Pickleball and the Rise of New Sports

Why Some Catch On | Level B2 | EnglishBridges.com

Before You Read

Discuss these questions with a partner.

1. What sports or games do people of different ages play together where you live?
2. Have you ever tried a sport that was completely new to you? What was it like at first?
3. Why might a new sport become popular in one country but not in another?

Reading: Pickleball and the Rise of New Sports

On many old tennis courts, you can now see four small courts, players of all ages, and a plastic ball with holes. This is pickleball, and in many countries it has become a **craze**. It began in 1965 on Bainbridge Island, near Seattle. Joel Pritchard and Bill Bell came home to bored families and had no proper badminton equipment. So they **improvised** with table tennis paddles and a plastic ball. For decades, it was a quiet hobby.

The game is easy to start. The court is small, the paddle is light, and the ball is slow, so the sport is very **accessible**. Tennis has a long **learning curve**, but many pickleball beginners can keep a rally going in their first hour. Most games are doubles, so the sport is also **sociable**, and people chat between points.

Then came a **surge**. A US industry group estimates that 24.3 million Americans played in 2025, up from about 4.2 million in 2020. Many observers think the pandemic gave the game **momentum**. Cities have been painting new lines, and some clubs have **converted** tennis courts into pickleball courts. The game has been spreading to countries such as Canada, Malaysia, Vietnam, and India.

There has also been a **backlash**. The pop of the ball can be a real **nuisance** for neighbors, and some towns have limited playing hours. A common **compromise** is quieter equipment and fixed hours. Injuries matter too. Older players are more **prone** to falls, and US hospital data show a sharp rise in pickleball fractures. Simple **precautions**, such as warming up and wearing court shoes, can help.

Padel, invented in Mexico in 1969, has followed a similar path, especially in Spain and Argentina. Both sports began as a **niche** pastime for a small group of fans. The hard part is to **sustain** a boom. In Chile, about 80 padel clubs closed in 2024 when demand fell.

Vocabulary: Fill in the Blank

Complete each sentence with a word or phrase from the box. Use each one once.

accessible **backlash** **sociable** **sustain** **learning curve** **converted** **nuisance** **prone** **momentum** **precautions** **craze** **improvised** **surge** **compromise**

1. Fidget spinners were the latest _____, and every child wanted one.
2. The speaker lost her notes, so she _____ and spoke without them.
3. The new library is _____ to wheelchair users through a ramp.
4. Learning a new language has a long _____, so be patient.
5. My grandmother is very _____ and loves having guests for dinner.
6. The heat wave caused a _____ in demand for electricity.
7. The campaign gained _____ after a famous singer joined it.
8. My uncle _____ his old van into a small camper.
9. The plan to raise bus fares led to a _____ from students.
10. The car alarm that goes off every night is a real _____.
11. After a long meeting, the two sides reached a _____.
12. Children who skip breakfast are more _____ to feeling tired in class.
13. Before a storm, people take _____ such as bringing chairs inside.
14. It can be hard to _____ interest in a hobby for many years.

Word Partners: Collocations and Word Families

Part A. Collocations

Match the two halves to make common phrases. Write the letter on the line.

1. the latest	_____	**a.** momentum
2. a steep	_____	**b.** public backlash
3. a sudden	_____	**c.** compromise
4. gain	_____	**d.** surge in demand
5. face a	_____	**e.** nuisance
6. a public	_____	**f.** precautions
7. reach a	_____	**g.** craze
8. take	_____	**h.** learning curve

Now choose three of the phrases and write your own sentences.

Part B. Word families

Complete each sentence with the correct form of the word in brackets.

1. Pickleball is popular partly because of its _____: almost anyone can play. (*accessible*)
2. The club plans the _____ of two old tennis courts next spring. (*converted*)
3. The school closed early as a _____ measure before the storm. (*precautions*)
4. Playing on a hot day without water is not a _____ habit. (*sustain*)
5. He can make an excellent meal through pure _____ with whatever is in the fridge. (*improvised*)
6. After the game, the players like to stay and _____ over coffee. (*sociable*)

Comprehension Questions

Answer in full sentences.

