

# Sports

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## Pickleball invasion is on its way to Union County

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There is a sport with a funny name that's gaining popularity in North Georgia and Western North Carolina, and it's called pickleball.

You can't really call it a 'new' sport anymore since it dates back to 1965 with 4 million players worldwide, but since its taken 50 years to reach this area, you could definitely call it 'new' to Union County.

After acquiring quite a following in Fannin and Towns Counties, Clay County, NC, and Murphy, NC, pickleball, which is a combination of tennis, badminton, ping-pong, and played with a ball similar to a wiffle ball, is set to invade Union County in the near future, and long-time pickleball player and coach, David Block will be offering classes for beginners at Meeks Park on Tuesdays for those who want a leg-up on the competition before it takes over, and everybody is doing it.

"It's inexpensive to play, it doesn't require a lot of room, you only need 880 square feet for a court, and I've been told that it was played in Union County and Towns County High Schools, but I don't know that for a fact," Block said.

And in case you were wondering, the game has nothing to do with cucumbers or any kind of vegetable. The inventor of the game named it after his dog, "Pickles," who constantly ran onto the court



Pickleball is a sport that has caught on amongst seniors. In September, Towns County will host a Pickleball Tournament at the Rec Center

to steal the ball. According to Block, pickleball came to the Northeast Georgia mountains about 2-to-3 years ago.

"Now it's been adopted by Towns County and we hope Union County," he said. "It's because there is such a large number of older people here and it's become a real retirement community. In fact, and this may sound funny, but we're hoping to make this area a sports destination. We have great fishing, great mountain

biking, great hiking, we've got some beautiful tennis courts that are exquisite at Meeks (Park) and Young Harris College.

"Bill Kendall (Towns County Commissioner) is putting in new tennis courts at the Towns County Rec Center and is also putting in another 20 pickleball courts. In fact we're going to have a tournament in September in Towns County that will draw from the entire southeast so there will be some very high quality players coming in."

The tournament is slated to begin on Friday, Sept. 18th and wraps up on Saturday the 19th. According to Block, it will most likely be held at the new courts going in at the Towns County Rec Center.

"Larry Conley was also kind enough to let us try to bring pickleball to Union County and will let us use tape on the pretty tennis courts. I've been contacted by 14 people who want to learn."

Block will be offering free pickleball instructions at the Meeks Park tennis courts on Tuesdays, and possibly Thursday mornings. "It's extremely popular

among older people because most of us who come out of tennis, badminton, or racket ball, we just don't have the strength and the stamina to run after tennis balls," Block said. "So Pickleball, because the court is small, the game is extremely fast but it makes use of a lot of the strategies that people learn playing tennis or racquetball, ping-pong or badminton.

"Games usually last 10-12 minutes and we usually play doubles. It's a very social game, although their certainly are people that play with tremendous intensity. It's virtually impossible to get hurt. If you get hit with a tennis ball, you're going to remember it for a long time. I just finished playing (pickleball) for 2 1/2 hours and was hit multiple times. The ball weighs 1 ounce so it's essentially impossible to get hurt by it."

The game is also one of the least expensive indoor or outdoor sports that you're going to find. According to Pickleball Central (www.pickleballcentral.com), a paddle weighs from 6-14 ounces. Most composite or graphite

paddles weigh between 6 to 9 ounces. You can get a new paddle for as low as \$10-\$15. Good composite pickleball paddles start at around \$40. There are three categories of paddles - wood prices range from \$13-\$36, composite from \$40-\$125 and graphite from \$60-\$110.

The intriguing history of the sport begins back in 1965. After playing golf one Saturday during the summer, Joel Pritchard, congressman from Washington State and Bill Bell, successful businessman, returned to Pritchard's home on Bainbridge Island, WA (near Seattle) to find their families sitting around with nothing to do. The property had an old badminton court so Pritchard and Bell looked for some badminton equipment and could not find a full set of rackets. They improvised and started playing with ping-pong paddles and a perforated plastic ball.

The pickleball court is similar to a doubles badminton

ton court. The actual size of the court is 20x44 feet for both doubles and singles. The net is hung at 36 inches on the ends, and 34 inches in the middle. The court is striped like a tennis court, with no alleys; but the outer courts, and not the inner courts, are divided in half by service lines. The inner courts are non-volley zones and extend 7 feet from the net on either side.

The ball is served with an underhand stroke so that contact with the ball is made below waist level in an upward arc from behind the baseline, diagonally to the opponent's service zone. The player must exit the non-volley zone before playing a volley. The first side scoring 11 points and leading by at least two points wins.

In doubles play, at the start of the game, the serving side gets only one fault before their side is out, and the opponents begin their serve. After this, each side gets 2 faults (one with each team member serving) before their serve is finished. Thus, each side is always one serve ahead or behind, or tied.

In singles play, each side gets only one fault before a side out and the opponent then serves. The server's score will always be even (0, 2, 4, 6, 8, 10...) when serving from the right side, and odd (1, 3, 5, 7, 9...) when serving from the left side (singles play only).

