

## **Intro**

"You mean to tell me you've never heard of paddle? Stay with me for one minute then. Platform tennis is a racquet sport played outdoors in the winter, ideally in below freezing temperatures. Don't worry, you warm up once you start playing. The court resembles a small tennis court, raised off the ground and surrounded by a 10 ft. chicken wire fence – although you don't feel caged in at all. My friends who just started describe it as if you are playing on top of a ping-pong table. I became a paddle addict because: you can play the ball off the screen, it's magical playing in the snow, and it's a relaxed, social sport – it's not uncommon for my friends to play with a paddle in one hand and a slice of pizza in the other..."

Remember the first time someone tried to explain platform "paddle" tennis to you? Or better yet, remember the first time you stepped onto a court?

Kate Macauley and Chris Kelley regularly ask their college friends if they have ever played paddle, and they usually expect a blank stare in response. But it has not discouraged them from introducing students to the sport that they have come to love over the past eight years.

Both Kate Macauley, a sophomore at Yale University, and Chris Kelley, a sophomore at Georgetown University, have been trying to create platform tennis clubs at their respective universities, in order to expose more students to paddle. Their goal is to eventually establish enough college teams to form an intercollegiate club paddle league.

Here are the different paths they have taken while at Yale and Georgetown University, the various obstacles they have faced and the current status of their clubs:

### **Georgetown University Club (Chris Kelley)**

I was very passionate about paddle while growing up in Wilton, CT, so much so that there were some stretches where I would play paddle for twenty days straight. The Wilton Youth Paddle Program led by Leslie Gambie spread the paddle bug to my peers and by the end of high school, I played every Friday night (and many other nights) with 30 of my best friends. It was such an essential part of my life in Wilton that I knew I wanted to spread the game to my classmates at Georgetown. Within days of settling into my freshman year I started to look for area courts, potential students, and ways to start the club.

There were a few key issues with trying to start such a club. This included access to area courts (due to a lack of public courts), passing a year long club development process at Georgetown University, and finding students who were interested or who had previously played.

I was lucky enough to be able to join the Washington Platform Tennis League during my first winter in DC. League commissioner Mike Taylor, APTA region president Fred Gumbinner, and many other league players worked tirelessly to help find public or

private courts in the area that Georgetown students could use. This past fall Mike Taylor and Joe Mesmer, tennis professional at Columbia Country Club, granted Georgetown students court time on Saturdays at CCC in Chevy Chase, MD in exchange for help in teaching youth paddle players.

Lots of students have expressed interest and a handful of them have been able to play. The last time we played three new paddle players tried the game as Emily Blynn and I battled against Dan Nunn and Kevin Donovan. While the club has not yet been approved by Georgetown University, the access to courts and student enthusiasm to try new clubs will drive further interest and boost the potential for a strong Georgetown team and an intercollegiate club league.

### **Yale University Club (Kate Macauley)**

In Wilton, CT, I played so much paddle throughout middle school and high school that I bordered on the obsessive. I knew that regardless of where I ended up at college, my goal would be to start a paddle program and to spread my love for the game to my new classmates. Fearing that it would be difficult to get approval from Yale University with no precedent set for such a club, I dove into the logistical groundwork during my first year.

By the beginning of my second year, I was well on my way to establishing platform tennis as a club sport. The head of Yale club sports, Tom Migdalski, was extremely receptive to the idea and accepted the proposal to become a Yale sanctioned club sport. Alex Dorato, the Yale Men's Varsity tennis coach and of course a paddle player himself, jumped on board as the club faculty advisor. Rob Coster, the head of Region II platform tennis, became my number one proponent, collecting donated equipment and organizing court time through the New Haven Country Club. Kevin O'Brien, a member of NHCC, acted as the intermediary to the club and found us a time slot every Thursday night.

The club kicked off the second week of January, and we have had about five to eight students out to play every Thursday. With twenty students on the team roster, a slightly different group plays each time, enabling larger numbers to be introduced to the game. Rob Coster plays with us every week and fills in extra slots with local adult paddle players. Most encouraging of all, all of the students who have played so far express an interest in coming out to play again. I wish I could take some credit for the trend, but at the heart of it all, the energy and excitement surrounding platform tennis sells itself.

Students at St. Lawrence, Bucknell, Princeton, and other universities have expressed initial interest in starting club teams. There is still a lot of effort that needs to go into starting these teams such as finding courts, working with the universities, and finding area paddle players that might be able to help in the process.

If you are interested in starting a club team at your college, joining a current club team, helping teach new players, or have any suggestions please contact Chris at [cak59@georgetown.edu](mailto:cak59@georgetown.edu) or Kate at [katherine.macauley@yale.edu](mailto:katherine.macauley@yale.edu)