



THAT

PICKLEBALL MEMBER PROFILE

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By Laurie Einstein Koszuta

From the Air to the Court: Nancy Girard's Passion for Pickleball Takes Off

Long before 53-year-old Nancy Girard, a Canadian from Quebec, discovered pickleball, her life had been shaped by sports and aviation. Before the age of ten, she trained in judo and karate, then turned to badminton, competing until age twelve and earning multiple gold medals at the *Jeux du Québec*. In high school, she continued her athletic journey, playing floor hockey (cosom) and basketball.



and later rented Cessna 172s to give rides to cadets from across Quebec. In her final year with Squadron 709 Vimont-Auteuil in Laval, Quebec, Nancy held the top cadet leadership position, mentoring fellow cadets and helping to run the squadron.

A Life in the Sky

That love of aviation eventually shaped Nancy's career path. "I once considered becoming an airline pilot," she noted, "but I didn't enjoy night flying. I briefly returned to the university in Quebec and studied to become a high school geography teacher."

But the pull of aviation proved stronger. Nancy left the university after two semesters and became a flight attendant for Air Transat. For 11 years, based out of Montreal, she traveled across Europe, Western Canada, the United States, Central and South America, and the Caribbean.

From Pain to Perseverance

That chapter ended abruptly when Nancy suffered a serious back injury at work. Chronic pain forced her to leave the job.

"The recovery was long and emotionally difficult," she offered, "I was eventually diagnosed with severe degenerative disc disease at L5-S1. After

That competitive discipline soon carried her beyond the gymnasium and into the sky.

From ages 13 to 18, she was an active member of the Canadian Air Cadets. At 16, she earned her glider pilot training on a Schweizer 2-33, and on weekends, she gave glider rides to cadets from various squadrons.

"When I was 17," she said, "I transitioned to powered aircraft, training on Cessna 150s and 152s,



four months, he prescribed a new medication that resolved my back pain. He advised me to avoid high-impact sports, which was really hard to hear. Thankfully, my wonderful dog helped me accept this new situation.”

Nancy tried swimming but didn't enjoy it, but found peace kayaking. Later, with medical approval, she cautiously began playing doubles tennis. Still, something was missing.

Pickleball: A Second Wind

That changed during the winters as snowbirds in Florida. Introduced to pickleball by a friend, Nancy initially played casually, roughly ten times per year for three years, exclusively in Florida while continuing tennis in Quebec and Florida.

In May 2024, she and her husband joined the pickleball league in Blainville and became fully hooked, sometimes playing three hours in the morning and three hours in the evening.

Learning from the Best

True to form, Nancy immersed herself in learning the game. “I turned to YouTube,” she said, “and discovered instructional content from Kyle Koszuta and That Pickleball School (TPS). I loved his clear, humorous approach to breaking down complex concepts.”

Inspired, she founded a private group, *Pickleball Enthusiasts of Blainville*, to organize weekly play and share

TPS content for discussion, drilling, and on-court experimentation.

As her skills improved, she began entering tournaments in August 2024. “It was energizing,” she said. “It was the only time we won first place in a tournament. But we also won silver in 3.5 mixed doubles (50-54) at the US Open Pickleball Championships in Naples last year. We have also won silver and bronze medals in mixed doubles and women's doubles in 3.0, 3.5, and 4.0 tournaments, both Open and 50+.”

Today, Nancy competes in advanced leagues in Quebec and plays primarily in the 4.5–4.99 range in Florida, often with male



Nancy's husband, Alain Barrette cheers her on at all her tournaments. Pictured above is also friend, Carole Faucher, after a tournament in Florida.

partners because there are few women at that level. Her goal is to compete in 4.5 mixed doubles (50+).

Pickleball has replaced the skies she once loved with a different kind of freedom, one found between the kitchen line and the baseline. 