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Pickleball is Disrupting the Marketplace

Even Lebron James and Tom Brady are Investing

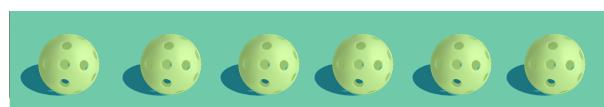
By Luke Hauver

What was your favorite childhood sport? Soccer? Football? Maybe Basketball? Baseball? Basketball was my favorite childhood sport by far, but what if I told you there is a new sport that is emerging from dust that is becoming everyone's new favorite sport? You read correctly, sports like baseball and soccer are no longer center stage, but rather a new up-and-rising sport that involves a wiffle ball, paddle, and a miniature-sized tennis court is making itself known.

Invented in 1965, pickleball has been around for many years. However, pickleball was not until just recently that the sport has been gaining the interest of millions of Americans.ⁱ Pickleball is undoubtedly disrupting the sports marketplace. Throughout this article, I will share and discuss a variety of ways through which Pickleball is bringing variation to the marketplace. This is happening due to pickleball creating a new niche/trend, pickleball gaining the interest of well-known professional athletes and businessmen, and pickleball generating increased revenue.

Creating a New Niche/Trend

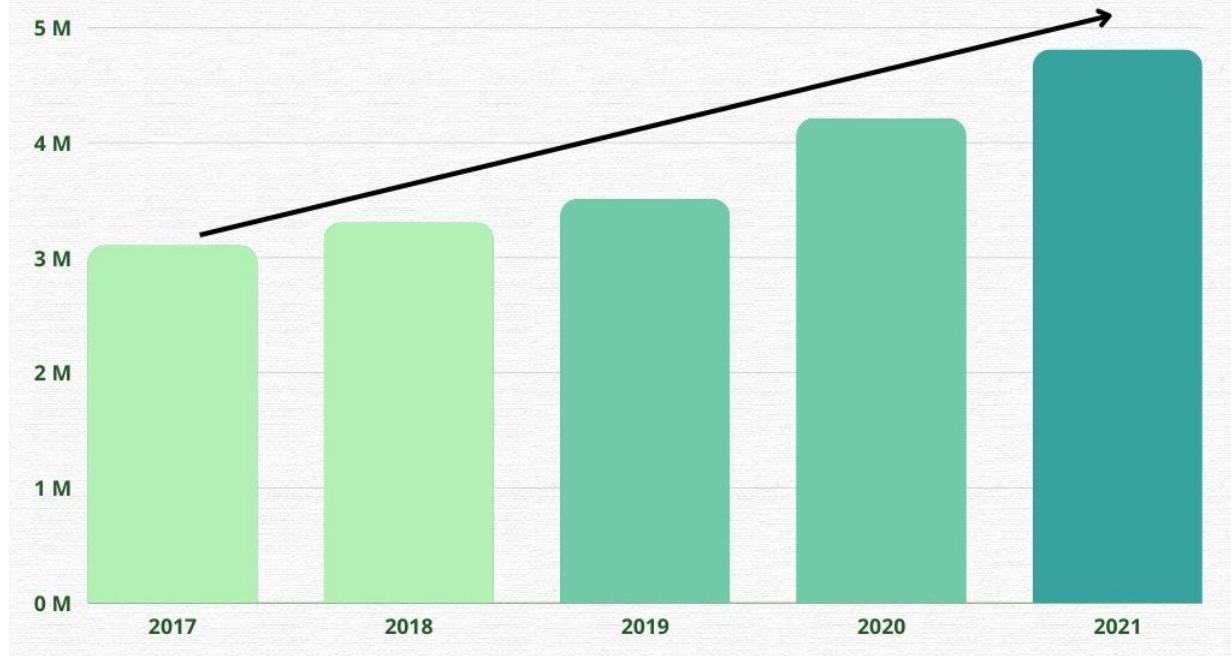
According to USA Pickleball, the governing body of the sport of Pickleball in the US, pickleball is the fastest-growing sport in America for the second year in a row.ⁱⁱ Additionally, Pickleball has doubled in participationⁱⁱⁱ in recent years and grown to nearly 5 million players.^{iv} The sport is even making impressive efforts to become an official Olympic sport by 2028.^v This would be a huge leap for the sport of pickleball. Pickleball becoming an Olympic sport would mean gaining recognition not only nationwide but worldwide. To even become an official sport in the Olympics, a sport needs competitive players in at least 75 different countries.^{vi} Until pickleball reaches that point the sport will, for now, continue to grow within the United States and a few other select countries. Additionally, do not forget that the game now has two national professional tournaments,^{vii} both formed in the last four years.



