

## **United States Pickleball Association (USAPA) 2015 Nationals Report Day 0**

After 6 years at Sun City Festival Northwest of Phoenix near Surprise, USAPA Nationals are in Casa Grande, Arizona about 45 minutes south of the PHX Airport for 2015. The Age Events will be held at Robson Ranch Sunday through Wednesday, Thursday is a Clinic/Venue change day, and the Open Events will be held at Palm Creek on Friday thru Sunday. Over 800 players from all over the US and Canada are entered making the 2015 Nationals the biggest pickleball tournament ever.

I rented a 1 bedroom home in Palm Creek with kitchen, bath, & living room:



plenty big enough for me. I arrived late on Friday night, picked up the keys at the Guard Gate. The Guard on duty greeted me with “Hello Mr. Koch” so I guess I was the last guest to arrive on Friday. On Saturday morning, I made the 8 mile drive to Robson Ranch for practice games. Robson has 32 courts set up – 16 permanent and 16 temporary courts taped on tennis courts with portable nets. The temporary courts are quite roomy – I didn’t hit any tennis nets or fences on my backswing and could take my maximum 3 step runup for my fastest serve with no difficulties. Ian & Kim Dickson from Johnson Ranch arrived a little before me. Ian & I are playing in the Men’s 50-54 Doubles on Monday. We got in some great practice games in the morning against Andy Gench of Kansas & Tony Tollenaar of Oregon, Byron Freso from Florida (Byron & his wife Marsha have been RVing all over the country the last 2 years) & Bill Propert of North San Diego, and Steve Wong now living in Tustin in Orange County. Later on we got to play a couple of games against Jim Hackenberg of Kalamazoo, Michigan and Surprise, AZ and Scott Lennan who moved from Washington state to Surprise recently. Jim & Scott won the 50-54 Men’s Doubles and were 4<sup>th</sup> in the Men’s Open Doubles at the 2013 Nationals and are 1 of the favorites in the Men’s 55-59 and Senior Open Men’s Doubles this week.

I also got to play a fun Mixed Doubles game with Dee Davison against Steve Wong and Gigi LeMaster. Steve & Gigi will be one of the strongest teams in the Open Mixed next Saturday.

It was good to see Dee Rochel back on the courts. Dee and I were supposed to play the Fall Brawl and Huntsman Mixed Doubles last month but Dee had to drop out when her husband Rich was put on the waiting list for a heart transplant. Rich received his new heart 2 months ago and his recovering well from his surgery.

Kim Dickson's Women's Partner Rachael Kroog from Minnesota arrived in the early afternoon. Kim & Rachael had some great practice games with Cookie Drake from Alberta, Canada and Roxanne Pierce of Surprise and also Stephanie Lane and Nicole Hobson of Nashville. It was good to see Kim get to battle with the 5.0 Women – something she doesn't get much chance to do in NorCal.

Just as I was about to leave, Pam King of St. George, Utah & Stacey Downy of North County San Diego arrived and convinced me to play 2 games with them. Pam & I are playing the 50-54 Mixed Doubles on Tuesday. Stacey and I played the 50+ 5.0 Mixed Doubles at Fall Brawl last month. Pam & Stacey are playing the Women's 50-54 Doubles on Sunday. It is their 1<sup>st</sup> tournament together but I think they will do well.

I met Mitch & Debbie Fitzhugh of Grass Valley at Buffalo Wild Wings for dinner. Mitch & Debbie had just flown into town. I am playing the Senior Open Mixed Doubles with Mitch on Friday.

Mitch, Debbie, & I headed to the Palm Creek courts for some night play. Mitch & I played 4-time National

Women's Open Champs Alex Hamner & Jen Lucore who had just arrived and are also staying at Palm Creek. Alex & Jen are playing in the Women's 35+ Doubles on Sunday.

Debbie & I played 3 games with Shonda of Billings, Montana and her Mixed Partner Chris from Washington state.

Mitch & I finished our night with a game against Rob Elliott of Florida and Rafael of Michigan. Rob & Rafael may have the biggest serves for any team at Nationals and are playing in the 19+ Men's Doubles on Monday.

Sunday is the Women's Age Doubles and the over 70 Men's Doubles. I am doing the late morning reffing shift.

-- Doug Koch aka "The Pickleball Pimp".