Pickleball and the Rise of New Sports

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Sections follow the student handout. Delete a section here when you delete it from the handout. The handout uses the short (quick) version of the reading.

Vocabulary: Fill in the Blank

1. craze
2. improvised
3. accessible
4. learning curve
5. sociable
6. surge
7. momentum
8. converted
9. backlash
10. nuisance
11. compromise
12. prone
13. precautions
14. sustain

Word Partners

Part A. 1 g 2 h 3 d 4 a 5 b 6 e 7 c 8 f

Phrases: the latest craze; a steep learning curve; a sudden surge in demand; gain momentum; face a public backlash; a public nuisance; reach a compromise; take precautions.

Part B. 1 accessibility 2 conversion 3 precautionary 4 sustainable 5 improvisation 6 socialize / socialise

Comprehension Questions: Model Answers

1. *Where and when was pickleball invented?*
   It was invented in 1965 on Bainbridge Island, near Seattle in the United States.
2. *Why did the inventors of pickleball need to improvise?*
   They had a badminton court but not the right equipment, so they used table tennis paddles and a plastic ball.
3. *What makes pickleball easier for beginners than tennis?*
   The court is small, the paddle is light, the ball is slow, and the serve is underhand, so many beginners can keep a rally going in their first hour.
4. *Why is pickleball described as sociable?*
   Most games are doubles, so four players stand fairly close together, and people chat between points.
5. *How did the number of pickleball players in the United States change between 2020 and 2025?*
   It grew from about 4.2 million players in 2020 to an estimated 24.3 million in 2025, according to the SFIA.
6. *Why do some neighbors complain about pickleball courts?*
   The pop of the paddle hitting the ball is sharp and repetitive, and it can go on all day.
7. *What kinds of compromise can reduce conflict over noise?*
   Quieter paddles and balls, fixed playing hours, sound-absorbing walls, and courts built farther from homes.
8. *What precautions can players take to avoid injury?*
   They can warm up first, wear court shoes, and avoid stepping backward for high balls.
9. *What does the story of padel in Chile suggest about new sports?*
   Open answer. A strong answer notes that fast growth does not always last: when demand fell, about 80 clubs closed, so a new sport needs players who keep coming back.

10. *True, False, or Not Given: "Pickleball was invented by a professional tennis coach." Explain your answer using the reading.*
    Not Given. The reading names the inventors but does not say what their jobs were.
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.*
    Yes. The writer says pickleball is easy to start and that tennis has a long learning curve, while many pickleball beginners can rally in their first hour.
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?*
    (a) To show that a sports boom can end. Chile is an example of fast growth followed by club closures.

True or False

1. **T.** It began in 1965 on Bainbridge Island.
2. **F.** They did not have the right equipment, so they improvised with table tennis paddles and a plastic ball.
3. **F.** The paddle is light and the ball is slow.
4. **T.** Most games are doubles, with four players.
5. **F.** About 4.2 million played in 2020. The 2025 estimate is 24.3 million.
6. **T.** Some clubs have converted tennis courts into pickleball courts.
7. **F.** The pop can be a real nuisance for neighbors, and some have complained.
8. **T.** Older players are more prone to falls.
9. **F.** It was invented in Mexico and later became popular in Spain.
10. **T.** About 80 padel clubs closed there in 2024.

Language Focus: Present Perfect Continuous

Model answers. Accept any answer that uses the form correctly and makes sense.

1. Lately, I have been sleeping less than usual because of exams.
2. I have been studying English since I was nine years old.
3. For the last few weeks, my friends and I have been playing badminton on Fridays.
4. Recently, people in my city have been riding electric scooters to work.
5. I have been trying to drink more water every day.
6. I have been learning English for about ten years.
7. Lately, I have been going for long walks in the evening.
8. People around me have been talking about a new board game cafe.
9. I have been living in my current apartment for two years.
10. I have been watching a cooking show about street food.

Accept the present perfect simple where the focus is a finished result (I have read three books), but encourage the continuous form for ongoing activities.

Notes on the Evidence

US figures: SFIA 2026 Pickleball Single Sport Report (press release June 4, 2026): 24.3 million US participants in 2025, up from 4.2 million in 2020; fastest-growing US sport for five straight years; ages 13 to 24 have the highest participation rate. SFIA participation counts anyone who played at least once in the year; core players (8 or more times) were 7.5 million in 2025. The Kitchen (March 12, 2026) gives growth of 22.8 percent over 2024 and 171.8 percent over three years for the same 24.3 million figure. The pandemic as a cause of growth is a widely reported explanation, not a measured finding, so the reading attributes it to "many observers."

History: Bainbridge Island, 1965, Joel Pritchard, Bill Bell, Barney McCallum (Wikipedia, HistoryLink). Early equipment is described as table tennis paddles and a perforated plastic ball (Wiffle ball); details vary by account. The name story is disputed: Joan Pritchard linked it to the rowing "pickle boat," and the Pritchards said the dog Pickles was named after the

game. Court: 20 by 44 feet (badminton doubles size) versus 36 by 78 feet for tennis doubles, so about 31 percent of the area; "about a third" is rounded.

Spread abroad: the reading names countries but gives no Asian player numbers. A UPA Asia and YouGov online survey (June 2025, 12 markets, about 14,000 respondents) extrapolated to 812 million people who had "played at least once," a figure that depends heavily on survey method; DUPR user data list Malaysia among the top countries and India and Vietnam among the fastest growing. Treat all such estimates with caution. Noise: restrictions, net removals, and lawsuits are documented in several US towns (for example Johnson County, Kansas; Boca Raton, Florida; Methuen, Massachusetts, August 2026) and complaints in Halifax, Canada (2023).

Injuries: AAOS 2024 Annual Meeting study of the National Electronic Injury Surveillance System, 2002 to 2022: 397 pickleball-related fractures in the sample, about a 90-fold rise, mean age 66.4, 87 percent over 60 (HealthDay, Feb. 16, 2024). The rise is not adjusted for participation. The safety tips (warm up, court shoes, avoid backpedaling) are common sports-medicine advice, not findings of that study.

Padel: invented by Enrique Corcuera in Acapulco, 1969; brought to Spain (Marbella) in 1974 and Argentina in 1975 (LTA Padel). Global Padel Report 2026 (Playtomic with Strategy&, PwC; summarized May 28, 2026): about 19.4 million players, 58,334 courts, Saudi Arabia over 1,000 courts, France the most new courts in 2025, Indonesia nearly 800 new courts, and 80 club closures in Chile in 2024. The FIP gives a higher player estimate (35 million) with a different method. All figures are as of 2025 and 2026 and will change.