Source: Canva Photos

Growth of Pickleball

2017 - 2021



source: "Pickleball Statistics," <https://www.pickleheads.com/blog/pickleball-statistics>

While these profound numbers contribute to the obvious evidence of pickleball becoming a new trend, the increased amount of pickleball players can also be explained through evidence that pickleball provides positive psychological triggers.^{vii} Genuine satisfaction, gratification, and a sense of fulfillment are all emotions that are experienced while playing pickleball. This takes the sport of pickleball from being just a competitive sport that is played every now and then to being a sport that people schedule into their everyday lives to feel happier. A business and economics trade journal further explains the details of this point by stating the following: "the short distance between players almost makes it conducive to socialization while playing doubles just for fun. It is almost like having a conversation and having your exercise too. The best of both worlds chatting and playing can indeed be addictive, just like walking long distances with a friend who is constantly chatting by your side can become habitual."^{ix} The Article further went on to state one last psychological trigger by stating that "some people are even drawn in by the sound: the mysterious 'pop-pop-pop,' that creates a kind of background noise for the sport."^x

Gaining the Interest of Well-Known Athletes

If these numbers and facts did not impress you, how about knowing that Lebron James, Tom Brady, and even Bill Gates are getting involved in the sport? Yep, that is right, professional athletes Lebron James, Tom Brady, and billionaire Bill Gates are frequently playing the sport of pickleball. They love pickleball so much that they aren't quiet about their interest in pickleball either. Bill Gates has openly stated, "Fifty years ago, I started playing this little-known sport with a funny name. Now, it's all the rage."^{xii} He later went on to say, "One of my favorite pastimes is now America's fastest-growing sport...If you decide to give pickleball a try, I hope it brings you as much joy as it has my family and me."^{xiii}



Source: Unsplash Photos

Even more than just playing the sport, Lebron James and Tom Brady have gone the extra mile and actually invested in MLP (Major League Pickleball) and become team owners.^{xiv} Chris Katje, a writer for Benzinga Newswires, said "NBA superstar LeBron James and business partner Maverick Carter teamed up with NBA players Draymond Green and Kevin Love and other investors to own a team in Major League Pickleball."^{xv} Discussing this growth, the owner of the MLP, Steve Kuhn, says "This investment and the platform that this group provides will significantly help us with our goal to reach 40 million pickleball players by 2030."^{xvi} The impact that pickleball is having in the eyes of many is indeed clear and incredible for the future potential of the sport. But what is it exactly that people like Lebron James and Tom Brady are seeing in the sport of pickleball to get them to go beyond just playing the sport and actually investing?



Source: Canva Photos

Generating Increased Revenue

This question now leads to the concluding point, pickleball is bringing in increased revenue. Multiple businesses are actually taking an active role in the promotion of pickleball. A Molson Coors brand, Vizzy, for example, is the official beer and flavored malt beverage partner of the Professional Pickleball Association (PPA).^{xvii} This could be alluding to possible appearances of pickleball in Super Bowl Advertising as Molson Coors has announced plans to return to super bowl advertising.^{xix} What would this mean for the sport of pickleball? Pickleball making an appearance in Super Bowl advertisements could possibly mean millions of new people worldwide being introduced to the sport and worldwide recognition of the sport. This type of advertising could also mean an even steeper increase in the number of pickleball players worldwide.

