



From the Picklehood

November 2024

By Jack Hodges

“Your experiences will be yours alone. But truth and best friendships will rarely ever disappoint you.” Anne Lamott

The other morning I was in Starbucks waiting for my mobile order. A lady, standing next to me, was also waiting.....and touching. Every. Drink. She apparently ordered a latte as well and picked up every venti sized cup to read the name. Finally she picked up mine, even though “Jack” was called out as the drink was set down. I couldn’t help myself and commented, with just a dink of sarcasm, “Off to play some pickleball.” Whoa!! Major stink eye. Forgot to mention she was dressed in a nice tennis outfit and, by her reaction, was not off to play the “fun game with the funny name.”

The experience made me think of our Pandemic days. The precautions we took. The respect we had for each other and for each other’s space. And, adjustments made as we maneuvered our way through Pandemic pickleball.

I recall what I remember. March, 2020. Lots of misinformation because we didn’t have much information. We started with a blank slate and adjusted as we understood. Places to play on our island were closed. We waited for clearance to use our pickleball venues. Well, some of us waited. As Covid-19 parameters were better understood, our County put restrictions on play. No more than 10 players per venue. That usually involved a couple of courts. If you wanted to show up and just drill with a partner, that was allowed, but bring your own net and use that third or fourth court....if available. Many players said their game really improved during Covid because they did just that.....drill with a partner. Others really enjoyed the small groups. In the early days, we rarely had more than 10 players at any one time. We created our own parameters.....wear a mask during play if you choose. Play with your own ball. Don’t touch others’ pickleballs. Move errant balls around the court with your paddle. No paddle tapping at the net after games.

Bring your own chair. No one sits in your chair. Masks suggested while you sit six feet apart. Sanitize between games. One funny memory stands out for me....on any given day of play, someone would announce to our players that toilet paper was in at Costco. Half the group packed up and were on the road in ten minutes. Middle of the Pacific living.

We made it hard on visitors. In mid-March of 2020, Governor Ige issued Hawaii's first restrictions. This included the closure of parks and, thusly, pickleball venues. On March 21, he issued a mandatory 14 day quarantine for visitors. In mid April, beaches were closed. In late April, travel quarantines included inter-island travel. We were isolated. We can remember morning drives to Lihue where we maybe saw 4 or 5 others cars on the road. In early June, access to local parks was allowed. We could play pickleball legally. With an August surge in Covid cases, partial 14 day quarantine mandates were put back in place. It wasn't until mid-October that our Safe Travels program was fully implemented. In January, 2021 Kaua'i was opened to mainland visitors (with restrictions). As a pickleball community, we asked visitors to wait five days and be tested before they joined play. In mid-June of 2021, more restrictions were lifted, but a large surge in Covid cases caused Governor Ige to "ask" travelers to not visit Hawaii. Finally, on November 1, 2021, visitors were welcomed back. The quarantine period was reduced to five days. On March 25, 2022, two years after mandatory restrictions were put in place, Governor Ige ended the Safe Travels program.

The above mentioned abbreviated timeline reminds us of how strict measures had been. We won't soon forget our early Covid journey. Each island had additional specific guidelines in place and we are thankful for Mayor Kawakami's levelheaded leadership.

This 24 month period in our lives was an extraordinary opportunity for us to prove our sensibility, compassion, and humanity. We were 5.0 participants and gold medal winners all. And to think, this column and these memories were kindled by a cafe-latte-time-to-make mobile order. GEESH!!

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