

Marketing Report

Pickleball and Young Athletic Adults

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Executive summary

Research objectives

The objective of this project and its research is to identify opportunities for attracting younger physically active individuals to the sport of pickleball. The age of the average olympian is 27 years old and the team intended on identifying what it would take to get more athletes of this age range into Pickleball.

Statement of method

The team enlisted exploratory research, which is used when the problem is not clearly defined. The team decided that the best way to research how active adults choose their activities was to ask them face to face in order to gather more data than a simple survey could provide. Interviews provide on-the-spot reactions to the questions without the limitations of binary questions or character limits.

The team collected the data via 15-20 minute zoom interviews with active adults. For the purpose of the research, active adults were defined as anyone 23-35 years old who exercises four or more times per week. 20 people were interviewed and identified with this definition of active adults from the team's networks and their answers were recorded.



Key findings

Many participants in the study said that the chances that they would try a new sport increased if their friends also agreed to play with them. However, the most important issue among the majority of respondents was accessibility, and fitting exercise into their busy schedules. The team found that the majority of the participants were “extremely comfortable” working out or exercising in a public place during the pandemic. Some participants said that they would be more willing to try a new activity if it complemented the skills of their primary activity. They would be less likely to try a new sport if it required a completely new skill set. This suggests that tennis players, or people who play other similar sports, would be more willing to try pickleball than people who might just work out, lift, or run for their activity. Similarly, the team discovered that the participants were more likely to be drawn to pickleball as their second or third activity as a warm-up or cool-down. Pickleball is considered to be a low impact sport as compared to many high intensity activities such as football, ice hockey, triathlons, etc. This means that socialization is a huge part of what would make pickleball compelling to potentially new players.

Conclusion and Recommendations

After information gathered from qualitative interviews conducted by the team, three key findings stood out. The team found that young adults were more interested in trying new activities if they were accessible, complimentary towards their already chosen activity, and if they were not picking it up alone. The data collected from these interviews showed that the



demographic of 23-35 year olds are typically very busy. They have chosen their specific activities because it is easily accessible to them at any time and will not interfere with their schedule. The respondents were willing to try other activities that may complement their primary activity. Some of the adults interviewed mentioned that they would try a new activity only to get a group of people to go together. The main takeaway from these qualitative interviews is that most adults between the ages of 23 and 35 are extremely busy and need an activity that is accessible to them. They also will be more likely to try a new activity if it were to complement their primary.

Based on the information gathered through the qualitative interviews it is the recommendation of the team that the World Pickleball Federation shape the narrative of pickleball to be one that complements other activities in an accessible manner. With the bulk of the data suggesting that young active adults are extremely busy, and largely participating in activities that compliment their current athletic pursuits, it makes the most sense to launch a public relations campaign shaping pickleball to this exact narrative. Specific tactics to execute this strategy would be pitching stories to editors of sports-related publications about how pickleball is a convenient and low-impact way to improve one's mobility and hand-eye coordination for their current athletic endeavors. This will serve as an athlete's introduction to the sport which will, in turn, help them fall in love with the game of pickleball.



Introduction

Physical activities are a great way to maintain physical and mental health as well as connect with people who have similar interests. Pickleball is a sport with a unique quality that allows players to compete against players of varying levels of ages and physical ability. Pickleball is played on a 44 by 20-foot court, less than a third of the size of a doubles tennis court with a lightweight paddle and a plastic ball. The small court size, combined with the easily swingable paddle creates a sport of finesse, not power. Players of all ages, sizes, and strengths can feasibly enjoy a match together. Pickleball is the fastest growing sport in the world, especially among the senior population, however, the future of pickleball lies upon younger generations. The purpose of this proposal is to determine what active adults do to exercise, how they select what they do, and how to determine the barriers of entry in a sport like pickleball in order to introduce pickleball to a new player base.

Research methods and procedures

To identify what the most prevalent barriers to entry for adults 23-35 were, the team felt it was important to have respondents elaborate on answers and go into great depth when discussing physical activities. It is for this reason that the team chose to approach the problem by developing a qualitative data collection questionnaire. The use of qualitative data allowed team members to research people's emotions surrounding their chosen physical activities. The



qualitative data was collected through convenience and snowball sampling. These methods cultivated together to create this report.

The qualitative data was collected through a survey program known as Qualtrics. Qualtrics is used to collect and analyze data for areas including marketing research. However, due to the nature of the qualitative research, the group did not use Qualtrics in the traditional sense. The group used the program to create a survey that was all open-ended questions. Typically, respondents would input their own answers into Qualtrics, however, throughout this data collection process a member of the team would conduct an interview and simultaneously summarize and input the respondents' answers into Qualtrics.

Before conducting these interviews the team first had to select appropriate respondents for the questionnaire. To do this they outlined the demographic of student-athlete graduates from 23-35 that are active at least four times a week. This group was selected because the team's literature review shared that recent college graduates who were student-athletes feel a sense of "homelessness" once they are left without a sport. The team also concluded prior to the design of the questionnaire that the narrative of pickleball being great for intergenerational play was likely hurting the sport among a younger demographic. If pickleball is to be an Olympic sport, there would likely need to be an increase in younger players who fall in line with the idea of a "typical olympian". The questions were then developed and 20 respondents of this demographic were interviewed.

The sampling method chosen was convenience sampling. With the timeline of the project and resources available, it made the most sense to select respondents based on the team's current



network. Next, snowball sampling was utilized, which allowed the team to survey friends, family, and other individuals associated with people that had already been surveyed.

Each member of the team conducted five in-depth interviews. Of these five, one person was a pickleball player and four were either athletes of different sports or even individuals who regularly exercised. This allowed the team to gain a unique insight into the mindset of how individuals across many sports make their selection as to how they stay in shape.

