Changeover
Conversion of Courts from Tennis to Pickleball

by Mary Helen Sprecher

Mary Helen has been the technical writer for more than 25 years with the American Sports Builders Association (ASBA), the national association of designers, builders and suppliers of materials for athletic facilities, and as such, has written for a variety of magazines in the sports and fitness industry. Sprecher has written on various topics relating to sports facility design, construction and supply, as well as sports medicine and health issues. She is also a contributing editor to Racquet Sports Industry Magazine and is the former editor of Sports Destination Management.

Previously, she was a full-time newspaper reporter in Baltimore, Maryland and has been an instructor in the College of Graduate and Continuing Studies at Goucher College, where she taught meeting and event planning courses.
If, like many club pros, you’ve made the decision to bring pickleball on board, you know there are multiple reasons, and multiple options, for doing so.

But it’s also important to be realistic. Pickleball players have more opportunities for playing on dedicated courts these days and if you want to remain competitive (and keep your pickleball players as well), it will necessitate some changes to your facility.

This is the second of a two-part article covering two issues of PTR Tennis Pro. Our previous article detailed the practice of lining existing courts for pickleball in order to allow continued play in both sports. This article details conversion of tennis courts to pickleball courts on a permanent basis.

As you proceed, it’s likely you’ll have questions - and plenty of them. Here are some of the FAQs, as well as answers, from members of the American Sports Builders Association, the professional organization for those involved in the design, construction and supply of materials and equipment to the sports industry.

**Can My Existing Tennis Courts Be Used?**

Good question. It is possible to use the same court and net; however, it is not ideal. The courts vary greatly in size. You already know that a tennis court is 36 by 78 feet (the space within the playing lines) and 60 by 120 feet (the playing area plus the area outside the lines). A pickleball court, however, is significantly smaller than a tennis court; 20 by 44 feet for the court size, with a total minimum playing area of 30 by 60 feet. The playing lines are also quite different.

At the very least, a resurfacing job will be in order to create a clean playing surface that shows only pickleball lines. [The resurfacing will create a better aesthetic for the new court(s), avoiding the patchwork look that comes from simply trying to paint over existing lines and put down new ones.]

**Do I Need to Buy Another Net?**

Those who want tennis courts to host only one pickleball court can use their existing net—with some modifications. A pickleball net is three feet (36 inches) high at the sidelines and three feet (36 inches) at the center. A tennis net is three feet, six inches (42 inches) at the posts and three feet (36 inches) at the center.

“The existing tennis net is too high to meet pickleball regulations,” notes Greg Nichols, CTCB, of Premier Surface Solutions Inc., Tallahassee, Florida. “A tennis net needs to be 36 inches from the court surface at the center, and a pickleball net needs to be 34 inches. This is not a critical issue for recreational play, however serious pickleball players will want to add a system to lower the net to the proper height which can be purchased and easily installed and removed.”

Referring back to the original point about pickleball players having more opportunities for dedicated courts—and to not being satisfied with playing on tennis courts—it’s likely you’ll want to think about new nets in the interest of keeping your players happy.

One key consideration for this is the width of a tennis court (and subsequently, the tennis net) vs. the width of a pickleball court and net. According to International Tennis Federation (ITF) rules, nets for tennis courts must be 27 feet wide for singles matches and 36 feet wide for doubles matches. The USA Pickleball Association (USAPA) rules state that the net length must be at least 20 feet extending from one sideline to the other.

Some clubs have taken down the tennis nets entirely and used pop-up pickleball nets, while others have modified their nets. If tennis net posts are set into sleeves on the court, removal of the net post and capping of the resulting holes, will create a cleaner overall look for the surface. An image of a post removal illustrates the fact that this should be done by a qualified contractor. Remember that if the old tennis net posts are left in place, they may constitute a hazard to players on the court who will forget their presence.

(continued on Page 20)
Changeover - Conversion of Courts from Tennis to Pickleball

Reconstruction (or New Construction) of Courts

Those who want to create a permanent space for pickleball courts have two options: building new courts (purpose-built for tennis or pickleball) somewhere on the property or taking out existing tennis courts and replacing them with pickleball courts. In all cases, a knowledgeable court contractor should be contacted in order to assist clubs with designing and building separate spaces.

If courts are going to be converted, or if new courts are being considered, work with user groups in advance to find out how many courts will be needed for each sport. The upside of having different facilities will be the club’s ability to schedule play without worrying who is playing which sport and when, and on what court. It will also allow clubs to continue to host sanctioned tennis play without concerns about additional lines on the court.

If you can plan for some, or even all, of any necessary construction work to be done during any regular shutdown your club has, you will minimize disruption; it will also allow the contractor to address issues on other courts during the same period.

Replacing Tennis Courts with Pickleball Courts

If pickleball courts will replace existing tennis courts, it is likely that the scope of work will include removal of the tennis net post footers, net, posts and center anchor, and placement of permanent pickleball net posts, footers and center anchor with the center strap set to 34 inches. The court lines will be removed, and the court resurfaced and relined.

In some cases, elements of the tennis courts can be repurposed, according to Fred Kolkmann, CTCB, of Fred Kolkmann Tennis & Sport Surfaces, LLC, in Grafton, Wisconsin. “We’ve converted a single tennis court in a park district to four pickleball courts,” he notes. “It’s not unusual, but we left the tennis net posts in (the court was only one year old) and the park district is using the tennis net as a divider fence for the new pickleball courts. This avoided having to pay for a new divider fence and also didn’t damage the court since we didn’t pull the old footings. The photo shows the tennis net posts, but unfortunately the net wasn’t up yet.”

Court contractors note that depending on the number of pickleball courts to be put in, fences between courts (or in the case of indoor courts, drop-down curtains) will need to be moved as well. Check on the placement of all light fixtures to make sure the new courts are evenly illuminated.

If new court construction is planned (and this holds true for either tennis or pickleball courts), courts will be built from the ground up, and the scope of work will include excavation as well as work on the drainage, subbase, base and surface of all courts, and the installation of lighting, netting and fencing.

If the pickleball courts are outdoors and near any residences, some residents may be unaccustomed to the sound of the ball hitting the paddle. There are materials on the market that can help with noise abatement; be sure to discuss such issues with your contractor.

The American Sports Builders Association offers two publications that can be of assistance when considering new facilities at any level. Pickleball Courts: A Construction & Maintenance Manual provides an excellent background on understanding the design, construction, appointment and use of pickleball courts. It was written with assistance from the USAPA. Another ASBA publication, Tennis Courts: A Construction and Maintenance Manual, is produced in cooperation with the USTA and walks readers through the process of tennis court design and construction, including various surface opportunities. Both publications are available from ASBA’s website, and can be ordered in either a hard copy or a pdf.