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# What's That Racket? Experiencing racquet sports (and handball) and an analysis of their trends and appealing factors

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# **What's That Racket?**

Experiencing racquet sports (and handball) and an analysis of their trends and appealing factors

Thesis by

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Tampa, Florida

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## **Introduction**

This thesis deals with my experience in playing most of the racquet sports and handball in and around the Tampa area. This paper also covers the history, state, and appeal of the racquet sports and why tennis seems to be the dominant racquet sport of today. Trends and appealing factors are analyzed to figure out how other sports can experience the same growth if it is at all possible.

The sports covered in the thesis include tennis, handball, racquetball, squash. Other sports included are table tennis, badminton, and rapid ball

## **Part 1 - The Thesis Experience**

### **The Beginning**

When I was younger, I didn't grow up playing any sports. I neither had the time nor the transportation to stay after school to join any clubs. My school was a good hour away from house and I didn't have a ride because both of my parents worked. Nonetheless, I still acknowledged the various competitions that occurred in the schoolyards and secretly wished that I was a part of it. Sports are a lot of fun to me. It reflected the coordination and performance that a human body is capable of. Naturally, I wanted to see how much I could handle it.

It wasn't until high school that I started looking for something to play. I was itching to participate in any kind of sport and I wanted to try out a few games. While looking through my choices, I first had to look at my options to maximize my play time. I still couldn't join a sports club since I still lived far from my school. It had to be close to my house and didn't require a lot

of players to play. Appropriately, I found that tennis suited both of those options. My local park had a few tennis courts so I bought myself a cheap tennis racquet and competed with anyone I could get myself to play with. Luckily, the park had a mildly active sporting community and the people there were more than willing to help me get started. In those first few days, I learned a lot of neat things. Tennis balls could actually spin up or down. A skilled player could keep the ball afloat or make it sink down whenever he wanted. This idea stayed with me and I always had a neat satisfaction whenever I curved the ball into the court because of my spins. I was also able to talk to a tennis instructor that taught me all about the different grips and strokes. The basic strategy was to hit the ball wherever the opponent wasn't. I learned a lot about tennis and played it with any chance that I can get. However, even though I was able to play competently, I still wasn't able to join my school's tennis club because I still needed transportation to school almost every day for practices. Fortunately, I had a neighbor who was willing to play against me in the local courts and he became my tennis partner for a good few months. I've also played against the other local players around my neighborhood but I still consider myself a casual participator of the sport.

I was still well within my tennis craze when I heard about a handball club in my high school that only met during the weekends. I have never heard of the sport before and decided to check it out. Also, the weekend schedule was perfect for me; I could have my parents drop me off at the handball courts during those days since they didn't have work. During my first meeting, I learned that handball is definitely an interesting experience and is absolutely a lot different than tennis. The game is played in a confined indoor area in contrast to tennis's outdoor setting. The rules are also different and the game doesn't even involve a racquet. Fundamentally, it is similarly a rally-based game, like tennis, where you strike a small ball back and forth.

However, it is played against a wall with a high-bouncing ball that is hit with your gloved hands. The sport might be obscure-sounding with its description but it definitely took a hold of me for the rest of high school. Without having any transportation conflicts, I was able to enjoy handball almost every weekend and learned more about the sport. The only problem is that the game wasn't as well-known as I would have preferred it to be. There were limited players that played the sport. Unlike in tennis, I couldn't just challenge anyone in the courts to play a game of handball because no one knew how to play it. My play time was restricted to club hours and there was no way for me to play handball beyond that.

It was fascinating that the reason I decided to play tennis was based on its popularity. It was already an established sport and it seemed simple enough: two players hitting a ball back and forth with a racquet. Sure there was more detail into the game but its simplicity and status were the factors that drew me into the sport. I love playing tennis and I started challenging people in my local tennis court. Being a newbie, I lost most of the time, but I was able to win a few games through sheer beginner's luck.

In contrast, my decision to play handball was based on its novelty and my fortunate access to it. The sport seemed a little bit alien to me: it was fun to play because I didn't know a lot of things about it. The rules are simpler than that of tennis but the game is limited in the number of players participating in it. It was rare to see all the courts filled with handball players. Challenging anyone was out of the question. You just played with whoever was present because you had to play against them sooner or later. In spite of the limited number of players, handball is certainly a fun sport to play. While I'm still not as good as the veterans in the club, I can at least hit the ball back into play some of the time. There was, unfortunately, a challenge I saw in

playing the game. While the rules of handball are simple, it is difficult to play. Returning the ball back with the arm's swinging motion took a little bit of time to perfect. Handball players do not enjoy an extended reach as in racquet sports so the range to hit the ball is severely limited. Therefore, you have to be within close proximity of the ball to hit it back. The small diameter of the hand gives players a narrow hitting surface to strike the ball, compared to that of a racquet head, and it is common to see new players missing a lot of their shots.

My thesis is based partly on how I ended up playing tennis and handball. Within all of the racquet sports, tennis is quite possibly the biggest industry in any perspective. As I thought more about it, I always wondered, what made tennis so big? There are obviously other sports where you hit a ball back and forth like handball, squash, or racquetball. What is it in tennis that isn't in these other sports? To find out, I have designed my thesis in that I would try out all the racquet sports that I can and find what makes them appealing. The answer might lie within the sports' history and general appeal. Also, if I ever find this factor, maybe I could also find a way for the other sports to flourish. These sports are fun to play in their own way and they deserve at least some recognition.

## **The Practice**

When I started attending the University of South Florida and entered the university's Honors College program, the course description included a thesis work. I had attended a few thesis presentations that the Honors College showcased and most of it was very educational and interesting. Some students had also made creative works like films or novels and it motivated me to do something different. Although I could have done my work on anything, I knew that I would

end up doing my thesis on racquet sports. What I didn't know was what aspect of the sports I would do my thesis on. I already started preparing.

Back in freshman year, a showcase of clubs was hosted in the Marshall Student Center and the recreation center booth caught my eye. In particular, I saw pictures of people playing a sport called racquetball. I have never seen the racquetball played before and all I knew about its description was its similarity to handball, except played with racquets. I decided to join the racquetball club to try it out. To my surprise, I was actually pretty good at it. I guess a combination of tennis and handball has turned me into a good racquetball player. In any case, I began to realize that I started playing the game more and more.

