

# racquetball

# into the 80s

## Game's popularity still increasing—court manager

By Tad Stryker

Racquetball's popularity may seem like a fad to some, but the sport's popularity is constantly increasing, according to the manager of a Lincoln racquetball facility.

"Racquetball is a sport still in the very beginnings of a rapid upswing in popularity which will last for many, many more

years," said David K. Putensen, manager and part owner of the Wallbangers Racquetball Club, located at 330 West P Street.

There are many reasons for racquetball's popularity increase Putensen said. People get a good first impression of the game because it's easy to learn, and fun to play. "It's not easy to embarrass yourself,

even if you don't know all the shots or techniques," he said. Matched against another player of roughly equal skill, the beginner doesn't experience the same frustration he might by trying to achieve a good score in golf or bowling. In other words, he said, you can win right from the start.

Those who have played for years however, still find the game challenging and fun. Roger Hein, a senior from Lincoln, who started playing four years ago, says he likes racquetball because "it's more physically exerting than lots of other sports. It's a good winter sport, and you don't need to get together two whole teams like in basketball."

Reasonable costs are a mark in racquetball's favor. The most expensive piece of equipment needed is the racquet itself. The racquets, usually made of fiberglass, or metal, such as aluminum, cost anywhere from \$15 to \$50 or \$75 for higher quality racquets to give you that extra competitive edge.

Competition is a prime feature of racquetball, but it's usually friendly competition, said Putensen.

"It doesn't take a great deal of strength or size, plus it's not necessarily a game where a long background in athletics is necessary," he said.

People of all ages can play, as long as they're in reasonably fair physical condition. Putensen said members of the Wallbangers Club range from eight to 75 years in age.

"People over 30 years old suddenly find they aren't able to stay in good physical condition with just their everyday activities," he said.

"Racquetball offers excellent exercise for the cardiopulmonary system, and for many different muscles of the body. It's great for people with weight problems—you'll burn off twice as many calories per

hour playing racquetball as you will playing tennis."

Besides these physical benefits, the game offers a good way to release those tensions and frustrations built up by a week of never-ending hour exams and English papers. You can whale the tar out of a racquetball until you drop and never once have to chase it across another court or watch it sail over the fence and across the street.

Putensen called racquetball a "fledgling sport," but pointed out that since Wallbangers opened in August, 1978, over 900 people have become club members. "The sport is gaining popularity so fast it's incredible," he said. "I think it's going to take four or five years before we even see how much potential for growth racquetball has."

Though there are professional racquetball players in the United States, it's not considered a "money sport" like golf or tennis.

"I think we'll see more tournaments and more pro players making more money in the near future," Putensen said. "I recall just a few short years ago that even the most prestigious of tennis matches offered only five or six thousand dollars as first prize."

The Nebraska racquetball doubles championships for both men and women will be at Wallbangers March 14-16, Putensen said.

Putensen even sees racquetball as a way for businessmen to get to know their clients better. Instead of talking business over the traditional golf game, why not take them to the nearest racquetball court?

"Sure, you can talk while you're teeing off," said Putensen, "but what happens if the first guy slices into the right rough and the other guy hits drive into the trees on the other side of the fairway?" Now that's a real communications gap.



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