

Go on, take your paddle and RUN!

# Racquetball an up and coming game

By MARGARET JOHNSON  
Battalion Reporter

Racquetball is rapidly becoming the new "in" game of today, even though it originated more than 20 years ago.

Joe Sobek, a tennis and squash pro of the 40's, introduced a game in the 1950's called "paddle-racquets." It was similar to paddleball, which evolved from tennis and handball.

The racket for paddle-racquets had strings rather than the solid

**The racket is about eight inches wide and 17 inches long. A safety string is attached to the base of the handle. It is worn around the wrist during the game to keep from slinging the racket.**

wooden paddle that was used for paddleball. Sobek's rules, however, leaned more toward squash than handball.

By 1959, the popularity of the new game had spread throughout the nation. After the National Paddle Racquet Tournament in 1968, players and officials met and adopted the name "racquetball" and formed the International Racquetball Association.

The equipment used for racquetball is similar to that of tennis except on a smaller scale.

"The racket resembles a miniature tennis racket, except the handle is shorter," said Bill Bohne of Athletic Attic, a local sporting goods store. "They are also made of similar materials."

The racket is about eight inches wide and 17 inches long. A safety string is attached to the base of the handle. It is worn around the wrist during the game to keep from slinging the racket.

Rackets vary with the quality and design.

"Racket frame compositions vary from wood to aluminum to graphite," Bohne said. "Wooden rackets are cheaper and they aren't as sturdy. Aluminum rackets which is what we sell most, are more popular because they last and are in the middle price range."

Graphite rackets are half as light as aluminum and are considered the best available, Bohne said. And

the cost proves it.

"Your basic price for a good racket is about \$20-\$35. Graphite rackets run about \$80. And since we don't have the demand for them, we don't stock them."

Different companies offer different varieties of shapes, styles and weights. The shape of the racket head is usually a teardrop or rectangular. The racket weights range from eight to 16 ounces. Lighter weights, such as eight to nine ounces are recommended for girls and women while men and boys prefer the nine to 10 ounce range.

Racquetball balls are molded rubber, a little bigger than a golf-ball. They can be bought already inflated with compressed air, or ready to be inflated with an air pump.

"A good can of balls costs around \$3 and will last a good while," Bohne said. "If you are an avid player, naturally you will go through them faster than amateur players."

The demand for racquetball equipment has increased over the past few years, Bohne said.

"We sell a good deal of equipment, especially during the winter months," he said. "In fact, we stock more racquetball equipment than we do tennis."

Racquetball has increased in popularity here on campus, so much that the constant demand for courts cannot be met.

"Phone calls for court reservations start at 8 a.m. By 8:30, the courts are filled up for the following

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day," said a spokesman for the department of Health and Physical Education. "The only way you can get a court if you don't call or come by at 8 o'clock in the morning, is if a miracle happens and someone cancels."

Reservations for the courts, which are on the second floor of DeWare Field House, can be made for the following day starting at 8 a.m. weekdays, and at 10 a.m. weekends. The courts are open until midnight.

Any faculty, staff or student with a current ID may use the courts, which are also used for handball. Rackets can be rented for 25 cents an hour, but a player must bring his

own balls.

"We just started charging for the rackets because of the abuse to them," the spokesman said. "Also, this will help with the upkeep."

Four years ago, the A&M Racquetball Club was formed. It sponsors three tournaments each semester.

"Membership is open to anyone at \$5 a semester," said Mike Hare, club president. "This covers your entry fee for the tournaments we host, besides making you a mem-

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ber of the club."

The organization is open to anyone interested in racquetball, Hare said, not just to avid fans.

"Racquetball is increasing in popularity at a phenomenal rate. Still, though, not many people know how to play it correctly, such as tennis, because they haven't been exposed to it," Hare said. "That's when tennis has the advantage over racquetball."

There is a possibility that racquetball could surpass tennis in popularity, but the chances are slim because of court facilities.