My true thesis experience started when I was actively playing racquetball, tennis and some handball. On a single semester, I was taking both racquetball and tennis classes on the same day. Handball usually took a back seat from my priorities because I was exhausted from playing the other games. While actively participating in all these sports, I noticed something peculiar in the way I play. Though all the games require some sort of arm motion movement, the strokes between racquetball and tennis are very different. In tennis, a long arm motion is important to impart spin on the ball, causing topspin or backspin. Spins are necessary in higher level of play because powerful strokes need a way to stay in court. The spins, especially the topspin, makes the ball sink down and land in court, even with enormous power behind it. The winding motion of the limb is important because it primes the arm before hitting the ball, causing increased control and power. However, in racquetball, the swinging motion is a lot shorter. Racquetball is all about speed and executing a tennis stroke isn't as effective in a competitive game. In racquetball's case, the motion of the arm is more like a sling, with the elbows trying to

lead the momentum. This leads to more power, causing more speed that, with any luck, would win the rally. The peculiar thing is that playing both sports one after the other gave me a very strange technique. I was doing tennis strokes in racquetball class and racquetball strokes in tennis class. The people I played against also noticed the style and remarked about the odd way I was hitting the ball. However, I realize that this integration defined the way I play both sports. Now I have a habit of putting backspin in my racquetball shots, especially in my backhand shots, and short swinging motions in my tennis shots. I would say that my style isn't the best way to perform, but that's how I've been coping for every single match that I play. Aside from the combination of tennis and racquetball strokes, another interesting integration I found was my typical serve in handball showing up in my racquetball games. My characteristic handball serve is a low drive serve that uses the momentum of my entire body to make a speedy, powerful shot to the back corner. I noticed that if I used the same handball serve motion in my racquetball serve, I was able to accomplish the same result. This serve has made me consistently win the most points and it is probably my favorite trick that I have learned between playing all these sports.

Along with the classes, I was also attending the various sporting clubs offered by the university. My experiences with the clubs tend to vary depending on the days I attend and which players are present. Tennis club had a lot of pretty prominent players that I had no way of defeating. My technique was far too elementary to compete seeing as how I had just started developing my style. These players have been playing tennis since they were little and have concentrated on only one sport. I, meanwhile, have only been playing for a short time and I have a mixed repertoire of sporting activities. Despite my setbacks as a casual player, I was still able to accomplish a few victories. In contrast, my experience with racquetball was very different. I

was able to compete in the higher echelons of the various skill levels. I remember beating a few distinguished players in the club which established my status as a 'somewhat decent' player. Besides racquetball and tennis clubs, I also sporadically attended handball club whenever I had the chance. Handball club was an experience that is a mix of both tennis and racquetball. On the days I attend, I usually win half and lose half of all the games I play. I am somewhere near the middle and I think that it is a decent enough place to be.

Because of my achievements in racquetball, I ended up playing the sport more. My wins were motivating me to keep playing. Also because tennis is a very weather dependent game, there were some days when I ended up playing racquetball even when I planned to play a few games of tennis. As I kept on going within the school year, I saw myself preferring to play racquetball because of its convenience and its indoor appeal. Rainy days meant racquetball. Suddenly, even sunnier days meant racquetball. Despite my narrow-mindedness about my choice of sports, I still found it a great form of exercise, which is part of the reason why I approached my thesis this way.

### **Squash, Table Tennis, Badminton and Rapid Ball**

The University of South Florida recreation center offers a few more racquet sports: squash, table tennis, badminton, and rapid ball. I had limited experience with table tennis and badminton mostly because of skill deficit and scheduling conflicts. I was able to play a little bit of squash and it was definitely a different kind of game. It didn't give me the same shock factor as my transition from tennis to handball but I still needed time to get used to it. I can describe it as a mix of tennis and racquetball except with a less active and smaller ball. This resulted in tedious games with unenergetic rallies because the ball isn't as lively as that of the other sports;

it isn't exactly my style of play. What was interesting was: it was hard for me to find any squash players in the college courts to play against. It was easier to find handball players in the recreation center than squash players (and that is saying something). I only had two or three decent games in squash and all of them were against the same person. The one other time I was able to spy a game of squash was when a bunch of foreign exchange students came into the courts. I wish I could have played a match against them but, unfortunately, they had a full doubles game going on and there was no way for me to join them.

Table tennis was (and still is) hard for me. The sport is as simple as tennis and should be considered easier to play. However, I seem to habituate racquetball too much and exhibit a little bit more power in my shots than what I'm supposed to. The sport wasn't very forgiving for my style because my strokes were very inefficient in the game. In tennis, I can consistently execute a backspin or topspin whenever I pleased. In table tennis, however, I could never make the ball spin enough and my efforts usually make the ball fly off. My shots always end up too far and miss the table on most occasions. My skills never developed and I still consider myself a beginner to the game. I attended a few meetings of the ping pong club in the recreation center and it only verified my greenhorn proficiency. My lack of skills turned me off from playing it any further but I wouldn't mind trying it again in the future. I would probably look into playing it more after this thesis is over.

While most people consider table tennis as a patio sport (a sport that may be deemed very casual), I see it more as an intensive and competitive game. Reflexes are a key attribute in order to play the game competently. The game is also taxing on the calves because I always had to go back and forth between the opposite ends of the table. Finesse in carving the ball slightly with

the paddle is even more of a priority because it multiplies the myriad of shots a player can choose from. A slight spin or a full spin have very different results in the way the ball moves around and how much it bounces on the table. Table tennis is definitely a lot more intense than people are willing to give it credit for. In fact, I have seen many table tennis games, especially in international competitions, where players perform ridiculous acrobatics while still keeping the ball in play. Watching the game makes you appreciate the limits of human reflex and decision making speed. All in all, I fully appreciate the sport and hope in improving my game whenever I take it up again.

One of the setbacks I had in this thesis experience was my inability to play a good game of badminton. The club only met during the weekends, the days of the week when I am not able to go to the campus. Ironically, my weekends were now sports-less in contrast to my olden high school days. Nevertheless, despite my limited experience with badminton, I was still able to find some information regarding the sport which I would reiterate with more detail later.

Rapid ball is a new game I learned from researching the various racquet sports. It is essentially a combination of racquetball and squash, designed to combine racquetball's speed and eliminate the slow pace of squash's ball. The game uses squash rules with a racquetball ball and racquet. It is an exciting mash-up between the two racquet sports and my limited experience with it provided enjoyment and great exercise. In my opinion, it also provided an easier entry point for beginners because the game isn't as fast as racquetball. Since the ball needs to be hit within the squash lines, the ball is not necessarily shot with as much power as in racquetball. Anyone can play the game, as long as the players know the rules of squash. The game can be played with existing racquetball gear. However, one of the limits about the game is its

requirement for an actual squash court. The courts need the lines that designate the service boxes and the various zones on the floor and the wall. Rapid ball cannot be played in a normal racquetball court because the various zones aren't indicated.

## **Setbacks**

Despite the planning I had formulated to expand my experience with the different sports, I still experienced a few setbacks that I did not prepare for. One particular obstacle that I had was my unfortunate schedule with my college classes. I had planned to join a few competitive tournaments for when I legitimately started my thesis experience, particularly that of racquetball, tennis, and handball. Unfortunately, not only was I out of practice with the specific sports during those times, but I had completely no time to compete. Tournaments were usually scheduled during my major exams and I was unwilling to jeopardize my grades. Regardless of that problem, I was still able to experience a few tournaments before I had started my thesis.