These elements were cultivated together to create a qualitative set of questions for in-depth interviews that were used to take a deep dive into the minds of athletes in their mid to late 20s and early to mid-30s. The data gathered through these interviews were analyzed and used to develop the strategy in the sections that follow.

Data analysis and findings

Younger people may not have as much time or money to allocate to a second or third sport. The team found that many people would only consider playing another sport if it complemented their current activity. For this reason, tennis and other racquet sport players may be more interested in pickleball as opposed to weight lifters or runners. The team also found that pickleball has a strong social draw. Many older people use it just as a way to get together with friends. For the younger generation, having friends also trying a new activity increases the odds of everyone following through.

Lack of accessibility also proves a strong barrier to pickleball for many young active adults. The team found in almost all of our interviews that younger people did not know where to



find their nearest pickleball court. It does not have many courts except in areas where it is popular. Many people that were interviewed expressed that the sport's lack of accessibility was an issue for them.

Finally, socialization is a huge part of what people expressed would attract them to playing a new sport. Many of the participants felt that the only way they would try a new activity would be with friends. At this point in the pandemic, almost none of the respondents said that COVID-19 would stop them from socializing and going out. Being able to play a sport with friends is a strong driver for younger people when it comes to spending their time on new activities. Many interviewees actually did their current activity with friends already. This suggests that being emotionally invested and being held accountable to attend is an important factor of trying out a new sport. The participants, whose ages ranged from 23-35, also expressed that pickleball's image is not one they would typically associate with. The team found that many younger people are under the impression that pickleball is only for the older generations.

Conclusions and Recommendations

This research aimed to understand why active young adults were choosing specific activities. The team wanted to see why respondents chose their activities and what it would take to start a second one.

As discussed in the previous section of the conclusion and recommendations, our team had three key findings that stood out when conducting these qualitative interviews. Out of the three, two came up much more often throughout the interview process. Approximately 85% of



the 20 people mentioned how their chosen activity was easily accessible and would not interfere with their busy schedule. The other finding, which was a recurring theme, was that active young adults were doing other activities that complemented their primary one. With the data the team collected, they were able to see that active young adults care about two important things when it comes to physical activities.

The 17 respondents that mentioned how accessibility played a significant role in their activity were busy individuals. These active young adults had full schedules, usually taking up a full day of work. A large majority of these 17 respondents had chosen running or the gym as a primary physical activity. Both of these are incredibly accessible and can fit into a busy young adult's schedule at any notice. This demographic of young adults have shown that they have been extremely busy with their schedules, and we are only willing to try a new activity if it is easily accessible. This was because it would be easy to fit into their chaotic schedules without hindering their routines throughout the day.

Along with this extremely busy demographic, seven out of the 20 respondents mentioned that they do other activities or would be open to doing new ones if they were to complement their primary activity. If these individuals could make more time or had the time, they would do an activity that would complement their current one. One of the respondents, who played rugby as his primary activity, mentioned that he also lifts at the gym because it complements rugby, helping him get better physically. Another example was a respondent that played professional volleyball as his primary activity. Before games, he mentioned that he would sometimes play pickleball because it is low impact and will help him with his hand coordination.



Out of the 20 interviews conducted, our team noticed that 35% of the respondents would try another activity if it complemented the primary one. This was the other standout result that the team noticed after collecting all data.

After interviewing 20 active young adults in this demographic, the team noticed these two distinct themes. This target audience will be driven by accessibility and the compliments the activity provides.

The members of the target demographic were asked a series of questions that aimed at identifying the factors most likely to encourage them to partake in a second athletic activity. By identifying said factors the World Pickleball Federation would have data suggesting how to best attract young athletic individuals to the sport of pickleball.

After all interviews were concluded and the data was analyzed it was clear that the two largest factors for having individuals adding a second athletic activity were time, and a complementary skill set. What this means is the demographic interviewed already has an extremely busy schedule and they will not easily add a new activity because of this. However, they are willing to make time for the right activity as long as it does not interfere with their busy schedule. The other substantial finding was that young athletic individuals are open to making time for a second activity if it will help them improve their skill set in their primary activity. Examples of this include rugby players lifting weights and running in their free time, and a volleyball player playing pickleball before a match. The two factors of time and a complementary skill set are the best findings to develop a strategy around.



It is the recommendation of the team that the World Pickleball Federation shape the narrative of pickleball to be one that complements other activities in an accessible manner. With the bulk of the data suggesting that young active adults are extremely busy, and largely participating in activities that complement their current athletic pursuits, it makes the most sense to launch a public relations campaign shaping pickleball to this exact narrative.

Specific tactics to execute this strategy would be pitching stories to editors of sports related publications about how pickleball is a convenient and low impact way to improve one's mobility and hand eye coordination for their current athletic endeavors. For example, the respondent to the survey who plays pickleball to enhance his volleyball skills would be the kind of story that a publicist should be pitching to sports publications. An entire marketing campaign could be developed around how pickleball helps athletes improve their overall skills in a convenient and low impact way. This will serve as an athletes introduction to the sport which will in turn help them fall in love with the game of pickleball.

Limitations

The team created a few limitations, but left a lot of parts of the interview process open. They were given the opportunity to focus on young athletic adults and find what drives them to choose their particular activities. The target audience was both men and women between the ages of 23 and 35. Unfortunately with the time frame the team was only able to interview four women and 16 men but still obtained useful data. Additionally, there were only 20 respondents interviewed, and were all pulled from the team's networks. Lastly, the team utilized qualitative



data exclusively, which does not provide any figures or quantitative data, which makes interpreting the data subjective.