



## From the Picklehood

December 2023

By Jack Hodges

**"No one is as old as those who have outlived enthusiasm" ~ Henry David Thoreau**

I start this December column with a shout out to westside Kaua'i ambassador Lucia Bartels, who was recently named the Western Region Pickleball Ambassador for the month of July. The awards are given quarterly and the 3rd quarter recipients were just announced in the West Region November newsletter. Congratulations Lucia. You are the living embodiment of "enthusiasm."

As I write this December column, I'm realizing that enthusiasm is an important centerpiece of our pickleball experience. The recently completed tournament in Princeville was three days of keenness, energy and gusto.....all appropriate synonyms for enthusiasm. The competition was keen, the play was energetic and the gusto was enjoyable to watch. We applauded a lot and laughed even more. Organizers Brant Fuchigami, Julie Peters and Loutoa Zoller are to be congratulated on a tournament well done. Kathy Ford also did an outstanding three day job with the P.A., keeping everyone informed of upcoming matches, tourney info and the awarding of medals. The Princeville Makai Golf and Tennis Center should also be congratulated for hosting the tournament. Positive comments all around.....but ONE concern. Will discuss later in this column.

As tournaments go, our Kaua'i Picklehood was well represented by local players Maria Almeida, Phil Baclayon, Kaleo Perez and Loutoa Zoller in the recently completed Biofreeze National Pickleball Championships played November 5-12 at Brookhaven Country Club in Farmers Branch (inner suburb of Dallas), Texas. They were part of the largest event in the history of the sport. 3,500 players. 50,000 spectators. Almost 7,000 matches. 2.6 million TV viewers. The largest racket sport tournament in the world. All four played well. No medals, but fun was had and they were very positive about their experience.



Norm has agreed to organize drop-in play on Tuesdays and Thursdays, 4-6 p.m. This begins on Tuesday, December 19. Since the opening of the courts this past May, play has been somewhat limited unless people set up their own games. Now with designated days and times, people have more of a chance to drop-in and find a game. Keep in mind that the Koloa venue is non-reservable. The above mentioned days and times of play are for social, drop-in play. Signs are posted for court usage when courts are filled and players are waiting. Thanks Norm. Your appreciation and enthusiasm for pickleball is just what the Koloa venue needs.

Now, an appeal to tournament organizers here on Kaua'i and to our County Parks and Recreation. Organizers first. Some you have had this discussion with me before. I have yet to see a tournament on Kaua'i that includes the 70+ group of pickleball players. As of last count, we have close to 40 players in that age group who are actively playing weekly. The count may be more. To see the oldest competition bracket be 60+ is a disservice to those 'super seniors.' Playing someone 10-15 years younger can be tough in any bracket, but no more so if septuagenarians have to play two 60 year olds. I was dumfounded a while back when we were discussing this very discrepancy and someone said "Well, I'm 48 and I am having to play someone 20 years younger in a 19+ bracket." Not the same animal. In your 40's and 50's you are in the prime of your life. The younger players ought to be the ones complaining. Yes, maybe there aren't enough 70+ people wanting to enter a tournament. MAYBE. But the opportunity isn't even there. If there was a 70+ bracket, the interest might increase. If just a handful of 'supers' sign-up, and a bracket can't be formed, then combine AND give the supers a chance to decide if they want to play or not. Not knowing (and not being able to dropout and be reimbursed) until 24 hours before the start of a tournament is too late. Most of our still playing super seniors have been there from the start. The biggest supporters. The ones who attended the early meetings with the County. The ones who put down the early blended lines. Taught the first clinics. Provided the loaner paddles and balls. Bought the first squeegees. They're the ones most responsible for the growth of this game on Kaua'i. They did the groundwork. I rest my case.

As far as the appeal to County Parks and Recreation.....please recognize the need for windscreen on many of our tennis and pickleball venues. Koloa is the latest example. Wind and background visibility are factors that affect enhanced play. The wind at our Koloa venue is a problem. So is visibility for players on the east side of each pickleball court. Looking out towards Maluhia road, with the glare and the cars (both passing and parked), is very tough.

This final column of 2023 ends with a simple answer I heard a pickleball player give when asked this question, "What is it you like the most about this game?" Their answer...."It's the laughter. So welcoming. So healthy." Sounds like a perfect by-product of enthusiasm.

Happy Holidays,