



National Pickleball Day: Players Celebrate with Games and Bobbleheads

by Sydney Sinks, News Reporter
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RIVERBEND - Today, Aug. 8, is National Pickleball Day, and to celebrate, local players are hitting the courts while the National Bobblehead Hall of Fame and Museum unveils their first pickleball bobbleheads.

Bob Biarkis, a local pickleball player, remembers the day he stumbled upon a pickleball game. He was immediately fascinated by the game and how people of all ages could play.

“The thing that was so obvious to me was everybody was having fun, because everybody was laughing and having a great time,” Biarkis said. “I was hooked. And that’s one thing you will learn about playing pickleball: It’s addicting. Once you play it, you want to play it all the time.”

Pickleball has been identified as the fastest-growing sport in the U.S. The [National Bobblehead Hall of Fame and Museum](#), located in Milwaukee, has recognized this with their new pickleball bobbleheads.

The museum has a wide collection of bobbleheads available for purchase. This newest release includes a bobblehead of Kitchen the Pickleball Mascot, a pickleball with sunglasses who is named after the “kitchen” or no-volley zone of a pickleball court. The second bobblehead is called the Pickleball Sports Ball Bobble and joins the Sports Ball Bobble Series.

“We’re thrilled to be unveiling the first two Pickleball Bobbles on National Pickleball Day,” National Bobblehead Hall of Fame and Museum co-founder and CEO Phil Sklar said in a press release. “The bobblehead of Kitchen and the Pickleball Sports Ball Bobble will be must-haves for pickleball players everywhere!”

For pickleball players in the Riverbend, National Pickleball Day is a chance to celebrate the sport they love. Biarkis has watched the sport become more popular over the past decade. In the beginning, Biarkis and his wife would play with a few other couples every week. The friends started calling themselves the OMG Pickleball Club, so named because Biarkis always asks for “one more game.” Today, the club has over 400 members and helps fund the pickleball courts at Plummer Family Park in Edwardsville. You can read more about the One More Game Pickleball Club at their [official website](#).

Why has pickleball become so popular, so quickly? Biarkis has a few theories.

“It’s an easy game to play. It’s great for seniors, but it’s great for all ages,” he said, adding that he is a certified pickleball instructor for the City of Edwardsville and Meyer YMCA in Edwardsville. “I just love the game so much. I just want to share the game with people...It’s not just in Edwardsville, it’s everywhere.”

He points out that pickleball is inexpensive and inclusive, as many seniors have developed a love for the sport. Because the courts are small, they’re cheaper to build than tennis courts. He adds that the solid paddle slows down the game and allows for longer rallies and what he calls a “friendlier” game as players get to know each other.

“You can be as competitive as you want, but if you just want to go out and have fun playing with three other friends, you see that a lot, too. It lends itself to being a very social game,” Biarkis said. “We’re seeing all age groups playing this game, which is great for the future of the sport. I think the game is going to be around for a long time and I think it’s going to get a lot bigger than it is right now.”

Village of Godfrey Park and Rec Director Chris Logan said the Godfrey courts were highly requested and now he is glad to report they are being utilized in a strong fashion.

"It is really awesome to see when we have something really requested by residents and it is really used a lot. It is cool to see. The other great thing is it is being used by all age groups."

For people who want to try their hand at a game on National Pickleball Day, you can check out pickleball courts in parks throughout the Riverbend, including [Robert E. Glazebrook Community Park in Godfrey](#), [Lions Club Park in Jerseyville](#) and [Plummer Family Park in Edwardsville](#).