

Observations about the Pickleball Summit July 2016.

The Basics

The Summit took place in July 2016 over three days in an indoor facility just outside Charlotte, NC. The cost was \$497 with a \$100 discount for those who registered early or those who signed up as a twosome. The cost for my hotel was about \$200 for three nights. The total number of participants was 120 divided up into four groups according to self ranking of 3.0, 3.5, and 4.0. Each participant had a colored wrist band to indicate their rank. (Not all players wore their wrist band). The 3.0 group had 30 total players, the 3.5 group had 60 total players divided into two groups of 30, and the 4.0 and above group had 30 total players. 95% or more of the players were seniors and more women than men populated the groups ranked 3.5 or below. I registered in the 3.5 group and found wide variety in the ability of the players.

The Facility

The facility was large enough to contain 18 regulation sized pickleball courts with plenty of room between courts. 72 players could play at any one time but that meant 48 players were sitting during general play. (Organizers have indicated that subsequent Summits will have 25% fewer players. Ribbons of corrugated cardboard about 18" high helped keep stray balls from leaving the court area. Each player received two yellow onix indoor balls but had to supply his or her own paddle.

The Schedule

Each day began at 8:00am and closed at approximately 6:00pm. Lessons were scheduled to begin at 9:00am, 11:00am, 1:00pm, and 3:00pm for a daily total of 4 and a Summit total of 12. The lessons for the most part started on time. The lunch break was from approximately 11:45am to 1:00pm. The facility had only drinks and snacks for sale. However, a food truck was available in the parking lot each day and local restaurants were within walking distance.

The Lessons

Matt Blom, Matt Staub, Sarah Ansbury, and Prem Carnot gave the lessons. Each lecturer was assigned one of the four corners of the facility. The participants in groups of 30 rotated during the day from corner position 1 to 2 to 3 to 4 so each participant heard from all 4 professionals once each day. The types of lessons were as follows: (1)Lecture. The Pro would talk about a certain aspect of the game, dinking for example. Usually the group would then go out on the courts and attempt to follow the instructions. (2)Question and Answer. The lecturer would ask for questions from the group. Some sessions were all Q&A. (3) Play and Critique. 3 Players were drawn from the group and would play with the pro who would provide feedback to the players. The point would end and the next 3 from the group would play with the pro and receive critiques and advice.

PRIVATE LESSONS. Private lessons were available to participants on the day before the Summit began and at 4:00pm each day of the summit. The cost was \$200 per hour or \$100 per half hour. Some participants formed groups of 2 or 4 to take lessons together with the pro and reduce the individual cost.

Playing Pickleball

Many opportunities to play were available to all participants. Open play began at 8:00am and continued throughout the day except for lesson times. After lessons participants were encouraged to play within their level, e.g., 3.5 with others ranked 3.5. Other times were considered open play and anyone could play with anyone else.

Recommendation

If you are a serious pickleball player and wish to improve your game I would recommend attending a Pickleball Summit. The enthusiasm of the pros and the participants is contagious and encouraging. Some of the best advice I got was from players who after a game would critique my play and I in turn would critique their play. I took notes during the lessons and that helped me remember what had been discussed. One theme throughout the course of the summit was that conflicting advice from different pros was not a problem. Each pro had a different style and encouraged players to find and use whatever works for them. If you are a casual player then obviously the Summit is not for you considering the expense and time. Overall, I felt the Summit was worth my money and time.