

SPORTSWOMAN OF THE WEEK: BARB PATTERSON

Pickleball player sees sport as perfect for all

By JONATHAN ADAMS

After years of playing tennis, Barb Patterson found herself playing pickleball.

Patterson, a Sun City resident, has been playing pickleball for the past four years. She recently became an ambassador for the United States Pickleball Association, where she will promote the sport across the region.

Her goal is to let people know that pickleball is a sport for people of all ages.

Q: How did you get into pickleball?

A: I've played for about four years now and I really got into it. I was an avid tennis player. I played high school tennis, I played college tennis and I just played tennis all my life. One day, when I was doing a team drill for tennis, some people came over and set up these portable nets on the next court. They had these strange-looking paddles and balls and started hitting them around. I went over and asked, "What is this? What are you doing?" So they handed me a paddle and I started playing.

Soon I got hooked on it and not playing as much tennis. Now I play pickleball about three hours a day. It's addicting. It's so much fun.

Q: What got you into tennis initially?

A: I started playing tennis when I was 11 years old. I got



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Barb Patterson of Sun City has been playing pickleball for the past four years.

a racket as a birthday gift and really took it up. I got really involved playing on teams. After college I joined a team with the United States Tennis Association. They have all sorts of teams and tournaments.

Q: I've heard pickleball is mostly for senior citizens. Can younger people play too?

A: The misconception about pickleball is it's considered a sport for seniors, which I think it started as a family sport and then seniors got into it because it's a smaller court. It is easier on your body. You don't have to run as far as you do playing tennis. But, it is still a good workout that requires lots of finesse and strategy. The point

system is really fun. The thing about it is I can take a little child aside, hand him or her a paddle and have them hitting a ball back and forth in about 10 minutes.

I love tennis, but it takes a long time to learn it and play it. To play a game, you've got to learn all the mechanics, the serve and all that. Pickleball you can learn pretty quickly. Now there are all these tournaments — I just went to the U.S. Open in Naples and the best people in the country are in their 20s.

It's filtering down and they're starting to teach it in junior high and high school. I don't want people just to think, "Oh it's just a bunch of old peo-

ple playing. It's not."

Q: What do you like most about pickleball?

A: Two things: I love the camaraderie. You can take your paddle somewhere on vacation and find some courts with open play and just walk in. They're going to welcome you with open arms. In tennis, you pretty much have to reserve a court and four of you have to go out there. The four of you play and that's great, but come to Sun City any morning around 9 a.m. and you'll see up to 30 people in the bleachers, laughing and talking.

The second: I like the competition. It's fun, social and competitive. Our club motto is, "Fun, friends and fitness." That pretty much sums it up, those three words.

Q: Why is fitness important to you?

A: I think it's good for your health and your brain. It's good for you socially, mentally and physically. Pickleball is a great stress reliever. You laugh, talk and you get to know people. It's also fun. I wake up every morning and I can't wait to go to the courts. If there's some day that I have to go do something else, it drives me nuts.

Each week we feature an athlete of any sort, not limited to high school or collegiate athletics. If you have a suggestion, submit them to Jonathan Adams by email at school@wilcosun.com.