



Gold medal winner in Women's Pro Singles Catherine Parenteau, with a patented two-handed backhand.

Photo by Scott H. Shook; Coastal Breeze News



Pickleball's Crown Jewel

**The 2022 Minto US Open
Pickleball Championships
Powered by Margaritaville
draws record crowd.**

By **Drew Wathey**

As the warming Florida sun began to cascade over this idyllic coastal town, it was the dawn of a major tournament as pickleball's crown jewel got underway.

The 2022 Minto US Open Pickleball Championships Powered by Margaritaville descended upon Naples, Florida, once again and—as it is affectionately called on the Sunshine State's Paradise Coast—the “biggest pickleball party in the world” engulfed the East Naples Community Park. It is a park unlike any other, with 64 dedicated courts including the world-famous Zing Zang Championship Court, where nearly 3,000 players from 49 states and 30 countries played in front of 35,000 boisterous spectators. With a record purse of \$100,000, this year's event drew participants as young as 8 years old and one player who was born in 1935.

Steady gaze of the world's top-ranked men's player Ben Johns.

Photo by Scott H. Shook; Coastal Breeze News

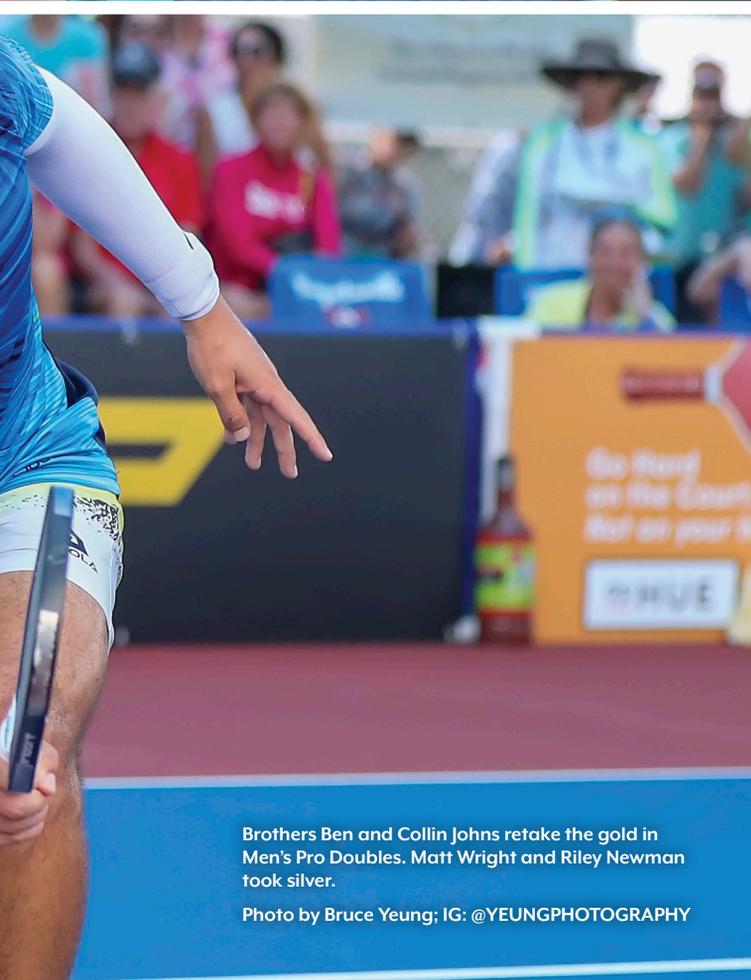
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Golden girls Catherine Parenteau and Lea Jansen win Women's Pro Doubles. Andrea Koop and Irina Tereschenko took silver.

Photo by Bruce Yeung; IG: @YEUNGPHOTOGRAPHY



Brothers Ben and Collin Johns retake the gold in Men's Pro Doubles. Matt Wright and Riley Newman took silver.

Photo by Bruce Yeung; IG: @YEUNGPHOTOGRAPHY

Recently, Racquet Sports Industry magazine named the Minto US Open Pickleball Championships Powered by Margaritaville the 2021 Pickleball Tournament of the Year.

The US Open is not just any tournament on the yearlong national pickleball schedule, but for men's singles play it may appear that way. Sitting atop the medal stand was who else but Ben Johns, the world's top-ranked player. But, breathing down his neck is a tournament-hardened and fierce competitor—JW Johnson. He gave Johns, the Maryland native, all he could handle in the finale. Taking the first game 11-5, Johnson was poised to capture perhaps the game's most prestigious title. He was on the precipice of upsetting Johns and had him on the ropes before losing the second game 12-10. He would eventually lose the third and final game 11-7 but certainly gave Johns a run for his money.

Reflecting on his performance, Johnson took a highly detailed look at their play in the final. "I think [Ben] called some good time-outs. When we went back and broke the match down, we actually won an equal number of points, so he played better on the bigger points. He's just a great, experienced player. I was happy with my performance and effort though," said Johnson. Pablo Tellez ended up with the bronze medal.

