

Racquetball a sport with force

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"Paddle rackets" was once the name of a sport which has evolved into an Olympic game and is played to this day.

Racquetball was developed by Joseph G. Sobek, who wanted to combine the sports of squash with the rules of handball as a way to alleviate the pain from using a person's hand and start using paddles, which evolved into specially designed rackets.

"I play because it's a lot of fun," said Staff Sgt. Juan Estrada, 2nd Brigade, 75th Division. "The skills used in racquetball are more of a combination on how you hit the ball and your endurance level."

The sport is played with either two or four players as in tournament play or in a non-tournament classified variation with three players named cutthroat.

The court is an enclosed rectangular shaped room 40-foot by 20-foot and a 20-foot high ceiling with red lines marking the serving and reception areas. When a ball is put into play and served it must pass the second unbroken line and hit the floor before hitting the back wall. In either case of the ball not meeting this serve requirement results in a fault.

Like tennis, racquetball is similar by allowing the server two tries to put the ball into play. The server must first hit the front wall before any other wall or they lose their turn.

The main goal of the sport is to hit the ball in a way the opponent is unable to hit the ball back to the front wall without a second bounce on the floor. When a player is unable to hit the ball before it touches the floor twice, the server gains a point or it becomes the defensive players turn to serve. After the ball is served off the front wall, it can hit as many walls and the ceiling as long as it hits the front wall before hitting the floor. A regular game consists of two 15-point games and an 11-point tiebreaker game if needed for amateurs while professional play the best of five eleven-point games needing a two-point margin.

"Beginners should be patient and take time to learn and listen to older players," said Sgt. Maj. Moises Martinez, a U.S. Sergeants Major Academy student. "It takes good hand and eye coordination to go along with your reflexes."

Martinez, an avid player for 14-years, thinks of the game as a stress reliever and excellent alternate physical training program.

People who have seen others play the sport have been worried about being hit by the ball. With proper precautions, the sport can be safe and enjoyable. Being hit by the ball is not life threatening, but a bruise can appear, according to Estrada.

"After a while you play enough to learn how to hit the ball and become fast enough to get out of the way," Estrada said.

Along with equipment used to play, safety gear should be worn also. although the gym's equipment can be used, Estrada recommends for people to buy their own. Racquets, balls, gloves and goggle can be purchased for as low cost as \$25 for a starter kit, and as much as \$225 for better quality equipment.

"It's a great sport I recommend for all," said Estrada. "Practice, practice, practice and get with someone at your level ... it will be more enjoyable if you get with someone as you get better."



Sgt. Maj. Moises Martinez scrapes up a low hit ball.



Sol Talamoni keeps his eyes on the ball to ensure he makes good contact with the ball.



Staff Sgt. Juan Estrada winds up for one of his power shots.