



Tennis & Pickleball and the Y – FAQs



The following FAQs seek to answer some of the specific questions related to pickleball programming and expansion at the Y. The FAQs go into several details on a variety of topics; however, we want to start this off with an overarching note on the new add-on fee. This fee has been the #1 question from folks.

The expansion of pickleball at the Patterson Campus is a meaningful component of this add-on fee; however, it is not the sole item driving this. The most important aspect associated with this fee is not the expansion of pickleball at the Patterson Campus; rather, it represents the Y shifting our overall approach to pickleball in significant ways as this sport has rapidly grown and matured.

We preface all of this by expressing our love of pickleball and gratitude for its ability to help so many people be socially and physically active. It is deeply aligned with our values and we are eager to help it expand.

Nearly everyone has heard the now well-worn phrase, “Pickleball is the fastest growing sport in the world.” You hear this idea being reinforced in so many different ways in the health and recreation industry. However, we don’t think folks often think about the details of what it means to be part of the fastest growing sport. From an operational perspective, here are some of the ways this tsunami of interest impacts the operations of facilities and organizations:

Pickleball started as a fun and relatively casual activity. People had a great time playing while enjoying its social and health aspects. Of course, competition has always been a part of the activity; however, it has now turned into a very serious and competitive activity for some. This means player ratings and having activities, times, and programming designed to focus on refining players’ skills matters a lot more. This adds programming and planning complexity in new ways.

As a rapidly expanding activity, pickleball has outpaced the ability of communities to provide enough courts to meet demand. This has made court time precious and highly sought after. The demand naturally elevates tension and emotions and can result in bad behavior. The Y regularly sees players not following our rules regarding court use, reservations and waitlists. There are often times when pickleball players are not showing up in ways that align with the Y’s code of conduct. Pickleball is our Y’s #1 activity eliciting member concerns about others’ behavior. This adds new levels of supervision and monitoring for our Y’s oversight of pickleball. It is clear we have to have dedicated staff to help oversee this programming in a more present and vigilant manner.

When COVID-19 began there were around 4.3 million pickleball players in the US, the latest forecast is that there are now around 37 million. In its early days of development, pickleball had a relatively modest impact on the Y’s operations and programming. Today, it is functioning much more like a specialty program at the Y.

In short, pickleball has grown and matured into a program that looks very different than a few years ago; this growth is not always associated with simply a growth in hours, it is also tied to a growth in the level of oversight needed. As such, the Y has to evolve and mature its supervision, oversight and programming support of pickleball. The add-on fee is our Y’s response to meeting pickleball’s new reality with the necessary resources to support that reality. Even without expanding pickleball programming at the Patterson Campus we would need to layer in a fee to support pickleball at the Y. The expansion of pickleball at the Patterson Campus crystalized the timing on the fee, but not whether our Y would need to charge a fee to support pickleball.



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Q: When will pickleball players have to pay the new add-on fee?

A: Due to technological obstacles, we are delaying the implementation of the add-on fee for pickleball players until March 1.

Q: Why do pickleball players have to pay the same add-on fee as tennis players?

A: Having access to play tennis at the Y has always been an add-on fee. This is for a few reasons; including:

- It helps limit the number of Y members who can sign up for courts. If all 18,000+ Y members were signing up for courts it would make it very challenging to access courts. We believe that narrowing down the number of members who can sign up for courts ultimately creates a more positive experience for those members most interested in accessing the courts.
- Another example is the add-on fee for the hydromassage and cryotherapy chairs. We do not use the add-on fees as a tool to create a financial barrier; rather, as a tool to ensure that only those who really want a service or activity are able to access that through reservations. However, we do know that a fee can be a barrier and that is why we have a robust financial assistance program for those who have a financial barrier when a fee is in place. Each month the Y provides approximately \$170,000 in reduced fees to our members and program participants
- For every additional hour we are open, we incur additional operating costs, including utilities, hiring new staff, insurance and maintenance costs. To meet the programming demands of pickleball means we need to purchase equipment, hire additional staff, and perform additional maintenance to a facility with a significant increase in users.

