

PICKLEBALL



STAFF PHOTO/PAUL FRANZ

Todd "Happy" Boynton, 51, of Greenfield, and Gabe Temesvari, 81, of Deerfield, on the pickleball courts at Green River Park in Greenfield.

Pickling in the capital

Greenfield's Todd Boynton and Deerfield's Gabe Temesvari stay active and find community through sport

By **AMALIA WOMPA**
For the Recorder

America's fastest-growing sport has continued to find avid players in Franklin County, and now, two long-time residents are traveling to Washington D.C. to compete for the ultimate title.

The intergenerational team, Todd "Happy" Boynton, 51, of Greenfield, and Gabe Temesvari, 81, of Deerfield, found each other at the pickleball and tennis courts at Frontier Regional School while overcoming personal challenges. It was there that Boynton convinced Temesvari, a lifelong tennis player who would come by with

his tennis equipment to practice serving by himself, that he should give pickleball a try.

"I'd been playing tennis virtually my whole life," Temesvari said as he sat next to Boynton at Green River Park in Greenfield. "It's because of Happy that, at the age of 79, I took up pickleball. The games are fast, hard, and I get to play with young people."

"I enjoy beating the young ones, too," Temesvari added.

Although he was initially reluctant to trade his racquet for a paddle, Temesvari eventually gave in,

"I persisted just like I was looking for a date, and now he plays three to four hours of pickleball a day while

still playing tennis," Boynton said.

Since then, the two have used pickleball to stay active, and to find community both in each other and at the courts. As described by Boynton, Greenfield is a "pickleball utopia" because the courts, although popular, aren't packed like they would be in other parts of the country. The Green River Park pickleball scene, he said, also has an inclusive community age-wise that can be more difficult to replicate in larger towns.

"Pickleball is great for your health regardless of how old you are," Boynton said.

It wasn't until Boynton answered a seemingly random ad for intergener-

ational pickleball pairs on the internet that the two realized they could take their shared passion to a new level,

"I had nothing to do with it," Temesvari said through laughter. "I was at home recovering from a hard day of pickleball when Happy sent me a text asking if I wanted to go to Washington D.C."

Boynton chimed in, "I saw an ad, wrote an essay, and to this day I don't remember what I said."

Boynton's impulsive decision worked out. The two found out they were one out of six pickleball pairs

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Local pickleball players to compete in D.C.

PICKLEBALL FROM B1

from across the country who will be competing in the Ultimate Duo Challenge at the National Mall in Washington D.C. This all-expense-paid trip is sponsored by the Trust for the National Mall and the Humana Foundation to celebrate the benefits of the sport. The competition will take place from Friday, Sept. 27, to Sunday, Sept. 29, with an opening ceremony on Friday at 11:30 a.m.

According to Julie Moore, vice president of communications at Trust for the National Mall, the event is an effort to collaborate with the Humana Foundation to promote physical wellness and foster relationships between generations. She noted pickleball is "where generations come together in harmony."

Moore added that last year's Ultimate Duo Challenge attracted around 7,000 spectators. To provide a larger picture of how popular the event became, Moore said reservations to play underneath the many memorials and monuments sold out within 90 seconds of being released to the general public.

"Gabe and Happy are just a great example of the life-changing benefits of this sport. They're overcoming life challenges they've worked through and it's just great to see," Moore said. "When you meet these folks who are senior players, they're just

thrilled to be there, are super active and in great health."

The Humana Foundation, established in 1981 as the philanthropic branch of Humana Inc., is focused on health equity, working to eliminate barriers in health and health care, according to its website.

"I am thrilled that Humana and the Humana Foundation, in collaboration with the Trust for the National Mall, are bringing pickleball back to America's front yard for the second year of the National Mall of Pickleball," said Humana Foundation CEO Tiffany Benjamin. "This year, we are proud to champion seniors by highlighting the role pickleball plays in fostering vital intergenerational connections and promoting a healthy lifestyle. We hope this three-day event on the National Mall will continue to inspire meaningful connections and active living for people of all ages."

Playing as a pair with a 30-year age difference has proven to be rewarding, Boynton and Temesvari say.

"He's super competitive, and I just was never that guy growing up, but if you can't enjoy the sport you're probably not a fun person," Boynton said of Temesvari. "That's a harsh quote but I'll make it!"

For Temesvari, he enjoys the open-mindedness and ability to easily match with younger people on the courts.

"Anybody 19 and up I play with," Temesvari said.



STAFF PHOTO/PAUL FRANZ

Gabe Temesvari, 81, of Deerfield, and Todd "Happy" Boynton, 51, of Greenfield, play pickleball at Green River Park in Greenfield.

The sport offered a community, as well as a distraction from the pair's challenges in their personal lives. Temesvari is a widower who escaped Hungary during World War II and lost his daughter to addiction, and Boynton has overcome addiction himself.

"I had quit drinking once COVID started, and I had a year of sobriety, which was tough. The fact that the bars were closed helped, but once everything started to open up again, I needed something else," Boynton reflected. "A friend mentioned pickleball, and I was hooked the first day I hit the ball. I didn't care how you kept score, I didn't care how you got good, I just wanted to do it all the time and I try to spread that."

Temesvari likewise found the sport to be a great way to spend his time.

"Since you always have new people to play with, you rotate regularly, and your day flies by," Temesvari said.

Boynton urges those who think they might be interested in the sport to go on Facebook and search for their page, Greenfield (MA) Pickleball, or search for a similar page in their local community. Boynton and Temesvari have also helped run tournament fundraisers across western Massachusetts, with their most recent one being for the Springfield Thunderbirds.

"For the most part, if people try it, pickleball does all the work," Boynton said. "It's just a fun sport to get out and be social."