



May 2023

Spring Newsletter

President's Address

I regret it has been a year since our last Golden Racquets (GR) Newsletter. Now that we have a new editor of the Newsletter, Liz Walker, we anticipate producing three Newsletters each year. We also now have a new secretary, Suzanne White and a new social chairman Howard Ho, who served in the past and did an excellent job. Hopefully we can go back to using PJ Skidoos for our annual meeting and have a tennis party on January 1 at the Fairfax Racquet Club

Our pickleball program is expanding, see Pete Koenig's article on pickleball in this issue. New online sign-up procedures for this summer's tennis and pickleball play is also explained by Catherine Ngo-Wilde's article.

Normally we have about 20 to 30 subs on each of our venue rosters. In most cases this is large enough for a regular player to successfully get a sub. Recently some regular players have been using large email distribution lists (60 to 90) to fill a sub slot. This must stop! Often people on these lists do not qualify for a particular venue. Most of them do not want to play in the venue. Regular players should only use the official sub lists provided for their venue. If there is a problem finding a substitute from these lists, then regular players should discuss this problem with their captain.

The tennis courts at Mason District have cracks in them and need repair. We communicated with the Fairfax County Park Authority about the problem. They said those courts will be repaired in 2024. We are hoping for new courts, but we don't know how the county plans to "repair" the courts. Captains of the outside courts should notify Fred King if they believe their courts need repair.

It is important that GR players leave the indoor courts as soon as the allotted time is finished. If you hear the bell ending the session, please complete the point then leave the court. Just because you do not see players behind the curtain does not mean they aren't waiting to play in the lobby or reception area. We paid for an allotted time but no more.

Hope everyone is enjoying the summer leagues and can attend upcoming social events to meet more GR members. Best, Tom



Tom Burroughs -President Golden Racquets

Pickleball

By Peter Koenig

Golden Racquets has officially incorporated Pickleball into our Constitution, so we now offer tennis and pickleball (PB) venues to our members. Our organization is recognizing the significant popularity of this sport nationwide among Seniors. Fairfax County has been expanding the number of PB courts available and a lot of them are dedicated to a pickleball configuration.

A few months ago, GR opened our membership to just PB players. We got 27 new members. All of them have had at least four months or more of playing PB; many of them have been playing for over a year.

For this 2023 Summer season we have increased the number of PB venues to more than we have ever offered in the past. Our outdoor venues are at: Wakefield Park, Rolling Valley, and Roundtree. Indoor venues are Burke Racquet and the YMCA in Arlington. There are a total of 48 slots at these venues. For the outdoor courts, we like to add a couple of extra slots so players can rotate out in the hot weather.

Depending on a person's playing skills, our current rating system will rate a person as one of the following: 3.0, 3.3, 3.5, 3.8 and 4.0. Most of the players are currently rated at 3.5. During this season, our goal is to increase the number of players that are rated. We encourage subs to take advantage of substituting when a regular player can't play. For the Fall season, we hope to have one venue dedicated to the higher rated players.

GRcentral and Online Sign-Ups: A New Approach to Information Sharing

By Dr. Catherine Ngo-Wilde - VP and CIO Golden Racquets

Golden Racquets Tennis and Pickleball Club had a successful transition to a new online sign-up and database system this year, thanks to the efforts of the Chief Information Officer (CIO) team and the cooperation of the entire membership. Previously, GR had used "offline" Word documents or paper forms for sign-ups. Entering data from such forms was a time-consuming process subject to error with each wrong key press. With a growing membership of nearly 400 people and more venue options for tennis and pickleball, we needed a new system that was highly automated, efficient, and accurate. Behind our computer screens, CIO personnel spent the past year creating and testing "Jotform" online membership applications and Google venue sign-ups to replace "paper" forms.

We also needed to create a new database to process the online information. For years, "GRSys" database smartly created by Bob Dineen, was the central hub serving GR's needs in many capacities. But as technology advances in an age of instant online communication and data sharing, we needed a system that could harness the power afforded by modern tools. Using GRSys as a template, "GRcentral" was designed by Catherine Wilde and programmed by Alan Negin using Visual Basic for Applications (VBA) in Excel, to take info processing several steps further. The result is an Excel database that's universally available, compatible with electronic forms and automates these key functions: process online sign-ups, do venue assignments, create rosters, calculate costs and payments.