I participated in a handball tournament a few years back which resulted in a decent one win and one loss record. It was the first time I had ever experienced playing a handball tournament and I was particularly proud of my first win. My loss in the second match knocked me out of the tournament and I was unable to continue on my next matches. A similar racquetball tournament also occurred a few years ago in which I also participated. Unfortunately, I got knocked out of my first game because of administrative rule changes which changed the winning score of the game from 15 to 21. I didn't have enough stamina to last the long and intensive rallies so I failed to produce a win. It was kind of upsetting but my opponent was a good friend of mine who I have previously played against in the courts; I was okay in losing to

him. However, despite the losses I have accrued in these tournaments, I was still set in continuously playing the sports until I get better.

### **Hours Played**

My accumulated log time for all of the sports I played is about 175 hours. I had spent about 80 hours playing racquetball, 40 hours playing tennis, 25 hours playing handball, and 10 hours playing the other racquet sports. Out of those 10 hours for 'other racquet sports', I have played around 6 hours of squash. Table tennis and badminton were around 2 hours each. I have also played a single game of rapid ball which lasted for at least 30 minutes. My log time includes all of the classes, club hours, and formal matches I participated in. The hours not included were my practice hours which can be described as me hitting the ball to improve in my forms and techniques. Whether it was racquetball, tennis, handball, or the other racquet sports I was constantly practicing and perfecting my shots and serves to better contend against any competition

My disproportionate amount of racquetball experience was due to my inability to play tennis during severe weather conditions. Even in a mild rain, it was impossible to play tennis because the courts were wet. The challenge in handball was mostly due to the lack of players to play with. In contrast, racquetball was easy to pick up and even easier to play. Socially, racquetball was a good way for me to meet new people. Whenever there is someone practicing in a court, someone else is bound to challenge them for a game. I have met a lot of people through this method and I am willing to keep playing to find more good games. Unfortunately, tennis and handball do not give the same luxury, in my opinion. I usually had to arrange a game in advance against someone I knew to be able to play. While it was satisfactory to just play against a known

opponent, I really had a limited experience meeting new people whenever I am practicing by myself. However, that problem might have something to do with the university setting because I never had a problem challenging people in my local park's courts. Whatever the reason, racquetball seemed a little bit more sociable, especially for singles players.

### **Beyond the Experience**

Throughout the days of playing the various sports, the most enjoyment I ever achieved was when I was teaching new people how to play the games. I had a lot of experience instructing people how to play the different sports, especially racquetball and some handball. Usually the people that end up becoming my students were the ones who watched me practice and became curious about the nature of the sports. They were probably like me when I first started, when I got bitten by the sports bug but didn't know what sport to play.

Out of all the games, handball drew a lot more stares than all of the other sports. People kept peering in and out of my view whenever I practice, probably because they had never seen a sport like it before. Luckily, the university's recreation center had the equipment to complement all the curious individuals willing to play. The sheer novelty of handball draws the people in and their interest is what makes them try it out. As for the actual teaching, the people trying it out usually understand the rules instantly after I explain that it is exactly like racquetball without that racquets.

The extent of my instruction only includes giving the basic rules and explaining it more comprehensively as we went further into the game. I tend not to give any advice on strategy because I believe that people have to first experience the sport fully. As long as the people know

the rules, strategy should be able to come naturally once they become a little bit more proficient. The last few tasks I had been doing before ending my thesis experience was to constantly keep teaching people how to play. I kept bringing new players in to racquetball to make them test the game out. I also promoted the racquetball club for the beginners so that they can consistently find match ups that would be more suited to their level of skill. Whenever they stick to it, I usually show them a little bit of handball to improve their assortment of different sports. Besides, a new game is always fun to play.

The one sport I was never able to fully teach was tennis (and the other racquet sports I had limited experience with). Whenever I played tennis, the people I played against usually had been playing the game since they were little. They knew a lot more about the game than I did and they also tended to be more passionate about the sport. Introducing a new player to tennis is particularly hard because they either had no interest or they had a significant skill deficit. In cases like that, it was easier for me to teach them drills before teaching the real game. Tennis is very dependent on ball placement because otherwise, the ball would just be shot outside of the lines. After teaching a few stroke techniques, the method of teaching becomes easier.

## **General Observations for Beginners**

### **Handball**

Handball is an energetic sport with simple rules. Its main draw for new players is its novelty. Beyond that, handball is hard to recommend to new players because despite its simple rules, it is also hard to play. Striking the ball usually discourages players because they usually miss or the ball causes a lot of pain when hit. Since the ball is small and hard, it is most akin to

slapping a small rock to hit a wall. Even through the gloved hand, a new player can experience a lot of pain in the chance that they hit the ball. I remember the first time I played handball, my hand became so swollen that it was hard to take off the glove that was supposed to protect it. Conditioning in handball takes at least a few weeks of playing. The hand becomes accustomed to being hit and shots become more consistent with more practice. However, the pain and discouragement of hitting mediocre shots can put people off and cause some players to abandon the game. Nevertheless, out of all the sports, I found handball to be the most taxing. I love the game because it uses the entire body for exercise. Whenever I play, I use both hands to hit, both my feet to run, and my entire core to position myself in the perfect pose to strike the ball. Despite having the big problem of beginner's remorse, handball is definitely the most rewarding out of all the sports I have played.

### **Racquetball**

With rules similar to handball and a racquet instead of a gloved hand, racquetball overcomes one of handball's limits. Racquetball gives the beginner an easier way to play because of an extended reach with a racquet, giving the player more range and power. For a beginner's game, basically it boils down to both players hitting ball to the large front wall enough times until one person can't return it. Usually, in most of these games, the ball is hit high which is then returned in a similarly high angle by another player. Returning a shot is an easy task for the beginner that is until the skill level becomes higher. After going above a level, racquetball becomes a lot more unforgiving for newbies. Shots get faster, lower, and more powerful. There is a risk of players in getting hit and eye protection becomes mandatory (which everyone should be wearing in the first place, anyway). Racquetball becomes a sport where the

player has to maintain center court and dominate, or else, risk losing the point. Good reaction times are a must to be able to return the ball back. This level of the game is hard for a beginner to reach because the strokes used to hit the ball are significantly different. Advanced players rarely stand passively in the court. The stance they take is almost always as aggressive as their shots. Their bodies are low to the ground and their entire core is used to hit the ball. In any case, despite a deficit in technique, a beginner can still relish a good exercise from racquetball. Any player can enjoy the game even if it is just hitting the ball back and forth.

### **Tennis**

Beginners playing tennis have a huge learning curve to overcome before they can enjoy a proper game. The correct way to hit the ball is a skill that is necessary to acquire so that the new players can keep the ball in the game. Usually, the swinging motion is first developed with drills and exercises. If a beginner produced any wild swings, the game might become dangerous because the ball could be shot anywhere. The tennis ball could hit any of the players or it could even collide into a passerby outside of the court. Since there is a great deal to learn before playing tennis, it was hard for me to find any new players within my age range. Most of the people who I have played against had already started the sport since they were kids. They had been playing for a lot longer than I have and their swings were more refined in technique. They had developed muscle memory in their movements, probably acquired from all the practices they had done since they were little. Regardless of that observation, people that started tennis late can still get a good game. Practice really does make perfect and it is essential to become decent in the game. Players also need the motivation to learn and understand the many different shots a player can make. For example, a player should know how a ball reacts to backspin compared to topspin.