Whenever he's entered in an event, there's always the possibility that Johns will walk away with Triple Crown honors—winning gold in singles, doubles and mixed doubles. Well, that's exactly what happened at the Open for the second straight year. After taking gold in singles, the 23-year-old, paired with big brother Collin, won the doubles crown by defeating the tandem of Matt Wright and Riley Newman, coming back from a second-game loss to capture the third and final game, 11-4. Then, he breezed to an easy straight-game win over Jessie Irvine and Tyler Loong in mixed doubles with his partner Simone Jardim, 11-5, 11-2.

On the women's side, hometown favorite Catherine Parenteau, ranked second in the world in women's singles and doubles, has made Naples her home for nearly three years and her play at the Open this year further solidified herself as a crowd pleaser. Having never medaled in singles before at this major event, Parenteau met her doubles partner, Lea Jansen, in the final and captured the first game, 11-4. But she found herself quickly behind in game 2. "I remember calling a time-out at 4-0 down in the second game and I feel like it was a huge turning point in a way, because it completely

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE >>>>



Jennifer Dawson with forehand return en route to winning Senior Mixed Doubles with partner Dayne Gingrich.
Photo by Bruce Yeung; IG: @YEUNGPHOTOGRAPHY

Mixed Pro Split Age gold winners were Lea Jansen and John Sperling.

Photo by Michael Gauthier.



changed the momentum from the moment I called that time-out,” said Parenteau.

The strategy worked as Parenteau, a former top-five junior tennis player in Canada, won 11 of the next 12 points to claim her first-ever singles gold medal at the US Open. “It feels amazing, as the US Open has always had a special place in my heart,” she said. “The US Open was my first pickleball major tournament ever a few years back, and I always enjoy competing in the US Open year after year. Naples is my home now and it felt amazing to win singles and women’s doubles in front of my home crowd!”

Anna Bright wound up winning bronze. With top-ranked Anna Leigh Waters not playing at the Open, Jansen was seeded #1 at the tournament with Parenteau second.

Parenteau and Jansen met Irina Tereschenko and Andrea Koop in the finals. Coming off a three-game win over the top-seeded pairing of Callie Smith and Lucy Kovalova in the semifinals, the Koop-Tereschenko duo, entering the event as the #4 seed, were primed to

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Jardim-Johns duo wins gold in Mixed Doubles against Jessie Irvine and Tyler Loong.

Photo by Bruce Yeung; IG: @YEUNGPHOTOGRAPHY



Dave Weinbach and Dayne Gingrich win gold in Senior Men's Doubles.
Photo by Kerry Pittenger.



Irina Tereschenko and Cammy MacGregor take gold in Women's Pro Split Age Doubles against Eva Welsher and Callie Smith.
Photo by Michael Gauthier.



Jennifer Dawson and Cammy MacGregor win gold in Senior Women's Pro Doubles.

Photo by Bruce Yeung; IG: @YEUNGPHOTOGRAPHY



The Dayne Gingrich and Riley Newman duo wins gold in Men's Pro Split Age Doubles. JW Johnson and Mircea Morariu took silver.

Photo by Michael Gauthier.

upset third-seeded Parenteau-Jansen. It looked like it was going to be an easy ride to gold for Parenteau and Jansen as they won the first game handily, 11-1. But, with one match point on their paddles in game 2, Koop and Tereschenko fought back and captured it 13-11. "I really think that once we lost the second game—and having one match point—we decided to go for it and play to win and not to lose, and that's what we did and we won the last game 11-5," said Parenteau.

Playing in front of her hometown crowd was especially meaningful for Parenteau who, like so many others involved in the sport of pickleball, has gravitated to this picturesque southern Florida community. And, of course, she has embraced the Open, which is unique among other tournaments in the country. "The tournament atmosphere is unlike any other at the US Open! There is always a very large and engaged crowd on center court, and as a professional athlete, this is one of my favorite environments to compete in," explained Parenteau.

Winning the Triple Crown at an event is one of her goals in 2022. So far, the year has gotten off to quite an impressive start for the 40-time winner on the PPA Tour. "Winning any title at the US Open is an amazing feeling, but I would say winning the doubles and singles titles this year were both very special to me for different reasons," said Parenteau. "Winning the singles title was unique because I have competed in the event at the US Open for many years and I have never medaled before. This year, I was not only able to medal, but I won gold! The doubles title was very special to me as well because I won the doubles title last year in 2021, and winning a title at the US Open back-to-back is no small feat. I have worked hard and dedicated a lot of time and energy to my training, so to see it pay off on such a large stage like the US Open is something I'll never forget."

If it seems to you like pickleball is garnering an incredible amount of attention of late, you're not alone. The mainstream media is starting to take notice as more and more high-profile personalities with backyard pickleball courts are springing up throughout the United States. One of the reasons for this onslaught of attention and accelerated growth in the sport is a national tour.