To provide an example of increased efficiency, doing venue assignments used to take several days involving 2-3 GR executives pouring over venue listings and deciding who should be assigned to which venues based on their choices and a standard set of rules. GRcentral does that process applying the same algorithm instantly with three simultaneous computer key presses. In fact, those same keys do nearly all functions in a single stroke or tap of the keyboard. Having GRcentral do everything expeditiously is gratifying and worth the many months of development, programming, and testing. Alan Negin and I can even say we enjoyed the collaborative process of delineating info streams, specifying algorithms, coding, checking functions, fixing bugs, re-coding, etc. We are very pleased to have a new system in place that processes information accurately and effortlessly with some copy/paste maneuvers, a few button clicks, and a bit of human decision making.

Doug White, Jeff Feldmesser, and Al Bready have been instrumental in CIO administration and database operations to determine venue costs and sub fees, help members fill out and process online forms, fill venue vacancies and change venues, send rosters to captains, and receive/record payments. To wrap up this season, we'll send out a general roster with contact info and venues playing for all members.

Our team has laid the groundwork for the new information system, but it will evolve as GR's interests and needs continuously evolve. On the horizon, we anticipate having an advanced pickleball venue that requires relatively high PB ratings, plus other special venues. Accordingly, the online forms and GRcentral will need some modifications. If you have computer skills and wish to volunteer your time by creating online forms, programming, or working with the database, please contact Catherine Wilde at cathngo1@hotmail.com. We would greatly appreciate your contributions to the growth and success of our organization.

p.s. The CIO team's efforts were met with notes of appreciation during the online sign-up process, some of which we'd like to share with you:

"Congratulations to you and your team on the new sign-up system. I'm sure [it took] a lot of work, but a huge improvement for members and leadership." ~ RB

"Appreciate all the work you do (and other volunteers) for our fun/benefit. It requires lots of your time. Your communications and instructions are very clear. If I can understand, anybody can. Cheers for now." ~LK

"I like the new registration process for Golden Racquets. Your sign-up information made the process very easy. Very good job!! ~KO- new member

"Thank you and your programmer(s). This was easy to fill out and major improvement over previous method." ~JP

"I have to admit I held off filling out the venue sign-up sheet until I had a second cup of coffee and felt ready to take on a computerized form. But it was amazingly simple and easy! Much easier than the computerized menu kiosk at my local McDonalds which usually takes me two or three tries before I get the breakfast I want. Thank you for a straightforward and uncomplicated process! ~ JM

Acknowledgments: We're grateful to Bob Dineen for developing GRSys, the first GR semi-automated database which set a foundation for GRcentral. I'm also personally thankful to Joe Wittling, former CIO, who provided great advice and insights about GRSys and the operations of our organization.

Chief Information Officer team:

Catherine Ngo-Wilde, CIO

Doug White, Deputy CIO

Jeff Feldmesser, Information Specialist

Al Bready, Information Specialist

Alan Negin, Information Specialist

Paying Golden Racquets Fees Using Zelle

by Al McFarland - Treasurer Golden Racquets

For quite a while, some members have been asking me if they could pay their Golden Racquets fees using Zelle. I have researched the possibility several times. Our previous bank did offer a service to receive Zelle payments directly into our checking account. While there was no cost to an individual making the payment, the bank would charge Golden Racquets 1% of the amount of each payment. The charge in 2022, if all payments had been made with Zelle, would have been \$1,183. There is a large difference in amounts paid by individual members (ranging from \$20 to over \$3,000). While not all members would be likely to pay with Zelle, I reasoned that those with higher amounts would be more likely to do so. It seemed we might eventually increase the administrative costs of operating Golden Racquets by 100%.

Articles in the business media consistently pointed out that Zelle was developed as a convenient way for individuals to make small payments to another individual from their phone but was not convenient for business use. When banks incorporated Zelle as a means of accepting payments into a business account, no change was made in the structure of the capability to facilitate recording in business financial records. There are other limitations for businesses use that would also affect Golden Racquets. For instance, there is no equivalent to the Memo line on a paper check where a payer could include important information like the name of the member, when the holder of the Zelle account has a different last name than the member.

