

Inaugural pickleball tournament in Osoyoos gets rave reviews from many visiting players

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By staff1

Glenn Cho was an avid squash player for almost a decade before giving pickleball a try this past summer.

At age 58, his squash playing days are officially over after becoming addicted to pickleball, said Cho, who along with his wife Louisa Lee-Kwon, made the long trip from Vancouver to Osoyoos to compete in the inaugural Thompson Okanagan Pickleball Enthusiasts (TOPE) Pickleball Tournament this past weekend at the Sonora Community Centre.

Close to 50 players from across the Okanagan Valley and beyond competed in the tournament on Saturday and Sunday.

“I had played squash off and on for more than eight years, before I decided to give pickleball a try last August and I’ve been hooked ever since,” said Cho. “I just love everything about the game.

“It can be very competitive and it’s a good workout, but it’s also an extremely social game where everyone shares a laugh and has a good time. I’ve given up squash and now play pickleball four or five times a week and can’t get enough.”

Vancouver has thousands of pickleball players and the game is spreading across the province with Kelowna now having more than 400 active participants, said Cho.

While the majority of players are seniors, the game is starting to gain traction with younger players as well, he said.

“There are more and more young people joining our club in Vancouver and they love it just as much as us older guys do,” he said. “I’ve played a bunch of racquet sports in my life and I have to say that I enjoy pickleball as much as any of them.

“It’s a sport that is really growing in popularity and it’s going to keep growing because people get hooked once they play it even once or twice.”

Ron and Dorothy Telford, who made the trip from Kamloops to participate in the tournament, couldn’t agree more.

“I’ve played badminton, table tennis, tennis and racquetball at different times in my life, so obviously I had to try pickleball and I loved it right away,” said Ron. “I’ve been playing for three years now and it’s a wonderful game that has a lot to offer.

“It’s obviously a great game for seniors because it’s not as hard on the body as other racquet sports, but it’s also very competitive and a great deal of fun. I’m 68 years old now and I can play several times a week without getting sore or injuring myself. It’s also a sport I can play with my wife and something we can do together that we both really



Uli Atzler hits an incoming ball in a game of pickleball while his teammate Jack Johnston looks on. Both men are from Osoyoos and they keep in shape playing pickleball at the Sonora Community Centre. Osoyoos and the Sonora Centre are playing host to a big tournament, the first of its kind for the South Okanagan, next weekend. (Richard McGuire photo)

enjoy.”

There are 90 active players at the club he’s a member of in Kamloops and more and more younger players are joining up, he said.

“We’re playing five or six days a week ... it keeps us young and keeps us fit,” he said.

The tournament in Osoyoos was exceptional for a first-time event, he said.

“We loved the format because we got to play with players we had never met before on the first day (Saturday) and then we get to play with our partners in the mixed doubles on Sunday,” he said. “The tournament was very well organized and the courts here are in excellent shape so there are no complaints at all.”

Michael Carter, the founder of TOPE and avid pickleball player who is trying to promote the sport across the province, said he was thrilled with the response to the first tournament held in the South Okanagan.

“We had close to 50 players and I didn’t hear a single negative comment all weekend,” said Carter. “I couldn’t be happier with the response and I would like to thank the Town of Osoyoos for allowing us to hold this tournament and all the great support we received.”

Local players play at the Sonora Centre every Monday, Wednesday and Friday morning.

New players are welcome. All they need is gym wear and running shoes.

KEITH LACEY

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