A backspin causes a ball to float for a lot longer than normal and topspin causes it to sink. For flat shots, the ball is going to be powerful and speedy because it doesn't have any spin that causes a ball to slow down. A lob shot should be read instantly and the player needs to back up into the far end of the court to maximize the range they can hit the ball. The basics of the shots are simple enough for a beginner to understand and they are necessary to learn before developing any kind of strategy. Applied consistency is more important than theory and practice can only make a player better. Once a player has learned all the kinds of shots and able to reproduce it somewhat reliably, tennis becomes even more entertaining. Ball placements become important and strategy takes over the way the game is played. Should a shot be hit on the far side of the court to make the opponent run back and forth, causing fatigue? Should a short drop shot be executed to mess with the opponent's rhythm? These questions pop up within any proficient tennis player's mind which needs to be answered wisely. Otherwise, the point might be lost.

Like handball, tennis is limited in its huge learning curve. However, once a beginner has gathered all the basics and applies it readily, the game gives a lot of reward. The different styles and shots give the game variety. Various feats of performance can be achieved by simply returning an impossible shot. However, the most important thing is that sport is a good form of exercise that a lot of people can enjoy.

### **The Other Racquet Sports**

Because of my limited experience in the other racquet sports, my general observations for beginners in this section also apply to myself. I am in no way an expert in these sports. I am just stating my views about the different games as I see it as a casual player.

Squash is easy enough to play if a player has had a previous experience with tennis, racquetball, or even handball. The strokes are different to that of tennis, requiring short arm motions, but it usually isn't as short as that of racquetball. The strategy and ball placement, however, is more on par on that of racquetball and handball. Because squash has extra lines in the court, there are more zones that are necessary for a player to be aware of. Squash can involve a lot of running because the ball has a flat bounce. The game is slower than racquetball and strategizing before hitting the ball can be accomplished with ease.

Table Tennis was somewhat of a challenge for me. The best suggestion I can give for beginners is to get a good feel of how the ball bounces on the table and how it reacts with the paddles. The rules are simple and a good rally can be easily achieved once both players are familiar with the movements of both the ball and the paddles. Beginners should never make the mistake of consistently trying to 'kill' the ball with an aggressive maneuver because it would usually send the ball careening past the table's borders. Table tennis requires good finesse and patience. I had the most success in holding back and giving the ball just enough power to make it past the net. A small flick of the wrist can give the ball a slight spin, which can be advantageous if done correctly. Strategically hitting the ball on the far sides of the opponent is also a good tactic for beginners. One mistake I always make, which I really need to work on, is hitting the ball up, giving it a high bounce. When the ping pong ball goes high, the opponent can easily spike it down with a powerful strike that would usually be impossible to return. Constantly staying low and hitting cross courts is one way to game out of your opponents favor.

Badminton is exciting because it requires good reaction time for all of the players participating. Reflexes are absolutely critical in the game, especially since the shuttlecock can be

hit really fast. The unique feathered structure of the shuttlecock causes it to decelerate rapidly when hit. This causes a slight optical illusion of suspension in mid-air. Out of all the racquet sports, badminton probably has the highest top speed. Since badminton is one of the only racquet sports where the projectile can never bounce, all games consist of only volleys. In that regard, new players need to react fast and strike the shuttlecock back within the lines. To do this, beginners need to learn how far a shuttlecock can travel when hit. After that, it is mostly about hitting the ball back as much as you can or leaving it whenever the player realizes that it is going to land out of play.

Rapid Ball requires a lot of stamina because of the length of its rallies. The game essentially reduces the running requirement of squash since the ball has a livelier bounce. Rapid Ball is played in a squash court with racquetball equipment. Strategy is similar to that of squash where the ball needs to be hit wherever the opponent is not. However, in practice, rapid ball is more similar to a beginner's game of racquetball where the ball is never hit low. Since there is a barrier at the bottom of a court preventing a typical racquetball kill shot, most shots tend to be hit in the middle of the wall. For beginners of any sport, rapid ball is one of the best games to play since it guarantees a good exercise for its participants. New players should expect long games and sore arms after a decent game.

## **Part 2 - The Research**

This part of the thesis attempts to briefly state the history of each sport mentioned. The state of the sport is then discussed and trends are analyzed. The factors that draw new players into the sport are listed and a suggestion is made to improve the sport's promotion.

## Tennis – The Main Contender

### History

The tennis that we recognize today is NOT the original sport of tennis. The true name of the modern sport that we play right now in our local courts is *lawn tennis*, “even though it is played primarily on asphalt, clay, composition, rubber, wooden, and synthetic surfaces.” (Squires, 9) The original game of tennis was called *court tennis* and it was played back in the 12<sup>th</sup> century “in open spaces in the country by ecclesiastical students, monks, bishops, and archbishops.” (Squires, 10) Tennis first began as a game played with the hand across any type of obstruction, “first, over a mound of earth, then over a tasseled cord—the forerunner of the net.” (Squires, 10) Although the game was originally played by the common people, many historians would like us to believe that it was first played as the ‘Game of Kings’. (Gillmeister, 17) The sport was taken up by the nobility by at least the 14<sup>th</sup> century, most prominently that of France’s King Louis X, who unfortunately “expired following a brisk court-tennis workout...” (Squires, 10) The original court tennis courts were varied in shape and size. The private courts of the aristocracy were “more or less copies of the cloisters,” which were rectangular open spaces surrounded by covered walks or open galleries. (Gillmeister, 35) In the cities, however, “people played the game within the walls of whatever buildings were available.” (Squires, 10) The game became very popular in England and France. In fact, King Henry VII of England was a big fan of the sport. It was at this point in which historians began to refer to the game as *real tennis*. (Crego, 115) The development from a bare hand to a racquet took a myriad of evolutions. The *rackets* were first introduced in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. It wasn’t until 1875 did the racquet become

fully established when “the hitting surface was strengthened considerably” as we know it today (Squires, 13)

The ancient game of court tennis had witnessed a steady decline around the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The birth of a new sport, lawn tennis, began when Major Walter Clopton Wingfield “obtained a provisional patent on a ‘New and Improved Court for Playing the Ancient Game of Tennis’ at around 1874.” The game was called ‘*Sphairistike*’ or Lawn tennis. (Gillmeister, 175) Mary Ewing Outerbridge brought the game of tennis to the United States at around the spring of 1875. She played the first instance of lawn tennis in the Staten Island Cricket and Baseball Club where “she rigged up the net in a remote corner of the cricket ground without much ado.” (Gillmeister 208) On May, 1881, the United States National Lawn Tennis Association was formed to standardize the rules. It was later renamed as the United States Tennis Association in 1975 (USTA).

