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WED., FEB 21, 2007 - 11:05 AM

Platform tennis anyone?

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PINE BLUFF - Add a new sport to Dane County's winter recreational roster.

Clad in hats, mittens, vests and plenty of polar fleece, members of the Madison Platform Tennis Club can often be found lobbing and volleying on a court behind the Red Mouse Club in the unincorporated community of Pine Bluff near the town of Cross Plains.

The cold doesn't faze these players, and the chance to lace up their shoes to slap a ball around outside is an inviting alternative to the winter blahs.

"I play in below-zero (conditions)," said Tim Goode, who started the club with his wife, Eileen.

The Goodes, who played platform tennis for 15 years in Boulder, Colo., moved to Madison about five years ago. They are avid players of both regular tennis and platform tennis, and they also compete at the national level in platform tennis.

Eileen Goode said the sport's popularity in Milwaukee and Chicago convinced them a club could be successful in Dane County.

The game was invented in the 1920s in upstate New York by tennis players who wanted to play in the winter. Organizers eventually surrounded the court with screens to prevent losing balls in the snow; it later occurred to players to incorporate the screens into the game by playing the ball off them.

Platform tennis is an easy sport to learn, and causes less wear and tear on the body than regular tennis, the Goodes said.

It's also a defensive game, not one of power, Eileen Goode said. Tennis players need to adjust to a smaller court - about a quarter of the size of a regular tennis court - and playing the ball off the screen, she said.

Players use paddles about 18 inches long and a spongy, solid, rubber ball. The court is made of aluminum tubing with heaters underneath to melt snow and ice.

"You heat the court for safety, not to heat your body," Eileen Goode said.

While bundled in the beginning, players soon shed layers as they play the fast-paced game.

Play is limited to members only, although the club is hosting two free open houses next month.

The club, which has 13 members, opened in January after the Goodes spent more than three years searching for a location. The Goodes used their own money to build the court and fund its maintenance, leasing the space and other associated costs, which totaled about \$50,000.

Delight Oelerich, of Middleton, who is an avid tennis player, has only played platform tennis a handful of times, but she said it's helping her regular tennis game.

Tennis players have to readjust to playing outside after a winter of playing on indoor courts, she said. Playing platform tennis helps bridge the gap between seasons, she said. The long rallies in platform tennis also teach patience.

"I like it just because it's a lot of volley and reflex," Oelerich said. "To be outside in the winter is a huge draw to me because I don't cross-country ski."

Beyond being an escape from the couch and a way to be outside in the winter, players say platform tennis is a more easy-going, social sport than tennis - helped by the fact the Dane County court is behind a bar.

"This was the first winter with consistent snow and ice," Tim Goode said. "With this sport you can always do it. (The court) is ready to go in all but the most extreme conditions."

The rules

Platform tennis is a racket sport played on a court about a quarter of the size of a tennis court. It is a doubles-only sport,



Craig Schreiner - State Journal

There's snow on the ground, but not on the court where platform tennis enthusiasts, from left, Tim Goode, Delight Oelerich, Eileen Goode and Diane Lin play doubles along Mineral Point Road in the rural community of Pine Bluff.

IMAGES
(3 images)

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with two players on each side of a 34-inch high net.

Rules of the game are identical to tennis with a few exceptions: Only one serve is allowed, serves that touch the net are played, and the ball can be played off the screened walls. If a ball in play or on the service hits the deck in bounds and then touches any part of the back or side screens, it may be played, as long as it does not bounce on the deck a second time.

SOURCE: Tim and Eileen Goode and The American Platform Tennis Association

To get involved

The Madison Platform Tennis Club will offer a series of free open houses next month to introduce players to the sport. Leagues, private lessons and tournament play is open to members only, however.

The club is offering a special introductory membership of \$150 for individuals and \$200 for families until Aug. 1. Regular membership dues will be \$300 for individuals and \$400 for families from Aug. 1 to July 31. The open houses run from 2 to 4 p.m. March 4 and March 18.

For more information call 608-438-8906 or visit www.madpaddle.com.



There's snow on the ground, but not on the court where platform tennis enthusiasts, from left, Tim Goode, Delight Oelerich, Eileen Goode and Diane Lin play doubles along Mineral Point Road in the rural community of Pine Bluff.

**(Craig Schreiner -
State Journal)**



Outdoors enthusiasts have a new outlet for winter fun in Dane County. The Madison Platform Tennis Club has built a court along Mineral Point Road in the unincorporated community of Pine Bluff.

(Craig Schreiner - State Journal)



Diane Lin dresses in multiple layers to play platform tennis with the Madison Platform Tennis Club. The club began in January and is building interest and membership. Its just great to be outside in the winter, Lin said.

**(Craig Schreiner -
State Journal)**