

## Sports

# Hinsdale to get 4 platform tennis courts

By Matt Le Cren

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Enthusiasts of platform tennis will soon have another place to play thanks to the efforts of people like Hinsdale residents Paul Wiggin and Bill O'Brien.

A two-year campaign to expand the number of public courts in Hinsdale came to a successful conclusion recently when the Hinsdale Village Board approved its 2004-05 budget, which allocates money for the building of four platform courts at Katherine Legge Memorial Park.

Wiggin said he hopes the courts will be ready for use by September, in time for the start of the 2004-05 season, which begins in October. The exact site of the new courts, along with a warming building, has yet to be determined, although it is expected to be somewhere on the south side of the park. The Village Board's action came after the plan was approved by the Hinsdale Parks Commission and the Administrative and Community Affairs Commission.

"We felt like the Parks Commission was very serious about doing the right thing," Wiggin said. "It went through very quickly. It was great to

see that. We were hoping to build the new ones in a less residential place."

The new construction at Katherine Legge will bring to six the number of platform courts available to the general public in Hinsdale, joining two at Burns Field that were donated by the Kelly and Templeton families in the mid-1990s.

Some nearby residents, however, have complained in the past about the lighting at Burns Field. The lights at those courts are allowed to stay on until 10 p.m.

Wiggin, who has been playing the sport for about four years, was introduced to platform, or "paddle," tennis by O'Brien, one of the individuals credited with helping popularize the sport in Hinsdale, which has one of the largest concentration of players in Illinois outside of Chicago and the North Shore. According to O'Brien, Hinsdale and Winnetka are the only two villages in Illinois that have public courts, although plans are in the works in Glen Ellyn.

"Paddle has been a long love of mine," said O'Brien, who has been playing for 23 years. "It really gets in your blood. I think part of the reason it's so wonderful is it's one of the few things you can do all winter. You can

do other things ... but so many of these sports you have to belong to a club to take part."

The sport of platform tennis, which is played on an elevated aluminum court measuring 30 feet by 60 feet (about a quarter of the size of a regulation tennis court), was invented in upstate New York in the 1920s. O'Brien, who was born in Western Springs, was introduced to the sport while he was living in northern New Jersey, another of platform's hot spots.

When he moved back to this area, O'Brien would have to travel into the city or to suburbs on the North Shore to find playing partners. But over the past decade, the number of people playing in Hinsdale has grown.

Wiggin estimates that between 300 and 400 people play platform, of which 100 participate in the Chicago Platform Tennis League. Hinsdale's local organization fields seven teams of varying skill levels in the Chicago league. Those teams play one night a week from October through April and many players also take part in pickup matches on the weekends.

While the sport originally catered to older people who found it hard to play regular tennis, O'Brien is trying to expand the sport's popularity.

Nationwide, 20 percent of platform players are older than 60, and most people generally don't begin playing until their 30s or 40s. But in Hinsdale, twentysomethings and even a few teen-agers have begun to take notice. Wiggin would like to see local high schools get involved.

Platform tennis follows the same scoring rules as regular tennis, with some exceptions. There is only one serve allowed instead of two and 12-foot mesh screens surround the courts. As in racquetball, balls that hit the screens are still in play, leading to longer rallies. The courts have heaters underneath them, allowing play to continue in all types of weather, including severe cold. The only thing that stops play is lightning.

Compared to some other sports, the cost is quite affordable. Racquets, which are metal paddles with holes drilled in them, cost between \$80 and \$100 and balls, of which just one is needed per match, go for \$2.75. All games are doubles matches.

"One of the things about paddle is it's more social than tennis because you're playing doubles," Wiggin said.

Anyone interested in learning more about platform tennis is encouraged to contact Wiggin at [paulwiggin@yahoo.com](mailto:paulwiggin@yahoo.com).