

NEWS RELEASE



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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Foley Set to Host Prestigious Pickleball Tournament

At A Glance

What: USAPA Atlantic South Regional

When: August 23 - 25

Where: Foley Event Center

FOLEY, AL – Pickleball is a sport that comes with a number of stereotypes - “it’s for the older set, “it’s a recreational thing” or “people don’t take it seriously.” In reality, pickleball has grown leaps and bounds since starting in 1965 outside Seattle. The sport has become an activity all ages can enjoy with serious competitions taking place around the globe. And so far, Foley has experienced the pickleball explosion.

After hosting local tournaments for the past two years, Foley will host the USA Pickleball Association’s Atlantic South Regional, August 23 – 25, which will welcome more than 400 players from around the country.

One of those players is 77-year-old Alice Tym who is no stranger to athletics. Tym played in tennis majors around the globe, including Wimbledon, and was ranked 13th in the world at one point in her career. She also coached the University of Tennessee Chattanooga to three national titles.

A little over five years ago, pickleball was introduced at the gym where Tym played badminton and table tennis. The rest is history; a history that Tym is still writing. She’s already racked up national championships in singles, doubles and mixed, and played in Spain, Italy, Germany, Canada, and the U.S. Her next stop is Foley, where she’ll be playing women’s doubles and mixed doubles. And while Foley may not be as large as other cities she’s played in, Tym said she’s excited.

“I’m not a southerner. I grew up in the Midwest but chose to live in the south,” Tym said. “I think anyone will tell you the most hospitable people live in the south. Foley may be little, but it’s not about the size, it’s about the vibes, the experience, and the hospitality. I don’t think you’re going to find it any better than Alabama.”

“It’s a terrific sport for young kids,” Tym said. “My 5-year-old grandson can keep the ball going 40 straight times over the net pretty consistently. You can’t do that with a lot of sports because they’re too difficult. We can chalk up the driveway to play. It’s cheap. The paddles aren’t expensive, and you don’t have to replace the balls very often.”

Interestingly enough, it was family that got 15-year-old Nicholas Golowich into the sport two years ago.

“It was actually my dad who went down to our neighborhood pickleball courts and came back to me to say, ‘You have to try this game, pickleball. It’s a lot of fun.’ For the first few months, I just said, ‘Pickleball? What’s that?’ then eventually he dragged me onto the court,” Golowich recalled. “A lot of people were playing at the time and word got around. It’s just something that looked like a fun activity for me to try.”

In just two years, Golowich has racked up national titles including the 2017 and 2018 Junior Men's Doubles and back-to-back U.S. Open Junior Mixed Doubles titles. He hopes schools will pick up pickleball in the future because it's perfect for anyone.

"It's a really easy sport to pick up, whereas tennis requires years of training and experience just to become a recreational player," Golowich said. "I think, with pickleball, anyone can pick up a paddle and have fun the very first time they play. I also think it's a great sport for schools. It's a compact sport in that can fit a lot of courts in a relatively small area. It's just a really great sport for kids."

Destination and Facilities Offer Unique Appeal

The USAPA Atlantic South Regional is a tournament that gives all participants the ability to register to play in the USAPA National Championships. That in itself is a huge draw, but the incentive is also there to win. Tournament Director and USAPA Atlantic South Regional Director, Bill Hess, said anyone winning a gold medal at the regional has the opportunity to preregister for nationals. To put the gravity of that into perspective, Hess said 2500 people fill out the registration for nationals with spots filling at head-spinning speed.

Needless to say, winning a "golden ticket" draws participants from around the country; visitors that will eat, stay and play in the Foley area. Hess said bringing the regional to Foley was something they knew would excite their membership.

"We had an immediate response from players around the country wanting to come down there, see the facility, play pickleball and enjoy the area," Hess said. "One of the comments we get after tournaments, is people complain they have nothing to do when they're finished playing. We set this up as a destination tournament. You can come play pickleball, but that's not all you can do. You can go shopping or go to an amusement park."

The destination was not the only factor that had players clamoring to register. The idea that their chance at preregistration was not dependent on weather was also incredibly appealing. After having the mixed doubles day washed out last year, the ability to fit 18 courts indoors helped make the move to Foley happen.

Foley Director of Recreation and Sports Tourism, David Thompson, said the city sees this event as an opportunity to grow a relationship with the USAPA.

"We know how incredible our city is," Thompson said. "But, this event is helping others around the country see the unique abilities of Foley. We have the facilities, we have the attractions, we have the proximity, but most of all we have the hospitality. We're excited to make Foley a destination for pickleball and continue our incredible partnership with the USAPA."

All ages are welcome to come check out the USAPA Atlantic South Regional. It's free and open to the public.

For more information on this tournament or any Foley Sports Tourism event, contact Stephanie Donald.