Q: Do insurance plans pay for the tennis or pickleball add-on fee?

A: No, these plans only cover basic membership at facilities; they do not cover items such as access to the recovery suite, specialty group fitness classes, or tennis and pickleball add-on fees.

Q: Many people who play pickleball are older adults and may be on fixed incomes; why charge them a fee?

A: The Y strives to support the affordability of our programs for active older adults by accepting 3rd party insurance payments for membership fees. Many Ys have stopped accepting 3rd party insurance plans because these plans do not pay market rates and payment increases are significantly below inflation rates. The sustainability of accepting insurance plans is a common point of discussion at regional or national YMCA meetings. Our Y has put our stake down on this question and we have made the commitment to accept insurance payments, despite their noted challenges, because we know these plans play a critical part in helping the Y be accessible for active older adults in our communities. At the end of December roughly 82% of our Senior or Senior Couple households had insurance paying for their access to the Y. We believe this is one way our Y demonstrates its commitment to supporting low-barrier access for our active older adults. Additionally, we strive to make all Y programs and services affordable and offer financial assistance to offset financial barriers to accessing any programs and services.



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Q: Will pickleball still take place in the gym?

A: Yes, the current schedule for pickleball in the gym will remain in place. Pickleball in the gym represents about 25% of our ongoing pickleball plan.

Q: Will all courts at the Patterson Campus be available, at all hours of the day, for reservations by either pickleball or tennis members?

A: No. When these changes launch on February 1, the current schedule for the hours of use by tennis will be in place. The goal is to expand pickleball without reducing court access for tennis players. While we want to continue to allow tennis players to have priority access to the currently outlined tennis schedule; we are exploring ways for both tennis and pickleball players to have the opportunity to use courts that are not reserved. The schedule that is blocked for tennis use and the schedule that is blocked for pickleball use will materially remain as outlined in this document. We do want tennis players to have access to pickleball courts that might not be reserved during pickleball-dedicated blocks of time and we would like to provide pickleball players access to courts during tennis-dedicated blocks of time—only after the dedicated sports players have had an appropriate amount of time to make their reservations. We are exploring ways to do this.

Q: Why should a pickleball player pay the same rate as a tennis player when they do not have time available until the evenings and 25% of pickleball programming is in the gym? Do members need to pay the pickleball add-on fee even if they do not intend to play at the Patterson Campus?

A: There are several details associated with these common question:

- The Y does not charge fees based on the time of day a person might be using our spaces.
- The Y does not provide an a la carte pricing structure. Over the years, we have commonly had folks ask to pay for a narrow and personally-selected number of Y services that they use or find beneficial. These include folks who only want to pay for use of the hot tub or sauna, folks who can only come at certain times of the day and want daily prorated fees, folks who only want to use the pool, and folks who only want to pay a fee to access the tennis courts.
- We do not charge folks who come to the Y every day any more than we charge folks who only come to the Y once a week. Each Y member has their own unique usage patterns, areas of interest, and programs of interest.
- Certainly, many folks will not want to play during the last hour of the day; however, we do anticipate some demand for the 9:30 to 10:30 p.m. time slots. We also know that some of the new pickleball times at the Patterson Campus will have very high demand; particularly:
 - Sundays 8:30 to 9:30 p.m.
 - Fridays 6:30 to 8:30 p.m.
 - Saturdays 5:30 to 8:30 p.m.
- We know that not all of our new hours will appeal to active older adults due to how late they are. We have heard from several pickleball players that the new hours have limited value or will only give them a few appealing hours of use (primarily in the 5:30 to 8 pm window). They question why they should pay the fee when only a few times are appealing to them. It may be helpful for pickleball players to know that the average tennis player paying the add-on fee to access the tennis center is not even playing more than once per week.



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The first week of January we had over 500 individuals with the tennis add-on fee and only 159 played during that period. Of those who played, they played an average of 2.49 times in a one-week period.

