

# Serving Up Confidence: How Pickleball Changed Everything For Madeleine Lapke

*By Laurie Einstein Koszuta*

Madeleine Lapke's voice is filled with emotion as she recounts how pickleball transformed her life. "You have to understand," the Seattle, Washington resident emphasized, "I have zero sports background unless you count playing soccer in first and second grade. My problem is that I have always been terrified of trying new things. I didn't play sports, do band, or anything. I couldn't even make it through cheerleading tryouts in eighth grade. Even as an adult, I just couldn't put myself out there."

## Directly Facing Fear

But a pivotal moment came six years ago when Madeleine was forced to face her fears directly. She and her husband, Bill, were headed to a dinner they had won at a school auction when Bill casually mentioned that it would include pickleball. "I was instantly upset," she said, "I won, but I told him, 'You that. I'll go to dinner, but whatever that is.'"

When they arrived at the venue, Madeleine discovered that the mixed couples tournament, "My reaction was to head straight to the bathroom and said, 'I debated whether or which was worse, forcing out and letting my unknown partner down.'"

Ultimately, she stayed. "I stood on the court for most of the game while my partner guided me. Surprisingly, I connected with the ball several times. Instead of dying, I laughed a bit, and my interest was definitely piqued."

## Finding Her Footing

A few weeks later, she learned about a local start-up pickleball league. "I asked Bill if he was interested in joining, and he immediately said yes. Other than raising our four kids, this was something we could do together. It started changing our marriage and making it so much better. I was laughing and exercising; for once, I wasn't scared of trying something new. I used to tell



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people I had a genetic problem that prevented me from sweating. I know now it was simply because I never exercised long enough to sweat!”

The change was profound. “My husband has always played sports. In the past, when he’d go to a park to play pickup basketball, I’d think, ‘Are you seriously playing with strangers?’ I thought it was so weird. But now, I’m doing it with pickleball. I’m playing with people I don’t know and love it. I realized the things that once terrified me weren’t so scary.”

### **Turning Doubts into Confidence**

As her passion for the sport grew, Madeleine began building a community and organizing over 70 pickleball enthusiasts. “I was about two years into this journey,” she recalled, “when the facility manager approached me and asked if I was certified. I remember thinking he was joking. Certified for what? Then he said he’d offer me a job as a pickleball coach if I got certified.”

Madeleine was stunned. “It was the nicest compliment, but I didn’t feel qualified to coach,” she stated. Still, the manager persisted. “Your energy and desire draw people in, which can’t be taught. Coaching is something you can learn to do.”

Encouraged by his belief in her, Madeleine pursued certification despite her self-doubts. Madeleine is now the pickleball coach at Eastside Tennis Center in Kirkland, Washington, a four-court indoor tennis facility operated by a 501(c)(3) nonprofit. “Our junior tennis courts, which remain unused during the day,” she explained, “have been permanently lined for pickleball, so it is an efficient use of the space. I thrive on teaching beginners from ages 9 to 89. I’m not a great player, but I know how to make people feel capable and have fun. I’ve been in their shoes.”

Madeleine has participated in several tournaments with her daughter, husband, and female partner, winning medals with all three. “These are not pro-level tournaments,” she emphasized, “but I am doing something I could never have imagined in the past.”

### **Finding Growth in ThatPickleballSchool**

Madeleine’s commitment to personal growth led her to YouTube, where she discovered ThatPickleballGuy (Kyle Koszuta). “I was instantly drawn to Kyle’s videos,” she shared. “They’re funny and packed with accurate information. I refer my students to them constantly. When Kyle announced ThatPickleballSchool (TPS), it was a no-brainer to join because the content is great and the community aspect is so inclusive and positive.”

### **Transformative Power of Pickleball**

Coaching has brought her immense rewards. “I see how pickleball changes lives,” she says. “I hear stories like, ‘I’m battling cancer, and for an hour a week, I forget about it,’ or ‘I survived a shooting and moved here to escape, and playing pickleball gives me a place to belong.’”

For Madeleine, pickleball has become far more than a sport. “Being on the court is a magical place of healing, comfort, and laughter,” she says. “It’s more than I could have ever imagined.”