### **The State and Trends**

As of 1960, the USTA estimated a total of 5.5 million tennis players in America. By 1978, at the height of the tennis boom, around 35 million Americans had played the game. (Julison) As of today, it is hard to get an estimate of how many tennis players there are in America. Currently, the USTA alone has more than 700,000 individually registered players in its own organization. However, there are also millions of other Americans taking up the sport in various clubs. In 2007, a worldwide count of tennis players around the world totaled at over 75 million participants. (Pluim)

The USTA estimated that in 1977, there were 141,000 tennis courts in the United States. Approximately 11,000 courts were built in the preceding year. (Gimmy, 7) With the popularity of the game and national interest in fitness, the number of tennis facilities most likely increased, consistent with its level of demand.

Since 2004, Google Trends has given the sport of tennis a consistent ranking in popularity. The reputation of tennis peaks at around the months of June, July and September, particularly during the French Open, Wimbledon and US Open Grand Slam events. January enjoys a little surge in traffic from the Australian Open Grand Slam event, although the spike isn't as high. As per Google's regional analysis, Australia has the highest amount of hits regarding tennis in the search engine. The France is currently 4<sup>th</sup>, the United Kingdom is at 6<sup>th</sup>, and the United States is further down at 10<sup>th</sup> place. (Google)

### **Appealing Factors**

As with other sports, people enjoy tennis because of plenty of reasons. Tennis is a great way to exercise and get in shape. A study in 1994 gave a mean heart rate of 147 beats per minute in a regular game of tennis among college males in a university club. (Reilly, 10) According to the American Heart Association, the target heart rate for exercise within that age range is around 100-170 beats per minute (AHA). This makes tennis a great candidate for anyone willing to participate in a cardiovascular exercise activity. The sport of tennis also has a strong appeal because of its reputation and origins. Its history involved kings and royalty playing the sport, a factor which could be appealing to some people. However, today, the sport can be enjoyed by people in all level of society. Public courts are available in most residential areas and tennis equipment can be bought for a fairly cheap price, depending on its quality.

The appeal of tennis is further increased with the birth of many superstars to the game. Prominent players like Roger Federer and Rafael Nadal have become household names and a lot more players are becoming well-known. As all of these players grow into more recognizable names, their appearance can be used as promotional tools to generate even more attraction to the sport. Lots of people want to become the next ‘top player’ and there are many others who just want to compete in the highest level that they can.

Parents are also a huge factor in the recruitment of tennis players. Children as young as 5 or 6 are already playing the sport and some parents have resorted to enrolling them in tennis clinics that have been popping up all over the country. In fact, there have been cases where “over-zealous parents [are] determined to see their children scale the heights of tennis greatness.” (Lewis) While this trend is very dangerous, there is no denying that a lot more children are starting the sport at an early age. This problem most likely results from tennis’ reputation as a world sport and parents want their children to become famous through the game.

Tennis is enjoyed by millions of people worldwide. It is a hugely popular spectator sport that enjoys many global events including the Grand Slam tournaments. These tournaments are located all over the world: The Australian Open in Melbourne Park, The French Open, currently in Stade Roland Garros, The Championships, Wimbledon in The All England Lawn Tennis and Croquet Club, and the US Open in the USTA Billie Jean King National Tennis Center. Tennis has a wide appeal in a lot of different cultures in many different countries. The sport was even played in the Olympics ever since its first games in 1896. While the game was briefly withdrawn the Olympic Games after 1924, it returned again as a medal sport in 1988. (Olympic) As of right

now, there is no denying that tennis is quite possibly one of the biggest racquet sports in existence.

## **Handball – The (Potential) Hand of Midas**

### **History**

Modern handball is thought to have been born in the country of Ireland. The earliest records from the game that indicates its Irish origins came from the Town Statues of Galway of 1527 which “forbade the playing of ball games against the walls of the town.” (USHA) However, there has been evidence of a ball striking game with the hand that has been dated way back in 2000 BC in Egypt. There had also been records of Alexander the Great playing a similar game at around 450 BC among the Greek colonies in Italy. Regardless, Italian handball became famous at around the 1600’s when the game was banned by church authorities because of people playing the game against the church walls. The churches were fearful that the ball would break their stained glass windows. The nobility, who had been playing handball inside their castles, started turning more towards racquet sports such as *Real Tennis*. The indoor courts became available for handball use again when physical exercises went out of fashion and the nobility lost interest. At around 1798, accounts of handball being played in Ireland became newsworthy when John Murphy, leader of the rebels, used many of the courts as meeting places for his followers. As the years went along, some Irish migrants moved to England and the game was then introduced over there. The original Irish handball was played in one-walled “alleys,” often at the end of houses and ruins of castles and churches. Games with side walls were called Fives, and as such, the courts became known as fives courts. In the 1850’s the game was spread by Catholic teaching orders that went all over the world to preach religion. A fateful meeting in the 1880’s

started a competition between US and Irish handball players. Official playing rules for handball have been seen at around 1895. In 1909, a resident of New York, James Kelly, defeated J.J. Bowles of Ireland for the world title. A period of separation began and the American game of handball began to move away from its Irish origin. In 1919, the first true national handball championship was staged by the Amateur Athletic Union. The reigns of handball was then transferred in 1951 when Bob Kendler founded the United States Handball Association in Chicago. Kendler served as the president of USHA until 1982 when he met financial difficulty and poor health. The national headquarters was moved to Tucson, Arizona by Carl Porter who served as president of the USHA until 1993. The USHA moved to progressively promote the game and, since 1984, almost \$1,000,000 has been donated for its growth. (USHA) As of right now, the USHA is the main governing body of handball in the United States.

### **The State and Trends**

There are many variations of handball including one-wall, three-wall, and the traditional four-wall game. The four-wall sport is played indoors and is the only version that contains a ceiling. The three-wall and one-wall variants are commonly seen in public parks. The one-wall version is especially popular because it only requires one wall that is at least 16 feet high and 20 feet wide. In New York City, it is estimated that there are at least 2052 public handball courts all around the five boroughs. (NYC Department of Parks & Recreation)

According to the USHA there are currently 8,500 members that are registered within the organization. (USHA) The association is represented by 50 state Chairmen and 9 Regional commissioners. Competition is held annually in various levels of skill including, “state, regional,

and national level for both singles and doubles for men, women, and children from 11-and-under to 80-and-over.” (USHA)

Handball is in strong financial state in the United States because of its fundraising programs. The sport enjoys a proactive promotional program with its ‘Development Fund’, “which literally puts balls and gloves in young players’ hands.” (USHA) This program is an ingenious decision from the management of USHA because it exposes children to the game at an early age. Investing in young sports players can significantly lengthen the lifespan of the game. While the number of members for USHA is increasing, it is hard to determine when and how big the sport can get. However, thanks to an assertive promotional model, the sport of handball is here to stay. The USHA employs two main strategies to ensure its future. The first is by maximizing the effectiveness of ‘word of mouth’. (USHA) Players can be drawn to the sport by their peers and acquaintances which could potentially recruit new and willing beginners. The second strategy is by investing for the future: USHA wants to “create an effective nationwide campaign to get young people to play handball, support coaches, youth program directors, and kids”. (USHA) Members, therefore, always have option to donate to the organization to support the sport they play. This kind of membership undertaking creates an intimate relationship between the sport and its players. Out of all the sports, handball has one of the most dedicated fans in its ranks that are willing to spend their wallet to support it.