Q: Why doesn't the Y charge basketball players for using the gym?

A: Basketball and pickleball function in quite different ways for several reasons:

- Basketball pick-up games can expand in a relatively fluid way. Pickleball has a relatively rigid ability to expand, and users have a relatively fixed expectation for having reservable spots.
- Charging some users to access programming in spaces, and not charging others, has been common in the new Y. As an example, the vast majority of programming in the group fitness studios is simply rolled into the basic membership for all Y members; however, we do have additional fees for those wanting to attend specialty group fitness classes at the Y. Specialty classes are often ones, like pickleball, that have more restrictive numbers of participants due to the programming or equipment needs, take more time to set up, or involve additional supervision monitoring to support. As noted at the beginning of this document, pickleball has become this type of activity for our Y.
- It has become clear that, to properly support pickleball programming, we need to hire dedicated "Pickleball Attendants" so members do not feel a need to monitor the programs and players themselves. This is an example of how the Y's focus on supporting a quality pickleball experience, at both of our Campuses, has a directly aligned cost to operations.

Q: Does a couple need to pay the additional fee if only one individual plays pickleball?

A: Yes. We do not have the ability to track access to the Patterson Campus if only one individual in a couple pays the add-on fee. The only way to pay an individual add-on fee would be to separate a couple membership into two individual memberships.

Q: What if a member cannot afford to pay the pickleball add-on fee?

A: Just as with the tennis add-on fee, financial assistance is available for those who need this support.

Q: Will there be opportunities for more clearly designated (and enforced) advanced, intermediate and beginner-level pickleball?

A: Yes, we are laying the groundwork for additional dedicated staff to help monitor pickleball. This is also one reason for the add-on fee.

Q: Will "Learn to Play" and "Coached Beginning" pickleball require the add-on fee?

A: No.

Q: How will I sign up for pickleball courts or mixers at the Tennis & Pickleball Center?

A: We are exploring new apps that will be user friendly for pickleball in particular. In the meantime, we will be



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continuing to use our current system of Group Ex Pro until the new app is developed. Transitioning to a new app is a lengthy process, including researching various options and then working with app developers to design an app that meets our needs. This can take up to 6 months.

Q: How do I add on the fee or convert my membership to add this benefit?

A: Please visit with the Y's Welcome Center staff, who will be happy to help you!

Q: I still don't love these answers; is this the final outcome we can expect?

A: At the Y, we never have the mindset that something is 'perfect'. We know that many changes, and this is a big change, will have phases and evolutions. There are lots of additional internal conversations related to these items that consider other short-term modifications and long-term facility needs. In 1891, a YMCA employee (Dr. James Naismith) invented the game of basketball while trying to come up with a solution for a problem his YMCA faced. Those first games looked very different than today's games. We love the fact that Dr. Naismith was not paralyzed by a need to have a perfectly complete solution prior to taking action. We believe in taking thoughtful action as quickly as necessary to meet evolving needs and then evaluate those actions and make adjustments as additional knowledge and insight is gained.

Q: This is happening fast, perhaps too fast?

A: When Dr. Naismith invented the game of basketball he developed the genesis of the idea and launched the first game within a two-week period. Of course, when it launched, it was far from perfect and the ensuing games looked very different than today. As an example, it took organizers seven years to figure out the value of cutting the bottom out of the peach baskets they used as hoops so the ball could simply drop back onto the court. Today this seems obvious. At the beginning, it wasn't. We love the fact that Dr. Naismith was moving with urgency to meet the demands of the moment and also humble enough to keep tinkering and changing as lessons were learned and improvements became obvious points that they probably wished they had thought of earlier. We believe that leaders need to be thoughtful, wise, caring and action-focused; not paralyzed by pursuing perfection prior to taking action to address clearly pressing needs. In fact, we celebrate these ideals in our staff and, within a few weeks, we will be hanging in our lobby a permanent award that annually recognizes staff who exemplify these values.