



PORTABLE PICKLEBALL NETS: THE INSIDE STORY

What do you need to play pickleball? A flat surface. A partner. A paddle. A ball. And, a net. The question for this article is how to decide which portable net to purchase; does it matter? Do you value your playing time and your lower back and knees? Would you rather spend one minute bending down to set up your net as compared to nearly three times that long? If you answered yes to both these questions, read on.

Today, there are options when deciding which portable net to purchase. It wasn't always that way. Eight years ago Bill Booth, former President of the USAPA, and Joe Dinoffer, President of OnCourt OffCourt, spent nearly two years collaborating on the best design for a portable pickleball net. This design set the standard at that time and is still more or less the standard today,

having solved the 34-inch center net height challenge with a fixed height inserted center strap rod that met USAPA guidelines.

First manufactured under the trademarked name "PickleNet" by OnCourt OffCourt, a 23-year-old tennis and (now) pickleball manufacturing and distribution company based in Dallas, Texas, this is the same net that is private labeled for organizations such as USAPA, Pickleball Spain, and Pickleball England. Plus, OnCourt OffCourt manufactures these same nets for other companies such as Pickleball Central and Gopher Sport.

The original net system was constructed with a round center strap rod and round metal tubes, but today's PickleNet has evolved. The new and improved version is the first pickleball net to receive a U.S. Utility

Patent that protects the many unique new features including a rectangular center strap insert for better net support and appearance, a partly elastic net for easier assembly and less stress on the net frame, and oval tubes for seamless frame alignment and much faster set-up than ever before. "You've come a long way, baby!" said the pickleball paddle to the net.

But while the improved versions of the original PickleNet are being released, it is a compliment to the original design that "knock-offs" from copycat companies have appeared on the scene. The purpose of this product review is to talk about the various features of different portable pickleball nets and what to look for in making this important investment decision. We will review two areas to consider: set-up time and durability.

Q. BENDING DOWN OR KNEELING TO SET UP A PORTABLE NET IS THE WORST PART OF PLAYING PICKLEBALL FOR MANY PEOPLE. HOW LONG DOES IT TAKE TO SET UP THE DIFFERENT NET SYSTEMS?

A. Round pole nets take about three minutes to set up. It may seem fast, but 3 minutes is actually fairly long considering you will generally be bending over or even on your knees during set-up. There are reasons. Regular nets without elastic that use round poles have locking “snap clips” that have to be inserted to align and connect the poles. The improved On-Court OffCourt PickleNet sets up in less than a minute! The oval tube design never twists and turns and there is no need for tube connection clips that are easy to misplace. Also, the net itself uses elastic composition to place less tension on the frame for much easier assembly. Saving two minutes may not seem like a lot, BUT if you are kneeling on the court and bending over for those two minutes, it really is a BIG DEAL.



Q. HOW ABOUT DURABILITY? HOW LONG DO PORTABLE PICKLEBALL NETS LAST AND WHAT CAN BE DONE TO EXTEND THE LIFE OF THE NET?

A. Simply put, sun and water are the enemies of portable net systems. Excessive sun exposure can fade the net sleeve printing and make the net band brittle. The industry standard is to use powder-coated steel tubing for the frame. While powder coating helps minimize rusting, remember to keep your net system away from moisture as much as possible. This is why quick set-up and take-down is so important! If you are on the court and a sudden rain shower sneaks up on you, break down your net system immediately. Take care of your net system and it can last for years. Also, the industry-leading OnCourt OffCourt PickleNet uses heavier and more durable materials than any other system. And, the elastic bottom net band that helps speed up set-up also helps maintain consistent net tension, taking stress off of the net frame to increase durability.

Q. IS THERE A MORE “PERMANENT,” HEAVIER-DUTY PORTABLE NET OPTION FOR A FACILITY OR CLUB?

A. Yes! The PickleNet Deluxe system features four locking wheels and a heavier frame. It is perfect for a heavier-duty option to the regular PickleNet system and is suited best for indoor facilities where the net can simply be wheeled in and out of storage.



▶ *“We used the (patented) PickleNet at our boot camp this week, and it is the most sturdy, easy-to-assemble net that we have ever used.”*

*– Scott Moore
(12-time National
Pickleball Champion)*