Points are scored by the serving side only and occur when the opponent faults (fails to return the ball, hits ball out of bounds, steps into the non-volley zone [the first seven feet from the net, also known as the 'kitchen'] in the act of volleying the ball, etc.). A player may enter the non-volley zone to play a ball that bounces and may stay there to play balls that bounce

For further information regarding the free pickleball instructional classes and to register, you can contact David Block at gamountainpickleball.com. The only equipment required is a pair of sneakers, everything else will be provided.



Locals take part in a sport that's taken over the surrounding counties.

## NASCAR 2015

By Gerald Hodges/the Racing Reporter

### "Rowdy" Kyle claims Kentucky Cup Race

SPARTA, Ken.—Kyle Busch won Saturday's Sprint Cup Series race at Kentucky Speedway for his second win of the season, and 31st career win. He led 163 laps of the 267-lap race and finished nearly two seconds ahead of runner-up, Joey Logano.

Busch, who led the most laps, was running second on the last restart. Logano was the leader, and held the front position for the next 20 laps. Finally, Busch was able to draw closer, and closer, until with 15-to-go, he made the pass around Logano.

"I knew that last restart was definitely an opportunity for us to take a chance on winning the race," said Busch. "When Logano was getting away from me at the beginning of the run I was getting disappointed. I'm trying; I'm driving as hard as I could. I'm hitting all my marks and I'm just not keeping up. I knew that I just had to move. I'm going to give this a few more laps and see if I get anything. If I'm not gaining then, I'm going to move like no matter what. If I lose ground, then it is what it is, I'll finish second."

"But I moved around and I found something and it really worked for me. So I just kept doing it, and here we are."

While the win was impressive, and he is making progress towards making this year's Sprint Cup Chase, he still has a ways to go.

Busch was sidelined for six races due to a broken foot and leg, received in a wreck at Daytona.

NASCAR ruled that he would be eligible for the Chase if he won a race and finished in the top-30 in points. His win at Kentucky was his second win, but he is currently in 35th place with 200 points. Cole Whitt is the 30th-place driver, with 287 points.

With eight races remaining before the Chase begins, and the points are reset, Busch must gain at least another 87 points, and maybe more.

It looks like a long road for him, but it's not impossible. "I felt like we were able to

get the lead on the last start and was able to pull away from Kyle for a little bit and then he started making some ground on the top," said Logano. "And when you're second place, you have the advantage of trying to move around and taking that chance of losing a little bit of time to try to find something."

Denny Hamlin was third, followed by Carl Edwards, Matt Kenseth, Brad Keselowski, Jeff Gordon, Kevin Harvick, Jimmie Johnson, and Kurt Busch.

Dale Earnhardt Jr. had brake issues with his car for most of the race. On lap 136, he scraped the outside wall. During lap 204, he got into the back of Danica Patrick, and sent her No. 10 Chevrolet into the wall. He finished 21st.

Current Chase leaders with eight races left before the Chase begins: 1. Johnson-624 (4 wins), 2. Harvick-692 (2), 3. Earnhardt-616 (2), 4. Logano-624 (1), 5. Truex-596 (1), 6. Keselowski-559 (1), 7. Kenseth-540 (1), 8. Hamlin-522 (1), 9. Edwards-449 (1), 10. McMurray-556 (0), 11. Gordon-537 (0), 12. Kahne-513 (0), 13. Menard-509 (0), 14. Newman-497 (0), 15. Bowyer-490 (0), 16. Almirola-473 (0).

Note: Some of the driver points might be confusing, but this is the official NASCAR standings, based on wins.

### KENTUCKY XFINITY RACE TO KESELOWSKI

What was bad for Eric Jones was good for Brad Keselowski.

Eric Jones was leading Friday's Xfinity race with 19 laps remaining. Keselowski was close behind, when the pair came up on a lapped car. Instead of moving up, the car went down. This caused Jones to lose momentum. Keselowski zipped by and went on to win his first Xfinity event of the season.

"I just caught a little break, to be honest," Keselowski said. "One of the lapped cars locked in Erik. He had done a heck of job and still was doing a heck of a job, and sometimes things don't go your way."

The victory was Kesel-



"Rowdy" Kyle Busch takes Kentucky Cup race.

owski's third at Kentucky and the 33rd of his career. The remaining top-10: 3. Kyle Busch, 4. Daniel Suarez, 5. Elliott Sadler, 6. Paul Menard, 7. Darrell Wallace, 8. Dale Earnhardt, 9. Brendan Gaughan, 10. Regan Smith.

Top-10 leaders after 16 of 33: 1. C. Buescher-593, 2. Elliott-557, 3. T. Dillon-547, 4. Sadler-528, 5. Smith-527, 6. Wallace-510, 7. Scott-478, 8. Suarez-477, 9. B. Gaughan-473, 10. Reed-471.