In addition to sponsorships, U.S., and hotels and resorts in the U.S. are adding more and more pickleball courts to their amenities.^{xx} One specific VP of sales for an American club resort said "Within the past three years, pickleball group bookings have generated a seven-figure revenue boost to our resorts."^{xxi} Let me state that one more time, a "seven-figure revenue boost." Resorts and hotels nationwide and worldwide are noticing the increased benefits of pickleball courts and actually replacing many of their existing tennis courts with multiple

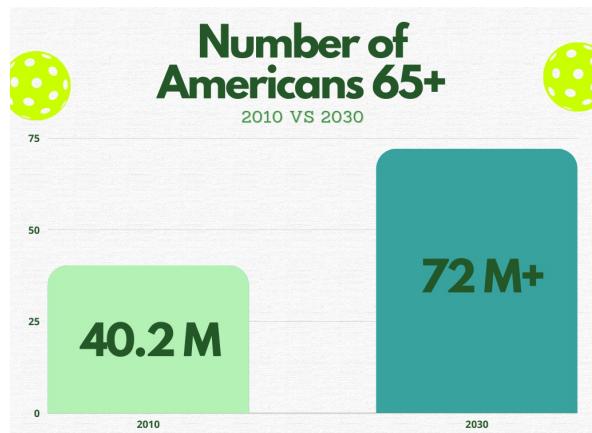
pickleball courts. People and businesses are indeed compromising in order to maximize this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity and get a sense of the joy of pickleball. So maybe now you can see a little more clearly the potential of the future of pickleball and why so many people are not just playing the sport but investing lots of money in the sport as well.



Source: Canva Photos

Now with all these newly built pickleball courts that cost so much money, it is important to understand who is utilizing these courts. A peer-reviewed article titled “Over 50 and Back in College, Preparing for a New Career” discusses this large demographic that is using these courts stated the following:

“As demand for more adult learning opportunities accelerates, colleges and universities are trying to figure out how to tap into the market for second careers to bolster their revenue and perhaps build alumni loyalty. The potential audience is huge. By 2030, the number of Americans 65 and older will grow to 72 million, up from 40.2 million in 2010, according to the United States Census Bureau. To date, colleges and universities have paid little attention to the needs of this population.”^{xxii}



Source: “Over 50 and Back in College,” <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/04/04/your-money/over-50-and-back-in-college-preparing-for-a-new-career.html>.

Thus, it can be clearly seen it is in fact the older generation of baby boomers that are taking the most advantage of the popular sport of pickleball. This makes sense considering the large tendency of the baby boomer population to be retired, not working, and searching for new avenues of enjoyment, fulfillment, and physical activity. Many people see retirement as a time to achieve unachieved goals or pursue new hobbies that were not feasible earlier in life. Even after having worked for almost their whole life, most people that retire actually continue to desire to develop and obtain new skill sets.^{xxiii}

“seven-figure revenue
boost to our resorts
- Michelle Lardizabal”

In consideration of pickleball disrupting the marketplace by bringing in increased revenue, this is extremely significant to understand. A study in the UK that lasted from 2006 to 2018 examined the spending patterns of current retirees.^{xxiv}

This study gives a detailed picture of retired households' spending patterns and the data showed that spending of individuals between the ages of 67 and 75 rose by 7%.^{xxv}

This is a powerful percentage in showing us that people are prone to spend more as they get older. And with the fastest-growing sport in America being pickleball, it might be no surprise that most of these baby boomers will be spending a lot more money on the sport of pickleball. This is just one of many examples of how pickleball is bringing in increased revenue and the details behind it.



Source: Canva Photos

In Conclusion

Although sports like football, soccer, and basketball are still the big dogs in the sports market, pickleball is indeed changing normal sports interests and is creating a wave of interest. From just being a simple sport that three dads created because their kids were bored of their summertime activities, to being one of the most liked sports nationwide, pickleball^{xxvi} has come a long way and without a doubt is booming. From being the fastest growing sport in America to having LeBron James and Tom Brady invest in the sport, to gaining sponsorships and pickleball is undoubtedly disrupting the marketplace. So, the next time you think of pickleball as just another trivial pastime for baby boomers, this up-and-rising sport is actually serving up aces in the industry and making big moves to disrupt the marketplace.

End Notes

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