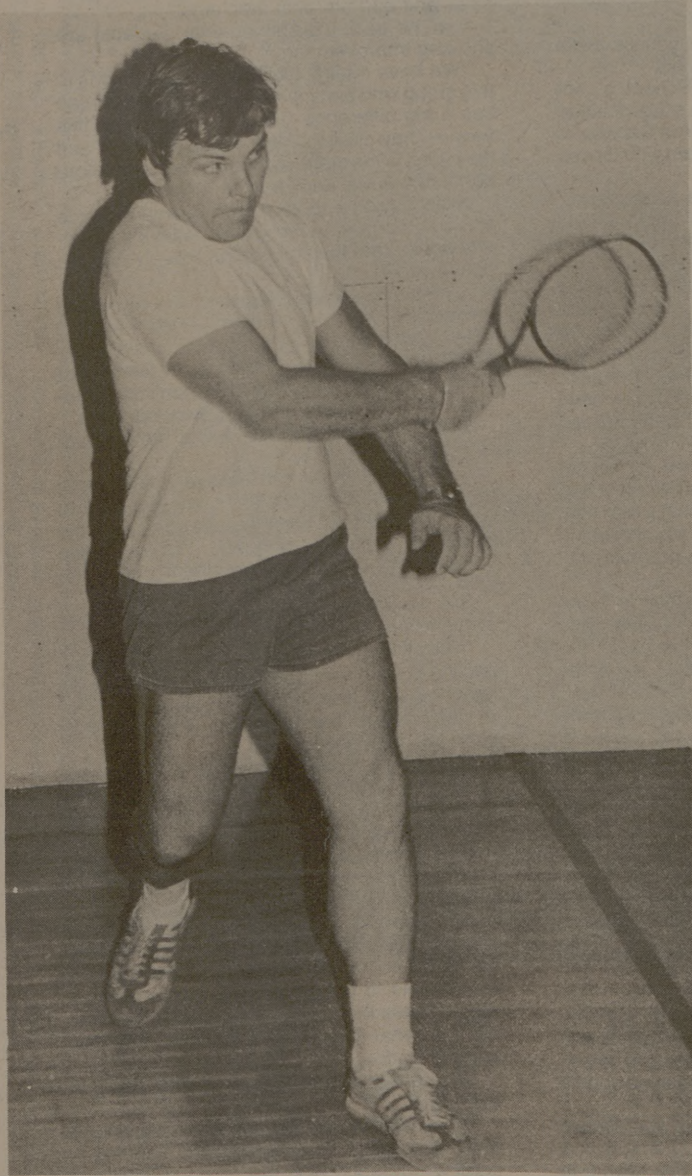
"Really, racquetball is better exercise than tennis, but if you don't live in a college town or own a membership in a club, you are at a disadvantage," Hare said.

Another drawback in racquetball is the lack of television coverage.

"People can watch (Bjorn) Borg or (Jimmy) Connors on TV and then go out and try to play like them," Hare said. "Racquetball is difficult to air because the courts are enclosed or three-sided and too, since the ball travels at such a high rate of speed, it makes it hard to follow."

A national group of concerned racquetball players realize the disadvantage of not having the sport aired on television. This group, Hare said, is trying to get the rules amended for television purposes.

"This will either make money because of the racquetball exposure or lose money because the rules would be changed," Hare said. "Racquetball is now expensive because of the court facilities. If the rules could be amended for television, I feel this would be a clear advantage to the game."



A sport which has gained popularity in the last few years is racquetball. Here, Steve Tutschke returns a ball. The ball has to hit the front wall of the court in order to be "good."

Photo by Sam Stroder

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## Racquetball rules

— The combined width and length may not exceed 27 inches and the weight of the racquet should not exceed 16 ounces. A safety string is attached to the base of the handle. It is worn around the wrist during the game to keep from slinging the racquet.

— Racquetball is played on a three-to-four wall court. Enclosed courts are the most popular, because they allow use of ceiling shots.

— The short line, which is parallel with the front wall, divides the court in half. The service line is five feet in front of the short line, thus creating the service zone. On each end of the service zone is the service box. In back of the short line, is the receiving line.

— To serve, a player stands in one of the service boxes and must hit the front wall with the ball's first bounce landing behind the short line.

— A game is won by the person or persons scoring 21 points first. Unlike tennis, only the person serving can win points.

Racquetball may be played by two to four players. When played by two, it is called "singles," three as "cut throat," and four as "doubles."