



THAT

PICKLEBALL MEMBER PROFILE

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By Laurie Einstein Koszuta

How Pickleball Opened Larry Bob's World

Sixty-five-year-old Mission Viejo, California resident, Larry Bob never considered himself an athlete. Even though he was coordinated, competition didn't excite him, preferring a quieter, more introverted life.

After he retired, pickleball entered his world almost by accident. "At first I thought it was just another old-person sport, like shuffleboard," he joked. "Even though I know I've had 65 birthdays, my head thinks I'm still 28."



Curious, he ordered a \$20 paddle set that came with six balls. They were so inexpensive that he bought two sets so he and his kids could mess around on the makeshift neighborhood court. The court was basically painted lines over a basketball court, separated by a flimsy, portable net.

INTRODUCTION TO THE GAME

But Larry's first real introduction to the game came when his youngest son's high school pickleball club was short on players at an event. Because he drove his son to the event, Larry was recruited to fill in as a player while they waited for players to show up.

"I had barely digested the rule about the ball having to bounce," he said. "and ended up playing the whole time." To his surprise, he really enjoyed the game and thought it was something he could be good at it.

Not long after, Larry and his older son were playing at a park when a couple who lived a few doors down spotted him. When Larry offered to give up the court so they could play, the neighbor insisted they stay and join them.

"Afterward," Larry said, "my neighbor told me I had potential and later printed out information about the city's pickleball facility, circled clinics and open-play times, and even recommended specific coaches."



That makeshift neighborhood pickleball court

That encouragement led him to the city-run pickleball program at Felipe Tennis Center, where he became a regular.

“I did go take a lesson,” Larry said. “I showed up with my \$20 paddle. The coach took one look at it and said, ‘Larry, you cannot play with that.’” He immediately handed Larry a quality paddle to use and gave him a discount code to buy one of his own.

SIDELINED...

Larry dove in. After the lesson, he started attending open play. Within a week of joining, he tore several ligaments going back for a lob and was sidelined for three months. When he tried to return, he reinjured himself and was out another three months.

Many people might have stopped there. Larry didn't. When he recovered, he returned with more determination. He began taking regular lessons, drilling consistently and eventually joined a standing group that played weekly. He became a Monday regular and a Wednesday substitute.



MOTIVATED...

“For me, playing this game is quite amazing,” he said. I’m an introvert. I’m happy just sitting alone and not interacting with people. For me, pickleball isn’t social. We have a 90-minute window of court time, so when I go play, I don’t do a lot of chit-chatting. I say hi, play, and then go home.”

“I really enjoy playing because I like the challenge,” he added. “But it’s also super frustrating, because sometimes my body doesn’t cooperate even though intellectually, I know what to do.”

And then there are the mental struggles. “Some people get angry when they make mistakes,” Larry said, “but not me. Instead, my mind goes blank. I don’t dwell on

mistakes. I play more reactively. My default is to hit the ball as hard as I can, which isn’t a great strategy.”

Larry admits that he continues to push himself. “I know that I’m not going to get more comfortable by avoiding it,” he said. He bought a ball machine, cart, 300 balls, and pickup tubes.

“I joined leagues where, every week, I play with a different group of people,” Larry noted, “but I don’t do nearly as well with that as I do with a regular group of guys that I play with now.”

Larry has tried official tournament play and says the experience has been humbling with a record of 0–19 in games.



Larry with his silver medal after a round-robin luau tournament.

But I keep entering them, and even signed up for a tournament on March 8.

LARRY FOR THE WIN

And while official tournament results have been tough, he has earned silver medals in local 3.0 round-robin events, which is total proof of progress.

For a man who never saw himself as an athlete, he keeps showing up and having fun, game after game, which is a HUGE win.