### CRAFTON GETS TRUCK WIN

Matt Crafton, two-time Camping World Truck Series champion took the lead from Erik Jones on the restart on Lap 145 of the scheduled 150-lap race. Going down the backstretch, Ben Kennedy's truck collided with David Gilliland and was pushed into the SAFER barrier, then into the fence, knocking out a big hole in it. Since it was going to take up to two hours to repair the fence, NASCAR decided to end it.

Crafton led twice for 43 laps, while runner-up Erik Jones led three times for 55 laps. Ryan Blaney, Daniel Suarez, Timothy Peters, Tyler Reddick, David Gilliland, John Wes Townley, Cameron Hayley, and Brandon Jones rounded out the top-10.

Top-10 points leaders after 10 of 22: 1. Crafton-417, 2. Reddick-397, 3. E. Jones-388, 4. Sauter-359, 5. Townley-330, 6. Peters-322, 7. Hayley-315, 8. Gallagher-308, 9. Hemric-308, 10. Kennedy-297.

### ON POLITICAL CORRECTNESS

Last week I asked for reader's input on some of NASCAR's recent decisions and

P/R releases regarding the Confederate flag, Donald Trump, and other issues. A lot of fans contacted me. What is so strange is that everyone was of one opinion.

And these weren't just Southern race fans. They were from all parts of the country, including Pennsylvania, New York, and Wisconsin.

One newspaper editor said she was 'sick and tired' of NASCAR's political correct stance.

A lady from Georgia said her grandfather died fighting for the South, and that she never regarded the Confederate flag as a hate symbol. She wishes people would get over that, because her family fought for individual rights. She went on to say, "What if the young man that killed those seven people in South Carolina had been holding a U. S. flag?"

"NASCAR should stick to racing, they have enough problems getting that right," said S. M. "I am offended by the recent political babble from them. What do they plan to do for me?"

That last statement pretty much summed up all the others. **Weekend Racing:** The Sprint Cup and Xfinity teams will be at the 1-mile New Hampshire Speedway for daytime races.

Sat., July 18: Xfinity Series race 17 of 33; Starting time: 4 pm ET; TV: NBCSN.

Sun. July 19: Sprint Cup Series race 19 of 36; Starting time: 1:30 pm ET; TV: NBCSN.

Note: NBCSN is NBC's Sports Network Channel. The listings I have are: Media.com-827; DirecTV-603; Dish-159; Time Warner-060. With Cablevision and AT&T you must buy a complete sports package, and those channels are not the same in all parts of the country.

**Racing Trivia Question:** Who won the 2014 Xfinity Series championship?

**Last Week's Question:** Which team owner helped Carl Edwards break into NASCAR? **Answer:** It was Jack Roush Racing.

You may contact the Racing Reporter by e-mail at: hodges@race500.com. NT(Jul15,C)ac

### Youth baseball finishes up at State

Union County's 12&U youth baseball team got off to a strong start at State by winning its first two games of the tournament.

Following wins over Sharon Springs and Sandy Plains, the Panthers fell to Murray County and

the SSYS Cyclones.

Meanwhile, the 10&U baseball Panthers dropped its first two games of the State Tournament to Dade County and Eastside.

Congratulations to all of the Union County youth baseball and softball stars.

### MUSA registration deadline nears

Mountain United Soccer Association's Fall Registration is now open. Age groups from U6 to U16.

You can register online at www.mountainsoccer.org. Registration forms are also available to print from the website. Forms can be mailed

to P.O. Box 1862, Blairsville, GA 30514. Deadline to register is July 18th.

For additional information, please check our website at: www.mountainsoccer.org or email us at: musa.soccer@gmail.com

### Trout stocking sites week of July 6-10, 2015

Fannin: Rock Creek  
Union: Cooper Creek

Note: Information is subject to change. For the latest on stocking and event information, remember to "like" us on Facebook at www.facebook.com/ChattahoocheeForestNationalFishHatchery. Please call the hatchery at 706-838-4723 for questions. The hatchery also provides trout for the state. Please contact Georgia DNR for information on sites stocked by the state. NJuly15,ZJCA

**New Liberty Heaven Bound Sportsmen's**  
3<sup>rd</sup> Annual  
**3-D Archery Coon Shoot**

Bow Raffle Refreshments  
Door Prizes

*And God was with the lad, and he grew, and dwelt in the wilderness, and became an archer. Genesis 21:20*

Will be held July 18, 2015 at **Alexander's Store**  
Town Creek School Rd, Blairsville, GA

Sign in From 7:00pm-8:30pm  
Shotgun Start at Dark  
\$10 per Shooter

Classes will be: Mens, Womens, Traditional, Youth( 12-16),  
Cubs(11 and under shoot FREE)

Rules: No Shining Targets. Targets will be lit with a light.  
No Broadheads  
Must Shoot From Stake  
Bring a small flashlight for walking

Any Questions Please Contact: Trenny Elliott 706-781-8883,  
Jason Seabolt 706-835-6978 or Tim Bohannon 706-781-4658