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## Pickleball

# Wilsons look to spread pickleball abroad

By **MATT COTE**  
DAILY SUN STAFF WRITER

THE VILLAGES – Ever since Ian and Maureen Wilson learned to play pickleball in 2009, they have been enamored with the sport.

The Village of Hemingway residents are English transplants from Kidlington, Oxfordshire, England who spend part of the year in The Villages.

After learning how to play and officiate their newfound favorite sport, the couple went back to the U.K. and immediately missed it.

“There aren’t a lot of clubs around (the U.K.),” Ian said. “Not a lot of people play over there. It is hard to find a place to play.”

So the Wilsons started their own club.

They called around and searched for anyone who also played pickleball in England. And after finding all the information he could, Ian began the process of creating a national pickleball association in England.

A short five years later, in June this year, the Wilsons officially created the United Kingdom Pickleball Association.

The UKPA has approximately 20 affiliated clubs and more than 200 players from Great Britain. The organization is picking up steam, and the Wilsons hope it continues.

“When we first started, we had about 10 people,” Maureen said. “Then our club grew to about 24, then other clubs sprouted up. It has been spreading like a web.”

Ian got his 15 minutes of fame during his time promoting the sport overseas. He started a program through Go Active to promote the sport to all ages, and when the BBC noticed the new sport, they decided to work together.

“They had a guy who would try any sport,” Ian said. “So he came to us and did filming to help push the sport and bring it to people’s attention. The response we got was great. A lot of people saw the program and wanted to try it. I was amazed how many people saw it.”

The Wilsons never could have imagined that when

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Peter Travers  
/ Daily Sun  
Ian and  
Maureen  
Wilson  
play  
pickleball  
at Colony  
Cottage  
Recreation  
Center last  
week.



## PICKLEBALL, from B1

they started this new sport called pickleball in Florida's Friendliest Hometown that it would lead to this. Now the couple puts as much effort into spreading the sport internationally as it can.

So far, the Wilsons have been doing well with what they have. They even got a group of players to compete in an international tournament in Amsterdam earlier this year.

Ian also has the UKPA up for review by the International

Federation of Pickleball to get the sport recognized and the organization recognized by the English government.

"Pickleball isn't a recognized sport in the UK, which puts up barriers for funding," Ian said. "Once the IFP makes the approval, we can get the sport recognized by England. We had a chicken and the egg situation, but we hope we have it worked out."

And the Wilsons know they have fellow Brits in The Villages who probably know nothing about their plight, and just go pickleball-free when they return to the UK. The couple

is hoping to be able to change that so everyone can carry their love of the sport home with them.

"What I'm hoping is that the people here playing will get in contact with us and help teach people the game," Ian said.

"We need to get people who can teach others to teach it," Maureen added. "We need to get instructors over there to help us."

Ian knows they still have hurdles left along the road. And he is quick to point out that it has taken nearly 50 years for the sport to catch on in the states. So he likes his chances

after only five years. But the couple know they can't do it alone.

"There are only two of us out there doing it," Maureen said. "So we do need more people."

For more information about the UKPA, email [info@pickleball.org.uk](mailto:info@pickleball.org.uk), visit their website at [www.pickleball.org.uk](http://www.pickleball.org.uk) or look for their Facebook page at [facebook.com/pickleballuk](https://www.facebook.com/pickleballuk).

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