

# Marriage, With a Side of Pickleball

By Rachel Simon, New York Times

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As pickleball rides a wave of popularity, couples are marrying on courts, hosting games at their receptions and finding other ways to incorporate the sport into their nuptials.

Julene and Charles Wood were married in May on the pickleball court where they met, in Bloomington, Ill. Credit: Photo by Lisa Wilson, courtesy of Julene and Charlie Wood

Julene and Charles Wood had played pickleball as a couple several times at the Evergreen Racquet Club in Bloomington, Ill., after first meeting on a court there in March 2021.

When they arrived at the club on a Friday in May, Ms. Wood, 49, wearing a white tennis dress, and Mr. Wood, 45, in a black polo shirt and white shorts, looked like any other doubles team were it not for the white veil clipped into her hair. Though they had come to play pickleball, the Woods, who now live in Lehi, Utah, first had another event to attend: their

wedding.

On the same court where they met, beneath an archway made of pickleballs, they were married before a few dozen guests, most of whom were in athletic wear. The ceremony was performed by the Rev. Trevor Gearhart, a pastor at Calvary Baptist Church in Normal, Ill., whom Ms. Wood, a librarian, and Mr. Wood, a manager at a garage-door manufacturer, met playing pickleball.

Later, attendees enjoyed pickleball-shaped sugar cookies as well as a few rounds of the game. When [the festivities](#) ended, everyone took home pickleball key chains as party favors.

“Lots of people commented that this was the most fun wedding they had attended,” Ms. Wood said. She added that their guests especially loved “that they could wear T-shirts and shorts and tennis shoes to a wedding.”

While the sport — a mix of tennis, racquetball, badminton and Ping-Pong — was started in 1965, interest in it has [exploded in recent years](#) after steadily rising over the last decade. According to a 2021 survey of 18,000 people by the Sports & Fitness Industry Association, a trade group, pickleball is the [fastest-growing sport](#) in this country, where nearly five million people now play it.

As a result, pickleball is showing up more [on social media, on television screens](#) and at weddings, with couples like the Woods marrying on courts, hosting tournaments at their receptions or finding other ways to incorporate the sport into their nuptials.

Betsy Krug, the event director and an owner of Rebecca Rose Events, in Winston-Salem, N.C., says [weddings](#) and pickleball are a great match because the sport is easy to learn and accessible to people of various ages and athletic backgrounds. The ability to play with up to four people at a time is also part of its appeal.

“Because you play in a doubles format, there’s a nice mix of being able to champion someone else, relax, have fun and meet people that you may not otherwise spend time with,” she said.

Sporting events are particularly popular at destination or [multiday weddings](#), Ms. Krug added, because “couples are always interested in providing optional activities.” Instead of an afternoon of golf or tennis, her clients Madison Snider, 30, and Richard Podpirka, 28, are hosting a pickleball tournament for guests as part of their wedding, which is set to take place over four days in September at High Hampton, a resort in Cashiers, N.C.

Participants will have the chance to receive a lesson before the two-hour tournament, which will be led by one of the venue’s tennis pros and played by mixed doubles teams on four courts. Winners will receive trophies, but every player will be treated to a catered lunch and, when the tournament ends, cocktails.

Arranging the lesson and tournament cost \$300, according to Natasha Kittrell, a representative for High Hampton; the lunch, drinks and trophies are extra. Regardless of whether or not their 140 expected guests actually take part in the activity, the couple, who live in Queens, plan to send all of them home from their wedding with gift bags that include bandannas featuring a customized pickleball print.

Though Ms. Snider, the founder of fine jewelry brand Fewer Finer, and Mr. Podpirka, a property manager, are more casual players than fanatics, the sport is “the perfect activity to include in a leisurely weekend,” she said. For their wedding invitations, the couple worked with Ms. Krug, their planner, to create specific invitations to the pickleball tournament, which included details and a dress code (formal tennis whites, of course).

“Our wedding party is so excited and already feels more into it and more competitive than we expected,” Ms. Snider said.

While pickleball is a low impact sport, couples looking to incorporate games into their nuptials should consider the health risks, which include sprained or strained muscles, according to a report from the National Library of Medicine [database](#).

They should also consider what amenities may be offered by a prospective venue, as Garrett and Elizabeth Gosselin learned after arranging a pickleball tournament at a tennis club near their home in Newport Beach, Calif., as part of their wedding celebration.

Weeks after their civil marriage, Garrett and Elizabeth Gosselin hosted a reception at a tennis club in Newport Beach, Calif., that included a two-hour pickleball session before dinner and dancing. Credit...Courtesy of Elizabeth and Garrett Gosselin

A few weeks after their civil ceremony in Santa Barbara, Calif., the couple held a reception in April at The Tennis Club at Newport Beach, where Ms. Gosselin, who is 36 and a licensed marriage and family therapist, and Mr. Gosselin, who is 31 and a co-founder of the equipment company CRBN Pickleball, had reserved three courts for a two-hour pickleball session before dinner and dancing at the venue’s restaurant.

But only about a third of their 130 guests ended up playing, largely because the club didn't provide access to its showers. (The Gosselins, who are friends with the club's owners, paid for catering and a band, but were not charged a rental fee for the restaurant or courts; a spokeswoman for The Tennis Club at Newport Beach said renting four courts for two hours of group play costs \$3,000.)

"Overall, the playing aspect probably could have been planned better," Mr. Gosselin said. "Everyone who played had a blast, though."

Pickleball obsessives, perhaps not surprisingly, say there are few better ways to connect with loved ones and new acquaintances at a wedding than through a friendly game.

When James and Anna Kloss, avid players who regularly compete in pickleball tournaments, were married on a court at a Phoenix fitness center, in December 2016, it was well before the sport experienced its recent boom in popularity. "There were quite a few guests who had never heard of, much less seen pickleball," Ms. Kloss, who is 57 and a retired teacher, said.



That did not stop a third of their 100 guests from participating in the various activities the couple had arranged, which included demonstrations for the less experienced, open play for seasoned athletes and a tournament-style competition. Everyone who attended also received custom pickleball paddles emblazoned with the couple's names and their wedding date.

Image

The few dozen guests at the Woods's wedding took home pickleball key chains as party favors. Credit: Photo by Lisa Wilson, courtesy of Julene and Charlie Wood

"We consistently heard that it was the most fun wedding anyone had ever been to," Mr. Kloss, who is 62 and a retired lawyer, said.

About a year and a half ago, the Klosses moved from their Phoenix home into a place in [Paradise Valley, Ariz.](#), a nearby suburb, where they've since installed two pickleball courts.

"Daily, we have friends come from all over the Valley to play

pickleball with us," Ms. Kloss said. Many of them, she added, took up the sport after playing it at the couple's wedding.

