights you would only see in a hospital. It is almost so unusual, that part of me believes the game can only exist in some futuristic dystopia. Where racquetball has been named the ultimate determination for life or death.

When I walk into the court I do feel as if I'm escaping reality, entering this white box floating across a black space. The lack of stimulation of the senses produces this unworldly feeling: The lack of color to see, as white dominates your vision. The quietness inside the room, only being able to hear your own breathing. All create this great calm that perhaps astronauts have felt orbiting in silence. The racquetball court alienates you with its Zen, where the court is calm and collective, our lives and minds don't always follow example. How I've wished to embody

this mindset outside of the racquetball court, I've written stories about racquetball, the way I dress sometimes is like a racquetball player, I even walk around with a racket when I don't even plan to play. Being a racquetball player has its own special characterization of tranquility but also callous.

This game is ruthless, you don't play but rather try not to die. Like a gladiator's pit where instead you take turns launching rubber balls at each other with everything that you have. The amount of times I have taken a flying rubber ball to the face. I've slammed against the walls, fallen on my butt after huge leaps, and slid across the hardwood floors, all in desperation to not lose a point. Stemming from this feeling that to win is to leave and to lose is to stay, to never leave the racquetball court. This factor of the game is a trait that perhaps has been handed down from its supposive origins: In prisons during the 1800s, they would give prisoners balls and they would hit them against the walls calling it "racket." Meaning racquetball is a game based upon cages and the people stuck inside. Creating this animal-like instinct to escape from a trap but within the trap: a barely visible flying object with a mind of its own is bouncing across the tiny cage-like court. To top it all off, a person who is squeezed in the same tiny cage as you is carelessly twirling their metal racquet around inches from your face, intent on winning this crazy sport. You play this game with constant fear for your damn life.



The intensity of the game is exaggerated but should not be taken lightly. The amount of times I have taken a flying rubber ball to the face. I've slammed against the walls, slid across the hardwood floors, all in desperation to not lose a point.







Is it better to experience the serenity of your own personal court but suffer the loneliness? Or better to experience the thrill of a cluttered challenge in your shared cage but live in constant fear? Perhaps there is a balance, in being a racquetball partner that contributes to the flourishing of both respecting mindsets.

One night when I couldn't find anyone to play with, I went to the courts for a practice set. Walking past the courts I noticed a post-it note attached to the glass wall outside the racquetball court "looking for a racquetball partner" and they left their phone number. Half of me had the intention of calling the number as I also was in need of a racquetball partner. I went inside the other court alone and played casually with this on my mind. After my set, I walked out for some water only to see a lone racquetball player in the court opposite of mine, the one that had the note outside. The note was still there and it was obvious that this was the same person inside who wrote it. As I walked past I turned my head towards them, only from them to turn around towards me. They stood still for a semi second, seeing the racquet in my hands and then raised their racquet towards me, like an invitation or a challenge.

Despite this I left them hanging there waiting for a response as I was still walking and had just turned the corner away from the courts only seeing them from the corner of my eyes. I thought about how naive it was to leave one's number so openly to the public in a city, especially

in regards to a sport like racquetball. But, it is quite brave to be so open in your search for a racquetball partner when a lot of us shy away from such desperation.

We were both in our own neighboring cages, closed off from the world playing our sport. I wonder if they found a partner, or just played alone in that white box. □