The Zelle capability was developed by a consortium of banks. They specified the technical details of how the information would flow from the bank of the payer to the bank of the receiver. But the details of how an individual interfaces with Zelle to send and receive payments, set up a Zelle account, see the transactions reported in statements, etc, differ from bank to bank. We were not sure how much consistency would be present in our bank statements for payments from different banks. The documentation about details like this was very thin.

We recently decided to move our Golden Racquets checking account to a new bank. A part of the decision to switch to Chase Bank was that Chase charges no fee to accept Zelle payments into a business checking account. Having opened the checking account with Chase, and having considered the preceding factors, the board decided to offer the option for members to pay Golden Racquets fees using Zelle.

We knew we would have to deal with many uncertainties and refine our process for handling Zelle payments, so we decided to run a test phase during the spring signup. We asked members of the board, who were willing, to make their spring payments using Zelle. Our intention is to allow members of Golden Racquets to pay the fall signup fees with Zelle. We will include detailed instructions for paying with Zelle along with the fall signup bills.

If you think you might want to pay with Zelle, and you don't currently have a Zelle account, you can see if your bank offers this service at this web site: <https://www.zellepay.com/get-started>. If paying Golden Racquets is your first time using Zelle, I suggest you get a friend to help with your first payment. Making a mistake could cause your payment to go to the wrong place and be difficult to get it back.

Rating of GR Members

By Art Politano - Rating Chair Golden Racquets

The goal of the rating process is to gauge and help maintain the skill level of players. This enables players to enjoy competitive play and select a desirable venue. Rating of GR members is done through a Rating Committee, whose process is highlighted by Section 13, Article IV of the GR Constitution and Bylaws.

Since being appointed Rating Chair for Golden Racquets in October of 2022, the Rating Committee and I have managed the scheduled rating of 32 members, evaluated recommended ratings of 22 members, rated 37 new GR members, and conducted 3 on court reviews, these were appeals of down ratings. As the rating chair, I have gotten a lot of questions from members regarding ratings, so I thought this Newsletter might be a good way to answer three typical questions I receive.

Question 1: How does GR keep member ratings currently valid?

The Rating Committee conducts GR-wide scheduled reviews twice a year. In February, we conduct scheduled reviews of those members who were last rated within three (3) years. In July, we conducted another review in preparation for the Fall sign-ups. These GR-wide reviews are done by canvassing Captains, and Rating Committee Members of their observations of members' play. Members playing above or below their current rating may be recommended to have their rating changed accordingly. This isn't done lightly, recommendations for changes are only performance based, to avoid showing favoritism, bias, or ill feeling.

If a player is downrated by GR, they can always appeal and ask for an on-court review. A member can appeal their negative rating by an email to the Rating Chair (me) stating why the appeal is warranted.

Question 2: Can I get downrated if a member of the Rating Committee sees me playing badly?



Definitely NOT. We all have bad days. Down ratings are not possible based on any one day, but a pattern of play, typically over six months to a year. In the February review, eight of fifty-four members were recommended for a downrating, but only six were, in fact, downrated. Still, a Captain or a Rating Committee member may suggest to the Rating Chair that a player is not playing consistently at the level of play of their venue and should be considered for a downrating. The Rating Committee would then conduct an on-court review using a comprehensive, objective evaluation approach based on USTA standards to document the member's level of play. A downrating would only happen if the on-court review determines the member is playing below their currently designated rating. An on-court review, by the way, is a review of the member's performance in playing a set or so, on a court with other GR members, who are at the target GR level in question.

Question 3: Can I get uprated, if I feel I'm ready to play at a higher level?

In the February review, sixteen of fifty-four members were recommended for an uprating, and ten were, in fact, uprated. The rating review, conducted by the Rating Committee, will be used as a basis for an increase, or to stay at the current level. Asking for a rating review is not to be taken lightly. It's usually best for the player to consult with their Captain to affirm that they have been playing at a higher level, and to recommend them for a new rating. As a Rating Chair, I will always ask for their captain's impression.