"The PPA Tour has helped the growth of pickleball tremendously by adding so many tournaments to the calendar, increasing visibility, and increasing prize money, which allows players to play pickleball professionally as a career rather than as a hobby as we used to," explained Parenteau, who also owns her

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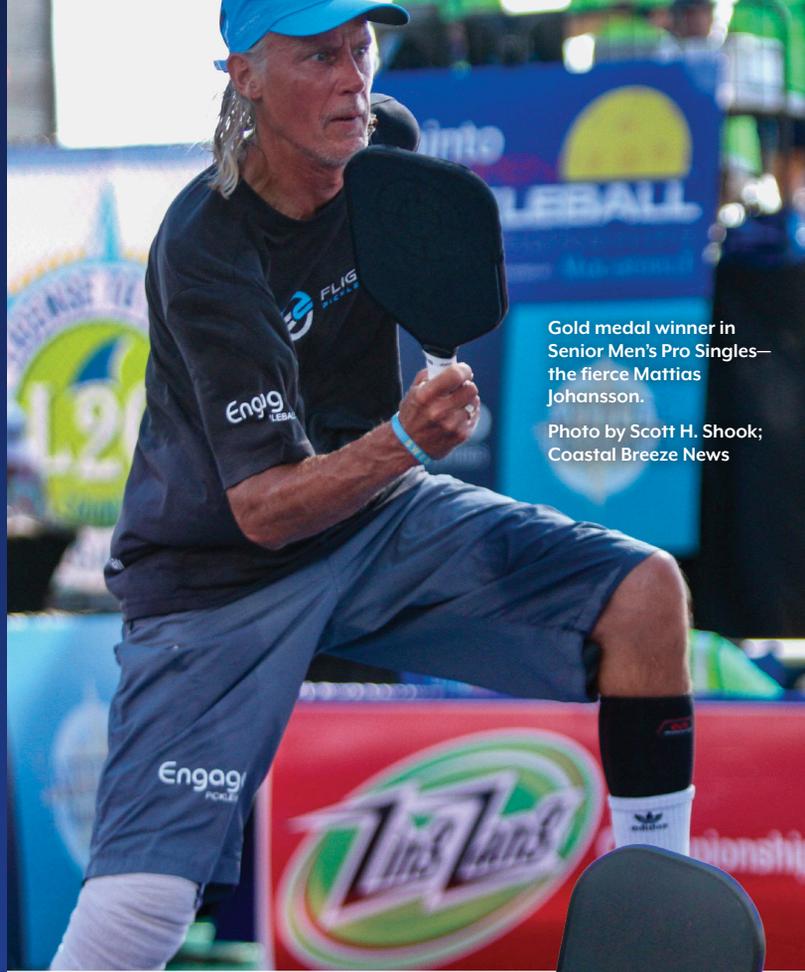
own teaching academy, CP Pickleball Academy. “Many players used to have a full-time job when they competed in order to make a living, and now they can do so just through playing professional pickleball. Also, the fact that pickleball has been on different networks such as ESPN 3, CBS Sports, Tennis Channel, and others has really provided tremendous exposure for the players.”

Sponsorship dollars for tournaments and athletes are starting to increase dramatically as well and Parenteau has felt its surge personally, recently signing a partnership deal with Skechers, which offers a diverse range of lifestyle and performance footwear, apparel and accessories for men, women and kids.

“It means a lot to me to be partnered with a brand that is so passionate about designing footwear with the athlete in mind. Skechers may be new to pickleball, but they’ve been innovating with comfort technology in their award-winning performance footwear for many years,” she said. “The designers nailed it with the Skechers Viper Court. It features everything I need to stay comfortable on the court so that I can focus on achieving my goals—like winning gold! And it was an incredible experience playing alongside my fellow Skechers athlete, Tyson McGuffin, at the US Open. What a week in Naples, and this is just the beginning with so much more to come for this great sport!” The duo captured the bronze in mixed doubles.

Johnson is also a pickleball athlete on the rise for sponsors’ interest and chimed in with his thoughts on the meteoric rise of the sport of pickleball: “There are several factors—the creation of the professional tours, the continuous growth of the sport at the local levels, the influx of talented players—and there’s just a lot of people with money now who love the game. There are certainly people like Seymour Rifkind who are working tirelessly to bring the sport to the Olympic stage, but there are also other types of events being held that are really bringing it to the forefront, such as Major League Pickleball and the APP holding a tournament at the iconic Flushing Meadows in NYC, site of tennis’ US Open.”

During the year, the total number of pickleball players in this country will top 5 million and with its exponential worldwide growth not likely to wane at all, seeing country flags flying in Los Angeles in 2028 for the Summer Olympic Games or in Australia in 2032 may eventually become a reality. •



Gold medal winner in Senior Men's Pro Singles—the fierce Mattias Johansson.

Photo by Scott H. Shook; Coastal Breeze News



The determined look of champion Beth Bellamy in Senior Women's Pro Singles.

Photo by Scott H. Shook; Coastal Breeze News