

Pickleball the rage for many different reasons

Exercise not the only reason players enjoy the sport because it's also so sociable

Don Bodger
The Courier

Pickleball's popularity is skyrocketing, but the sport's also done wonders for some people for reasons beyond the recreational benefits.

Mike Bellis of Nanoose Bay, a player in the Island Pickleball Championships held during the weekend at Fuller Lake Park, is a case in point. His discovery of pickleball was a true life-saver.

Bellis, 43, concedes his life was a shambles after a spinal cord injury in 2005. He was battling addiction and packing a lot of extra weight when he discovered pickleball about four years ago.

"I was on the journey of completely transforming my life," he said between games at the event Sunday. "I fell in love with it. It was a huge influence for me dealing with my addictions and dealing with my weight loss."

He lost 140 pounds along the way, has been clean and sober for five years and evolved into one of Vancouver Island's top pickleball players. "It honestly changed my life," said Bellis.

"I travel all-around and play these tournaments and four or five times a week in winter. It's been fun. It's my sanctuary and I love it. It gives me peace."

Bellis left his mark in the Chemainus

tournament again by teaming up with Barrie Hill of Victoria to win the men's doubles A event while taking second place alongside Elizabeth Peckham of Victoria in the mixed doubles A division.

Pickleball gave Bellis back his competitive edge, but he conceded the game is all-encompassing for players of different levels to enjoy it.

"I look around at my social circle and 75 per cent are pickleball players," Bellis pointed out. "They're a positive bunch and they're active."

"He's probably the best male player on the Island," tournament director Ken Holman said of Bellis.

Holman of Chemainus did his usual phenomenal job of organizing the event and making sure everything ran like clockwork.

"He's done a great job organizing it and the consistency of play is great," enthused Bellis, repaying the complement to Holman.

The tournament is a labour of love for Holman, who has put his heart and soul into it the last three years.

"I've had quite a few emails from the people that participated and everybody had a really good time," said Holman.



Victoria teammates Kerry Savory, left, and Vicky Strandlund keep close tabs on the ball with the required quick reflexes during the women's doubles event in the Island Pickleball Championships at Fuller Lake Park. (Photo by Don Bodger)

After nearly two months of almost entirely dry weather, the potential for rain on the weekend crept into the forecast, but fell overnight Saturday and didn't affect play Sunday.

"I was stressing out beforehand," conceded Holman. "It worked out great."

A total of 111 players were on the courts for the competition. Additional space on the neighbouring tennis courts helped handle the overflow.

The mixed doubles reached the maximum of 32 teams. There were 23 entries in men's doubles and 19 in women's doubles.

The men's singles attracted 13 entries and four entered the women's singles so it was a very busy, but rewarding weekend.

One player whom Ken Holman and Claudia McLean know well from their travels to Mexico, Sam Recinos, made the journey all the way from Puerto Vallarta to take part. It was his first time here and he was impressed.

"Beautiful place, people are amazing," Recinos said. "What a difference, the community in pickleball. I guess it's the sport itself - it's very sociable."

Recinos and John Savory of Nanaimo teamed up for second place in the men's doubles A. He also played with McLean in mixed doubles.

"Exciting," said Recinos of his experience here. "I'm so glad you guys have this facility."

He was happy to join Holman and McLean on their turf this time.

"We practice with them over there (Puerto Vallarta) and then they invite us to play in this tournament."

Results of the women's doubles A had Kerry Savory and Vicky Strandlund of Victoria first, Elizabeth Peckham and Gwen Chew of Victoria second, and Mc-

Lean and Pauline Davidson of Nanaimo third.

In women's doubles B, Elizabeth Folk of Comox and Campbell River's Lissy Rauber were the winners. Victoria's Debbie Simpson and Jane Rich placed second, followed in third by Susan Hawkes of Crofton and Barb Bradford from Saltair.

Bronze was picked up in men's doubles A by Wayne Russell and Terry Glowczynski of Victoria in the division where the Bellis and Recinos tandems finished ahead.

Leading the way in men's doubles B were Marty Stoner of Mill Bay and Rob Turnbull of Victoria. Neil Rich (Victoria) and Mark Lucier (Duncan) came second, with Bill Dumper of Ladysmith and Piet Komen of Nanaimo occupying third.

Theresa Orcutt from Nanaimo and Barrie Hill from Victoria were victorious in mixed doubles A. Behind Peckham and Bellis in third were Vicky Strandlund and Joe Wong from Victoria.

Beverly De Haitre from Victoria and Ladysmith's Bill Dumper were the mixed doubles B champs. Damaris and Peter Brix of Victoria took second while Lissy and Thomas Rauber from Campbell River were third.

Ryner Wilson from Nanaimo won the men's singles, with Joe Wong of Victoria second and Peter Brix of Victoria third.

Damaris Brix secured the women's singles title. Elizabeth Peckham was the runner-up and Kerry Savory third in an all-Victoria top three.

Holman said it was always the intention to move the tournament around and that will happen in 2018 with Lake Cowichan hosting it.

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