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From the Picklehood

May 2024

By Jack Hodges

I saw this quote the other day—"the only place success comes before work is in the dictionary"—and I immediately started thinking about all the pickleball friends who played a major role in the early days of pickleball growth here on Kaua'i. So many memories. So many names. A lot of hard work. What follows is a my recollection of those early days and the friends who played an instrumental role in the start up of Kaua'i pickleball. If I forget a few of you, I apologize and promise that I will circle back to this topic in the future. In my twenty eight previous month's columns, some of what follows has already been mentioned. Nothing wrong with repetition.

Here goes.....thank you all for your involvement and hard work.

.....From Jan 10 through late March, 2015, Mike Folster, Bob Russo, Dick Furtado and a few short time visitors joined me at the old Koloa tennis courts for the first organized pickleball play on Kauai. We met in the morning 2-3 times a week. Chalked lines and lowered a tennis net. I had extra paddles and balls. We drew the interest of passers-by and occasionally had two courts going. Two months of groundwork play.

.....Last week of March, 2015. A productive hour long meeting with Melanie Okamoto and Cindy Duterte (Kaua'i Recreation Department) led to the scheduling of Kauai's first pickleball clinic.

.....First Clinic. April 1, 2015. A very successful clinic at the Kalaheo Neighborhood Center gym.. No fooling. Close to 100 participants. Two weeks later, Tuesday/Thursday morning drop-in pickleball play started. Many are still playing today. That was nine years ago!! Kudos to gym director Jason Caldeira, James Kealalio and Melanie. A big thank you as well to my wife Stephanie for helping plan the clinic and for the teaching assistance that day and every day since.

.....Princeville. A big thank you to Ted Steinberg, Kaua'i's first volunteer USA Pickleball Ambassador. He was responsible for the area's first clinic and for the growth of pickleball in Princeville. Ted has since stepped down, but still plays and is still thanked regularly for his role in growing the game on the north shore. The same can be said for Phil Baclayon and the role he played in assisting Ted with indoor play at the Kilauea Neighborhood Center. I believe the first pickleball game was played there in 2016. A special thank you to Princeville residents Loutoa Zoller, Fran Graziano and Bob Day. They were three of the original handful of Princeville pickleball pioneers.

.....The Kalaheo Neighborhood Center was the hub of southside Kaua'i pickleball for the first couple of months, but we needed an outdoor facility. I have fond memories of Dean Fujikawa helping me paint pickleball lines on two Hanapepe tennis courts. With permission from the County of Kaua'i. The day marked the first confrontation with tennis players who threatened to remove or paint over the lines. That was sorted out and Hanapepe is still going strong.....nine years later.

.....Hanapepe/Kekaha. Speaking of Hanapepe, Lucia Bartels has been our westside ambassdor for seven years. She is also our longest serving Kaua'i ambassador. Lucia and husband Ray have been instrumental in the growth of pickleball on our island. Roxy and Scotty Vidinha need to also be mentioned. They and others were pickleball pioneers in the early days of westside play. Now, thanks to their collective efforts, pickleball is also played regularly in Kekaha.

.....Koloa. The growth of Southside pickleball can be linked to the early efforts of USA ambassadors Carol and Don Kolenda, Leona Bryant and Mike Wellman. I remember our first meeting with Church Elder Rick Bundschuh of Kauai'i Christian Fellowship and we all appreciated his welcoming attitude and support. He handed the reins over to Carol, Don, Leona and Mike and from the outset, KCF pickleball has been one of our most popular venues on Kaua'i. Many others have been instrumental in KCF's popularity, but two need to be mentioned.....Eddie Beetschen and Mark Wagner. Their involvement in multiple phases of facility improvements has made this permanent, dedicated facility what it is today.

.....Lihue. Outdoor play at Wilcox courts in Lihue began in late 2016. Chalked lines. Lowered tennis nets. Funny bounces on a very uneven surface. Good fun and lots of laughs. I remember a meeting we had at the Wilcox courts in mid-september with Lenny Rapozo, Director of Parks and Recreation. Anyone was invited. The topic was putting down blended lines on the courts. We probably had two dozen people there representing the pickleball and tennis communities. A one point in the discussion, a person from the tennis community made this comment...."Why are we even considering lines on the courts. Pickleball isn't even a sport." Funny what sticks in your mind. On Saturday, October 7, 2016, we received permission to paint blended pickleball lines on both tennis courts (thank you Melanie). During those early days Aaron Uyeda and Barbara and Roy Miyake took on the responsibility of court supervision and play organization. There were many others and I apologize for not mentioning them as well. Frustrating who you don't remember.

.....Kapaa. Mario Hendrickson was Kapaa's first USA Pickleball Ambassador. His responsibilities began in February, 2016. The first organized play in Kapaa took place on the evening of February 29, 2016 at the All Saints Church Gym. I conducted a drop-in free clinic for anyone interested. We had 16 attendees. Mario volunteered his time for several

months before work related commitments forced him to resign as an ambassador. Diane Treskon is now the contact person for Kapaa pickleball.

.....Kalaheo. Play unofficially started at Kalawai Park in the spring of 2016. Again, chalked lines and a 2" pull down of the tennis net center strap. As popularity grew, so did the need for four courts. Permission was granted in May of 2017 for us to paint blended pickleball lines to create four courts—two on each tennis court. The need for pickleball nets was now an issue and many of our regulars purchased nets. In the last seven years, Kalawai Park has become one of the most popular venues on Kaua'i. Pioneer net providers, squeegee squads, painters, windscreen fasteners and general maintenance crew members included Carol Mackey, Tiffany Rae, Marvin Nomi, Eddie Beetschen, Barbara and Mark Howard, Judy and Jimmy Honda, Kathi Maddox, Kyle Maligro, Jason Brown, Alana and Dean Fujikawa, Theresa and David Della Lana, Susie and Mike Wellman, Mike Folster, Bob Russo and Stephanie Sunn. I know, other names forgotten again.

Two more people to mention. Dennis Fujimoto (The Garden Island Newspaper) has been with us since the beginning. His coverage of Kaua'i pickleball has been phenomenal. The same for Lihue USA Pickleball Ambassador Nolan Ahn. His efforts in growing the game here on Kaua'i over the past few years has been greatly appreciated by all.

So there you have it. The early days of Kaua'i pickleball with most of the pioneers recognized. And, I'll say this to all of you who play this fun game with the funny name....you have become part of one of the great conversation pieces in America. In my humble opinion.

Jack Hodges

District Pickleball Ambassador - Hawaii

Kaua'i Resident

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