### **Appealing Factors and Suggestions**

Handball players argue that their sport exhibits the most demanding exercise among all of the other games mentioned. This argument is plausible since handball incorporates a lot more movement than the typical racquet sport. The ‘backhand’ in handball is replaced by a second

forehand. This setup results in symmetrical activity in both sides of the body. There is no passive side because both hands are used. Also since there is no extended reach caused by a lack of a racquet, a handball player has to move closer to the ball just to hit it. Running is absolutely mandatory and diving for the ball is usually a typical occurrence in more serious games

Aside from fitness, handball gives players a cheaper option to play the sport. Essentially, the game only requires a ball and a wall. However, gloves are definitely recommended to protect the hands and eye protection is also mandatory. The positive side is that players can enjoy handball without having to spend hundreds of dollars in decent racquets. Even without access to a four-wall court, handball can still be enjoyed outside. With enough determination, even a single wall is enough to provide a decent game of handball.

The sport of handball seems to be more intimate than the other sports. It feels somewhat homegrown because the game is spread primarily by word of mouth. The USHA does all it can to appease its players by establishing fundraising events to promote awareness about the sport. There is even a professional handball magazine that USHA publishes which features many local events and players every month. The players are very passionate and they do all they can to support each other and the game they play.

My suggestion to improve the state of handball involves the continued passion of its players. To further promote the sport, handball organizations, local and national, should establish exhibitions to many different schools and local clubs. Word of mouth is a powerful weapon to spread reputation, although handball has been doing a decent job of using it so far. In fact, I, myself, started playing handball via word of mouth. However, handball's different local organizations need to put more effort to oust the established industrial powerhouse of tennis. In

fact, Handball is also competing, not only against tennis, but against the other racquet sports in terms of reputation. In my opinion, handball needs a leader that can bring the sport into the imagination of the public. Personalities, like Bob Kendler, the founder of the USHA and USAR (his story will be covered later), are the ones that make the history of sports interesting. It would be a lot easier if a famous person, probably a movie star, can take up handball and promote it to the public. Alas, it would probably be a while before that happens. In any case, the USHA is doing a good job of keeping the sport alive. I hope, through the continued promotion of the sport, that handball becomes even bigger in the future.

## **Racquetball – The Dramatic Powerhouse**

### **History**

Racquetball is a combination of other sports, particularly that of tennis, squash, Irish handball, and other ball-hitting games. The actual beginning of racquetball was in 1950 when Joe Sobek, a tennis and squash player, developed a new sport called ‘paddle rackets’ in the Greenwich YMCA in New York (Turner, 4) Sobek created the sport because he had no one to play squash with and it was too cold to play tennis. He had tried out handball before but described it as a painful game to play. According to him, “it takes about six months to develop the callouses required to make the game painlessly enjoyable.” (Squires, 199) A similar game called paddleball was being played at the YMCA with durable wooden paddles. Sobek had the thought of producing a livelier game by using a shorter strung racquet. In 1952, Sobek founded the National Paddle Rackets Association and codified its playing rules. (Squires, 200) The sport was spread through Sobek’s continuous promotion of the game and it was aided by the existence of the already established handball courts spread throughout the country. However, in 1969, the

president and founder of the United States Handball Association, Bob Kendler, established the International Racquetball Association, 'racquetball' being a term coined by a tennis player named Bob McNery. (Squires, 203) Kendler had seen the success of Sobek's paddle rackets and created his own organization. Joe Sobek, the father of modern racquetball, saw no reason for having two different associations. However, he was convinced that he would never win an argument against the rich and popular Kendler. Sobek believed that Kendler's "dynamism, contacts, magazine (Kendler owned a magazine company, ACE, that promoted both handball and racquetball), and financial wherewithal made him the ideal person to carry on the mission he had started over twenty years ago." (Squires, 204) Just as Sobek became the father of racquetball, Kendler became its emperor.

In 1971, the IRA had internal disagreements, resulting in Bob Kendler leaving the organization. He had warned that he would create his own administrative body for racquetball, and subsequently created both the National Racquetball Club and the United States Racquetball Association. The IRA did not stand a chance against Kendler's determination and became defunct a few years later. (Squires 204) Both established in 1973, the NRC became the organization for racquetball professionals, and the USRA became the organization for amateur players. (Turner, 4) In 1974, the American Amateur Racquetball Association was established from the roots of the defunct IRA to compete with the NRC and the USRA. There was absolute confusion within the racquetball world over who was the real governing body of the sport. By 1981, both the USRA and the NRC ceased to exist and the AARA finally triumphed and became the official organization. (Turner, 5) In late 1995, the AARA renamed itself into the USRA. In 2003, the organization renamed itself again into USA Racquetball, to emulate other Olympic sports associations. Currently, the USAR is the official governing body of racquetball.

## **The State and Trends**

According to Google Trends for racquetball, the game has been in a state of decline since 2004. (Google) The query for the sport peaks at around the cold season between fall and winter. Racquetball is mostly played in the United States, with Chile and Canada trailing for 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> respectively. (Google)

The game of racquetball peaked in the mid 1980's. By 1987 the rate of popularity declined and stabilized into a steadier, manageable growth. There are at least 5.6 million American players who enjoy the sport of racquetball each year. (IRF) Internationally, the game is practiced worldwide in over 90 countries on five continents with a total of 14 million racquetball players. (IRF)

For the USAR, the organization tries to maintain the game via five objectives: membership support, membership recruitment, promotion of the sport, competitive success, and sponsors and supporters. (USAR) Despite the vision of the organization, there is a visible decline in participation, particularly that of the last 4 years. (Google)

## **Appealing Factors and Suggestions**

Racquetball enjoyed a period of boom although it steadily declined after that. It was heralded that the sport of racquetball would slowly overtake tennis but it definitely fell short. Regardless, the game holds a lot of advantages over its outdoor sporting competition. First, the game is indoors. In weather sensitive locations, tennis becomes a challenge to play and indoor tennis courts cost a fortune. Clubs that are willing to spend frugally can fit at least 4 or 5 racquetball courts in the size of a single tennis court. Second, the game of racquetball is easy to

play. The basic premise of the game is to hit the giant wall in front of you. Just striking the ball in the general direction of the wall has a chance to accomplish this very objective of the game. Third, it is fast and exciting. The lively ball captures the personalities of young college students. It bounces speedily from wall to wall and its intensity is more appealing to the young crowd. Fourth, the simplicity of racquetball also gives people a good way to relieve stress. Players can visit the courts after their classes or after work and let out all the pent up energy they have acquired during the day.

One other important glaring factor is that racquetball is fun. The game wouldn't have been as successful as it is today if it didn't promise a gratifying experience. In fact, this entertaining factor was what drew me into racquetball. New people willing to try the game would not have gone out of their way to play racquetball if it wasn't enjoyable.