1. Where and when was pickleball invented?

2. Why did the inventors of pickleball need to improvise?
3. What makes pickleball easier for beginners than tennis?
4. Why is pickleball described as sociable?
5. How did the number of pickleball players in the United States change between 2020 and 2025?
6. Why do some neighbors complain about pickleball courts?
7. What kinds of compromise can reduce conflict over noise?
8. What precautions can players take to avoid injury?
9. What does the story of padel in Chile suggest about new sports?
10. **True, False, or Not Given:** *"Pickleball was invented by a professional tennis coach."* Explain your answer using the reading.
11. **Yes, No, or Not Given:** *"The writer thinks that pickleball is easier for beginners to start than tennis."* Explain your answer using the reading.
12. **Author's purpose:** Why does the writer mention padel clubs in Chile? Is it (a) to show that a sports boom can end, (b) to show that padel was invented in Chile, or (c) to compare the prices of tennis and padel?

True or False

Circle T (true) or F (false). Be ready to correct the false sentences.

1. Pickleball was invented in 1965. **T / F**
2. The inventors bought new equipment for the game. **T / F**
3. The pickleball paddle is heavy and the ball is fast. **T / F**
4. Most pickleball games are played in doubles. **T / F**
5. About 4.2 million Americans played pickleball in 2025. **T / F**
6. Some clubs have changed tennis courts into pickleball courts. **T / F**
7. All neighbors of pickleball courts enjoy the sound of the game. **T / F**
8. Older players are more likely to fall. **T / F**
9. Padel was invented in Spain. **T / F**
10. Some padel clubs in Chile closed in 2024. **T / F**

Language Focus: Present Perfect Continuous

Form: *have / has* + *been* + verb-*ing*.

Use it for an action or trend that **started in the past and is still going on**, often with *for*, *since*, *recently*, or *lately*. *I have been studying since nine o'clock.*

From the reading:

"Cities **have been painting** new lines."

"The game **has been spreading** to countries such as Canada, Malaysia, Vietnam, and India."

Tip: Verbs for states (*know*, *like*, *own*, *be*) usually take the simple form: *I have known her for years*, not *I have been knowing*.

Part A. Sentence starters

Finish each sentence so that it is true for you. Use have / has been + *verb*-ing.

1. Lately, I have been _____
2. I have been studying English since _____
3. For the last few weeks, my friends and I have been _____
4. Recently, people in my city have been _____
5. I have been trying to _____

Part B. Questions

Answer each question in a full sentence. Try to answer using the present perfect continuous. Then ask a partner.

6. How long have you been learning English?
7. What have you been doing in your free time lately?
8. What new hobby or game have people around you been talking about?
9. How long have you been living in your current home?
10. What have you been watching or reading recently?

Discussion Questions

Discuss with a partner or in a small group. Give reasons and examples.

1. What sport or physical activity do you enjoy most? Why?
2. Have you ever played pickleball, padel, or badminton? Would you like to try?
3. Do you prefer sports you play alone, with a partner, or in a big team? Why?
4. What is the best way to meet new people where you live: sports, classes, clubs, or something else?
5. Which games or hobbies became a craze among your friends? How long did they last?
6. Is it better for a sport to be easy to start or hard to master? Can it be both?
7. Should public parks give more space to new sports, or protect space for older ones like tennis?
8. If a noisy court were built next to your home, how would you feel? What compromise would be fair?
9. How much responsibility do players have for their own safety, and how much do clubs and cities have?
10. Why do you think some sports grow in one country but stay unknown in others?
11. How much do social media and famous players help a sport grow?
12. Should new sports like pickleball or padel be added to the Olympic Games? Why or why not?
13. What makes a hobby last for years instead of disappearing after a few months?
14. Imagine you could invent a new sport. What would make people want to keep playing it?

Online Practice

Scan the code or visit **englishbridges.com/lessons/pickleball-new-sports** for the full reading, vocabulary activities, the Speed Challenge, typing practice, and AI conversation prompts.