

# **Paddleball Sport History**

## **Chapter 1 – First Draft**

### **Where is Paddleball Played?**

The one key element that is absolutely necessary to play paddleball is a court, specifically a one-wall handball court. At some point in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the powers that be in New York City decided that its parks, beaches and school yards would have handball courts as an integral part of their infrastructure. And so they built the courts - more than 8000 of them. As more and more people played handball and then paddleball and New Yorkers migrated to other parts of the world, they brought with them the desire to play their one-wall game, but they needed a place to play. While some switched to the more readily available four-wall game (handball, 4-wall paddleball, squash and racquetball), others used their influence to build one-wall courts. So courts were erected where the weather was good for outdoor play and there was an abundance of transplanted New Yorkers: South and Central Florida, New Jersey, Connecticut, California and Puerto Rico.

During the twentieth century, dozens of beach clubs flourished in the NY Metropolitan area and so did paddleball. Most of these clubs built one-wall courts for their members and these beach clubs became an important component of paddleball growth. Castle Hill and Shorehaven in the Bronx and Brighton Beach Baths in Brooklyn were biggest and the forerunners in the beach club branch of the paddleball tree. Concurrently, the Borscht Belt in the Catskills, with its resort hotels and bungalow colonies also built paddleball courts for their New York City guests and paddleball became a major activity in the Catskills, especially in the summer. Alas, as the 21<sup>st</sup> century advanced, the beach clubs, with very few exceptions, along with the Borscht Belt became past history and their demise is undoubtedly a factor that contributed to the decline of paddleball in popularity that started in the 90's.

Perhaps the single most important element in the growth of paddleball was the indoor facility. During the sixties and 70's, organizations that specialized in physical fitness incorporated indoor paddleball into their sports repertoire. Paddleball became an integral part of many "Y's" and other athletic clubs, as well as many school gyms. But the greatest factor was the privately owned indoor facility. The first was Bronx Indoor Paddleball (now Zerega) in 1976, followed by Astoria Indoor, Take-One, George McFadden's Paddle Sports and Health Club and others. At one time during the 80's, seven facilities were flourishing. These indoor paddleball havens were major factors contributing to the groundswell of paddleball, mainly because they gave players the opportunity to play year-round, during inclement weather and at night. They also provided more organization to paddleball, with private court time and organized open time. Additionally they were an excellent venue for paddleball tournaments.

Present day paddleball is played at a limited number of locations in the NY metropolitan area and in southern Florida, perhaps a dozen parks outdoors and two indoor facilities.