However, despite this nature of the game, the USAR and the IRF, in my opinion, aren't doing enough to promote the sport. The sport is losing ground around the world, especially to the other racquet sports. Racquetball has had a chance to become an Olympic sport but it could never be played in the grand stage because the game is mostly limited to North American top players. The International Olympic Committee only recognizes that sport of racquetball but it is never played during the event. The US has dominated the sport so much that making it an Olympic sport would absolutely guarantee another gold medal for America (which no other country, except the US, would probably want anyway).

A simple suggestion to stir up the sport is for the global racquetball administration to spread the wealth around. Every time I see the results of an international racquetball tournament, the US would usually always come out as champions. First, promoting the sport to children in

the other countries would directly be investing into the game's future. Intensive clinics given to children in the foreign lands could probably produce champions worthy enough to beat the United States in its own game. There is no way the sport can flourish if the US constantly won the games in almost all recognized tournaments. In fact, an underdog from a foreign country could reinvigorate the sport as other nations would also want the glory to hold the crown of the champion. As of right now, the top two players in the world are from the United States. Mexico is on the right track for winning the juniors divisions in the recent years. If this trend keeps continuing, racquetball could finally become a real global sport. It could finally also end in the Olympic Games, being enjoyed by billions of spectators worldwide.

Racquetball could also benefit from an improved way for spectators to watch the sport. This suggestion could be applied to all of the walled court sports as well. Handball, at least, has had a chance to be viewed by spectators easily in its one-walled variant. The rest of the other sports suffer from a decent way to watch the game. Usually, from a viewer's standpoint, the game can only be seen from behind the players with the bodies of the players obstructing the sight of the ball. Attempts to make clear four-walled side walls make the game somewhat easier to watch but it gives the players a definite disadvantage. In this case, technology can probably be used to make the game more enjoyable to watch. Tennis games on television feature advanced ball tracking technology which tracks whether the ball goes either in or out. If the same technology is used inside the racquetball courts, the ball could easily be highlighted for spectators to follow, even if the players are obstructing its view from the spectators. Of course, this suggestion is all speculated technology, but an evolution in the way the game is watched is absolutely needed for spectators to fully enjoy the sport.

## **Squash – The Squashy Ball**

### **History**

Back in 1850, in the elite English school of Harrow, students were lining up to play a game of hard rackets, a popular racquet sport at the time. Hard rackets was defined by the hardness of the ball, and the equally hardy players that played it. The game was originally created by prisoners back in 1760. (Squires, 39) However, the school of Harrow only had one hard rackets court and playing time was limited. Close by, a smaller court used for ‘fives’ excited the imaginations of bunch of youths and the students tried to play hard rackets in these close quarters. Quickly, they realized that they needed a different type of ball because the hard rackets ball was too lively. The students used “a special, thick rubber ball punctured with a hole” to make the game slower. (Zug, 13) The combination of the small court and the softer ball became popular and youngsters around the school started playing the “new” game. (Squires, 53) The people dubbed the name “squash” for the sport because of the mushy sound created by the ball, in contrast to the loud crackle made by the hard rackets ball. In 1882, Jay Conover became the father of American squash when he introduced the game in Concord, New Hampshire. (Zug, 17) The squash racquets game that Conover brought to America should not be mistaken with squash tennis that was developed in the early 1890s in New York. (Squires, 78) Squash tennis is a faster version of squash racquets that employed regular lawn tennis racquets and balls.

Both in the US and England, students were the first to take up the sport of squash racquets. However, for some unknown reason, in America, the squash racquet courts erected were 2.5 feet narrower than those in Great Britain. (Squires, 54) Regardless, the United States Squash Racquets Association created the standards of the game in 1930, which differentiated

between the ‘American’ version of the game and that of the English. As the two different versions of squash racquets began to split even more, the Americans started using a zippier ball that made the game somewhat faster. The English body did not see the need to change their standards and remained separate from its American cousin. The differences discouraged competition between the two bodies of squash and it did much to create a heated debate. (Squires, 56) In 1967, the first meeting of the International Squash Rackets Federation was held by the seven founding countries—Great Britain, Australia, India, New Zealand, Pakistan, South Africa, and the United Arab Republic. The United States and Canada were denied membership because of the different courts and ball they employed. Despite the ban, the two countries became eligible for membership after subsequent meetings of the Federation amended the established constitution. (Squires, 56) The USSRA changed its name into US Squash and is the governing body of squash racquets in America. The ISRF later changed its name into the World Squash Federation in 1992. (WSF)

### **The State and Trends**

The sport of squash has been stable since the year 2004 according to Google Trends. The game peaks in popularity during the two most prestigious tournaments in squash, The British Open and the World Open. (Google)

There are approximately 20 million squash players worldwide. (WSF) In America, the USS invests in many programs to grow the participation of the sport at every level. (USS) Numerous programs have been developed that “created hundreds of squash lovers from nontraditional squash communities.” (Zug, 282) These programs targeted children in local neighborhoods and faced relevant success.

## **Appealing Factors and Suggestions**

Squash is doing fairly well for being an old game. The game appeals to people who do not favor the fast speedy ball of racquetball. The mushy ball requires a little bit of effort to hit into the wall but it only requires a shorter swing with the arm, compared to that of tennis. Most people like to play squash because they are always consistently running within the court. Like all of the other sports, people play this particular game because it gives them a chance to exercise. Since the ball is practically life-less, most players and games would end up being played at or near the front of the courts. At this stage of the game, people are drawn by the ridiculous extent of reaction time needed to return the ball back in play.

The USS is successful in bringing in new players to the sport with its many programs aimed at the public. Like the program developed by the USHA, the USS programs are aimed at children to further extend the life of the sport. One minor suggestion that would help make squash better would be to make the game easier for spectators to watch. Like racquetball, watching squash matches can be frustrating because the view of the balls could be obstructed by the players. A camera that has been installed at the back of the courts had partly solved the problem but it would be nice if this practice was extended to all of the major squash games.

## **Table Tennis – The Spinning Wonder**

### **History**

The game of table tennis was first thought to be a game originated by British Army officers in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. The first players had to improvise, using small racquets, balls, and a table which had a row of books in the middle to act as a 'net'. Soon after, a British fellow

named Gibb brought back a celluloid ball from the US and started playing games with it. The game of “Ping-Pong” was created, named from the ‘pinging’ sound when the ball contacts with the table and the ‘ponging sound’ when it hits the racquets. (Squires, 117) Gibb sold the rights to the game to Parker Brothers Company, which marketed the game, all throughout America. The indoor game became popular until about 1914 when the fad of ping pong began to fade. It wasn’t until the 1920’s when the game experienced a comeback in England and the European continent. At this point “Ping-Pong” was the preferred name of the game. However, Parker Brothers still owned the rights to the name, resulting in many associations changing their name back to table tennis. (Squires, 117)

The English Table Tennis Association was formed in 1923, and a 1926 meeting of eight countries in Germany resulted in the formation of the sport’s worldwide governing association, the International Table Tennis Federation. Table tennis became one of the most popular sports in the world, second only to soccer. The first world champions were held in 1927 and annual championships were staged right after. By the late 1920’s table tennis was popular enough to warrant an organization in the US and the American Ping-Pong Association was formed in 1930. However, because Parker Brothers held the rights to the name, all equipment for major tournaments must be purchased through them. This hampered the progress of the organization and in 1932, a rival organization called the United States Table Tennis Association assumed the lead. The APPA became defunct in 1935 and the USTTA became the sole governing body of table tennis in America. (Squires, 120) The USTTA later changed its name into USATT shortly after that. The ITTF still exists today and, even now, it is still the world governing body of the sport of table tennis.

