

One Way to Grow the Sport Making the Pitch for MUNICIPAL PADDLE

by Tom Dow

Over the years, a variety of ideas have been discussed and/or tried in order to grow platform tennis. This article is intended to help facilitate growing the sport by making it easier to sell the idea of building more public courts and facilities. This article will subsequently form the basis of a presentation designed to arm you, the paddle enthusiast, with what you need to be able to make the pitch in your area. This could include making the case to a local municipality, YMCA, foundation, and/or local "paddle angel."

PRESENTATION BEGINS

First of all, we'd like to begin with a little history and point out that platform tennis (a.k.a. paddle tennis) began in 1928. Two men, who were looking to stay active and keep their tennis skills honed during the winter months, had the idea to build a miniature court that would allow for winter play. They then built a 30' x 60' outdoor court surrounded by 12' high screens.

The screens were originally used to keep the balls in the court. Soon after, it was found that the balls were fun to play off the screens, similar to walls in squash and racquetball.

Today, the courts are made of aluminum, with gas heaters below to melt the snow and lights up high for night play. Most courts are accompanied by an inviting warming hut (many with fireplaces) and other modern amenities.

The founders surely had no idea that the game they created would someday become a sport so thoroughly enjoyed by people of all ages and skill levels, both male and female, across the United States,



The first platform tennis court (Scarsdale, New York, 1928)



A Saturday morning social game (Boulder, Colorado, 2003)

Canada and even in various countries abroad. But, more to the point, how did this happen?

...Because Platform Tennis is a great game on many levels.

Unlike golf or tennis, learning to play is relatively easy. It's not hard to become proficient, even if you've never picked up a paddle. In addition, strategy is more important than raw power. In that sense, you might say the sport entails the power and speed of tennis mixed with the strategy and patience of chess. And, as a consequence, it is highly addictive.

Platform tennis is so appealing, in particular, thanks to the ability to play a hard shot off the screens. In fact, a hard shot into the back screen can result in the receiver hitting the ball right back at the originating driver from an even shorter distance. What athlete wouldn't enjoy turning the tables on his opponent in such fashion.

In addition to being able to play at night, the sport has a long season, typically September through April, for the enthusiasts. These months, of course, leave plenty of room for such a sport.

Other reasons paddle is the ideal winter sport for residential communities include:

- It's very complementary to ones tennis game; particularly volleying, overheads and strategy
- It helps increase use of often underutilized city parks during winter
- It offers a true winter sport option where often few exist
- It can be played by and between both sexes and by all age groups, including intergenerational family play

In platform tennis communities, tennis and other racquet sports are popular. In fact, 85% of platform tennis players also play tennis. Other demographics are:

SHOW DEMOGRAPHIC SLIDE

- More than 70% of current players are over 40, with 20% over 60
- 85% are college graduates
- 85% play tennis
- 80% earn over \$70,000 annually and 38% over \$150,000
- All enjoy other activities (golf, walking, squash, swimming, etc.)

SHOW VARIETY OF FACILITIES



The Glen View paddle palace (Northbrook, Illinois, 1999)

SHOW DIFFERENT PLAYERS



A sport for juniors...



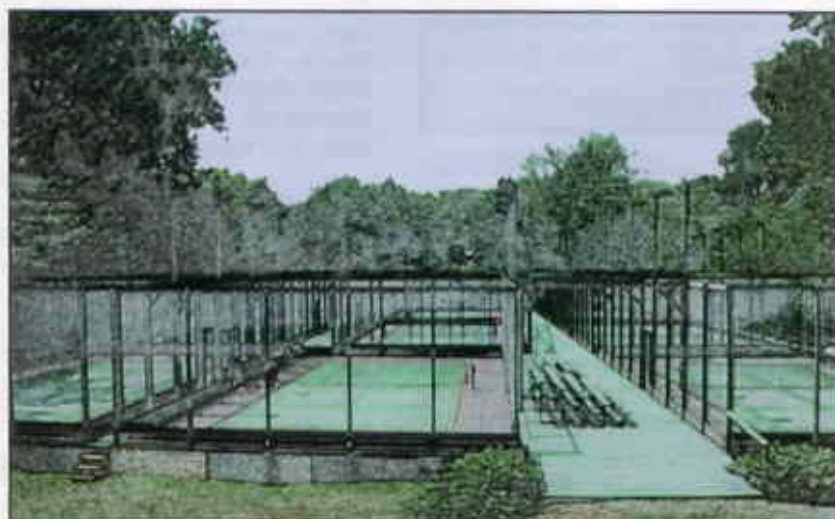
...to seniors.

Some of the communities where the sport thrives include:

Ann Arbor, MI	Milwaukee, WI
Baltimore, MD	Nantucket, MA
Boston, MA	New Jersey
Chicago, IL	Ocean City, MD
Cincinnati, OH	Philadelphia, PA
Cleveland, OH	Pittsburgh, PA
Columbus, OH	Rochester, NY
Fairfield County, CT	Springfield, IL
Grand Rapids, MI	St Louis, MO
Grosse Pointe, MI	Washington, D.C.
Long Island, NY	Westchester, NY

While all of the communities above have private clubs with platform tennis facilities, most also have public courts. Some of the most successful programs are at public and YMCA facilities. This presentation is to propose that we build a public facility right here in _____, so everyone can play. (Refer to case studies on pages 20 and 21).

Building a platform tennis facility is relatively economical for a municipality such as ours because, once in place, they can be self-funding through membership dues and court fees. They can also repay debt incurred for start-up in a relatively short time. Of course, a healthier, more vibrant community during the fall and winter months is the best reason of all to have public courts.



The nine court layout at the Fox Meadow Club in Scarsdale, New York.

Our committee would like to suggest that we put together a proposal to build a facility, perhaps something that looks like this...

SHOW BLUEPRINT OR ARCHITECTURAL DESIGN

The proposal would include identifying location options, getting firm quotes, making revenue projections and developing a management plan.

We believe platform tennis is the perfect way to add depth to our community's winter offerings. We believe it would thrive here, as it has in (refer to case studies)... In closing, we'd like to play a short video, and then ask you what you think ?

PLAY APTA VIDEO PRESENTATION ENDS

That's it. If you're interested in pursuing public courts for your community, you may download a PowerPoint presentation that mirrors this article by going to the A.P.T.A. website at www.platformtennis.org (coming soon).

With the meeting in a box presentation in hand, you'll be well on your way to being able to develop an effective pitch to take to the powers that be in your community. Also, please keep in mind that this is intended to be a template that can be customized for different audiences and purposes. It is meant to be a living and breathing document that can and will be updated and evolve over time with new ideas and hopefully with more success stories.

Below is a list of next steps you might want to consider.

- Forming a committee of enthusiasts who will also turn out for the pitch
- Identifying key decision makers and influencers in the community
- Identifying site location(s)
- Getting firm quotes (contact Paula Gifford at RJ Really (1.800.950.5049), Jacki Brown at Bulleetworks (1.888.799. 5048) and David Dodge at Premier (1.888.303.1822).
- Two new courts and a basic hut cost approximately \$120,000 with lights and heaters. Reconditioned courts can be a significant savings.
- Do revenue projections (see case study financials)
- Consider cost comparisons to other municipal programs
- Consider sponsors
- Consider surveying residents and public relations efforts
- Develop management plan for facility, including a teaching pro
- Consider showing APTA video
- Finalize presentation
- Assign roles
- Practice and make the pitch