## **The State and Trends**

The queries of table tennis in Google Trends indicate a slight decline in the sport beginning in the year of 2008. Spikes in traffic occur during the years of 2004 and 2008 resulting from the Olympic table tennis competitions. (Google)

The USATT serves over 9000 members in over 285 clubs in the United States. The organization oversees a wide variety of membership services, national teams, and rule keeping. The USATT is governed by 9 members of the board of directors. Numerous committees help with the policy and work of the organization. (USATT)

## **Appealing Factors and Suggestions**

Table tennis can be a fun game when played with competent people. The sport is most suited for people with fast reflexes and finesse with the hands. In the United States, the game is usually celebrated as a backyard sport as most families have bought Ping-Pong tables to complement their living quarters. However, the very fact that the game is targeted at families gave table tennis a slight setback in becoming a serious sport. Most people recognize table tennis as a family game instead of a professional activity. A suggestion that the various Table Tennis organizations can adopt is to aggressively market the game as an actual serious sport. This is particularly effective when people tune in to the sport during the Olympic Games and recognize that it is actually as a real game. By removing the family-oriented brand that has plagued its image, Table Tennis can grow and spread even more. Manufacturers of the game can promote table tennis as a sport that features intensity and reflex. Local sporting venues could also jump

start the game by holding exhibition events that could further promote the sport as an indoor competitive game.

## **Badminton – The Reflex Racquet**

### **History**

The earliest game that featured a shuttle-like object was played in China more than 2000 years ago. In between the 11<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> century, a children's game in Europe called "battledore and shuttlecock" was also played. (Turner, 2) Some believe that British soldiers stationed in Poona, India, rediscovered the children's game when they saw the Indian racquet sport 'Poona' which was named after the city. Regardless, the soldiers returned home and decided to give the Indian game a go. In 1873, residing within the Duke of Beaufort's estate, the first participants named the sport 'Badminton' after the name of the Duke's elegant Gloucestershire house. (Squires, 92)

The original rules of the game were formally published in 1877 in Karachi, Pakistan. The first badminton courts in Karachi were hourglass shaped. The shape stayed for more than 30 years until the Badminton Association (later named the Badminton Association of England) elected to make a rectangular court the standard. The BAE met again in 1893 to devise a more uniform set of rules for the game. (Squires, 92) These rules became the modern rules of badminton today. In 1925, an English team representing the BAE toured the East Coast of the United States. The BAE, because of its continuous promotion of the game, led the formation of the International Badminton Federation in 1934. The nine founders include Canada, Denmark, England, France, Ireland, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Scotland, and Wales. (Squires, 94) In

the United States, the first formal Badminton organization wasn't formed until 1936. Four Badminton players from Boston created the American Badminton Association. That same year, the organization affiliated itself with the IBF and the ABA later renamed itself the USBA. (Squires, 96) Shortly thereafter, the USBA re-renamed itself into the USAB.

### **The State and Trends**

Badminton has experienced a very slight decline according to Google Trends traffic since 2004. The sport is played consistently throughout the years without any significant peaks. However, in 2004 and 2008, the game experienced a surge in queries caused by the Olympic badminton competitions. (Google) The sport received the most traffic in Malaysia with Denmark being 3<sup>rd</sup> and the United Kingdom being 7<sup>th</sup>.

In America, the USAB formed the US Badminton Education Foundation program in 1966 to contribute to the growth of badminton. Over \$120,000 had been collected to promote the sport. Like other sports organizations, players can contribute to their corresponding foundations to insure the future of their sport. In badminton's case, long term and consistent sources of income are donated to the USBEF. (USAB)

### **Appealing Factors and Suggestions**

The game of badminton enjoys recognition from many different countries. People play the game because it develops reaction time and encourages the further development of hand-eye coordination. Badminton is similarly plagued with being branded as a backyard sport like Table Tennis. Family-oriented packages of outdoor badminton are usually marketed for kids, especially within the toy sections. The USAB should promote the sport as an actual game played indoors.

Exhibitions can significantly impact the view of public with the sport and recognize it as a real competitive game.

## **Rapid Ball – The Best of Both Worlds (or the Worst of Both Worlds)**

### **History, State, and Trends**

Rapid ball is a new sport invented by a squash player named Peter Haighton in Spain, possibly around the year 2007. Haighton, who has had enough with the strain of squash on the body, entered a squash court with a pair of junior tennis racquets. With a racquetball ball, he played against a friend and the two started hitting the ball around. The rules gradually materialized from there, eventually removing the complicated lets and points in squash and creating a simpler version of the sport. Word spread to squash players, many who had given up on their own sport because of the injuries they had sustained playing squash. While still in its absolute infancy, Rapid ball is enjoying popularity in many squash clubs across Spain. The down-turn in the popularity of squash in the country has been invigorated by the young sport. Despite its early stages, many clubs have reported an increase in demand in the game. (Rapid-ball)

### **Appealing Factors and Suggestions**

Rapid ball gained a lot of appeal in Spain because it required less movement for the older squash players that were seriously getting injured in playing their squash game. The sport of rapid ball still gives these players the exercise they need without having to deal with the pain. Rapid ball's appeal also comes from its novelty for being a new sport. Any squash or racquetball player can easily pick the game up and experience a new sport.

Although rapid ball is simple, because it is essentially a combination of racquetball and squash, it desperately needs a proper organization to govern its rules. Without a representative, the sport's fun factor is going to be for naught because there would be no coherence within the players enjoying the game. A sudden rule change decided by a group of people could make the sport a lot different with the other rapid ball games people are playing. To become successful, rapid ball would first need to overcome the challenge and become organized. Only then could we see rapid ball flourish into a more serious sport.

### **Part 3 – Final Thoughts**

There is absolutely no overnight suggestion that can topple the racquet sport giant that is tennis. The best chance that the other sports can rely on is by investing in the young players that play their game. Essentially, improving the way the game is watched could also potentially make the game more enjoyable. This has been a great challenge for sports that are played inside walled courts. If passionate promotion and the investment of its own players also continue, the other racquet sports can maintain the stable status of their sport. However, in order to grow further, the sports need to be reinvigorated, possibly by making unique risks that the other games aren't employing. Promotion in movies and television could work since advertising in the mass market could potentially gain the sport a few more players. In any case, my hope is that the racquet sports could continue to grow because all of them are essentially fun in their own way. I wish there was a legitimate reason where other players cross-train between all of the different games. However, only time will tell how much longer these sports have to experience a significant change in their current status.

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