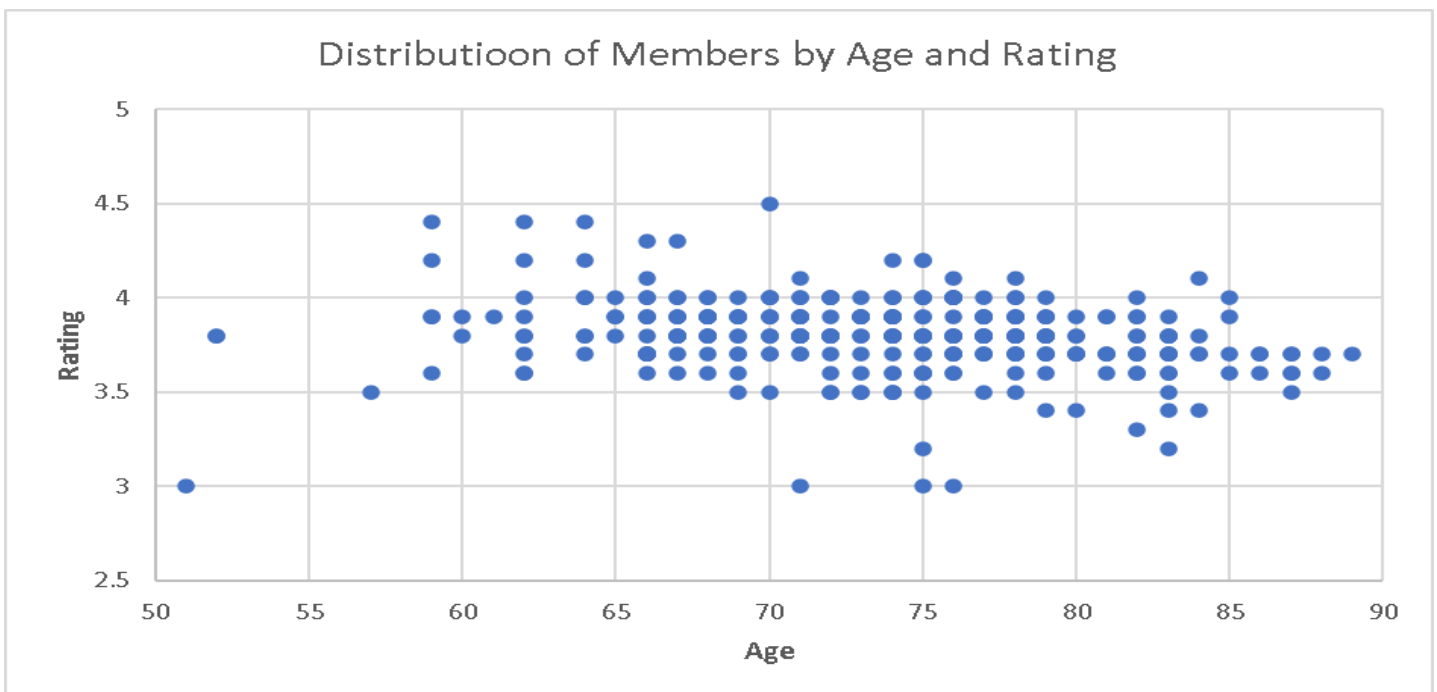


I hope I have answered your burning questions about ratings. If not, contact me at “gr8chair@gmail.com.” Rating Committee Members are required to be objective, fair, and compassionate as we do our work. So, if you see a Rating Committee Member, say hello, we’re all working to make GR better.

Rating Committee Members include: Maggie Carney (4.1), Howard Ho (4.1), Ethylinda Alpuerto (4.0), Ben Asunción (3.9), Bob Linett (3.9), Ed Tang (3.9), Lydia Newsom (3.9), Ralph Bresler (3.8), John Santos (3.8), Young Carlson (3.8), Michael Grace (3.7), Loida Velilla (3.7), and Ed Falkowitz (3.6). Mentoring us all has been Steve Mateo, Rating Chair Emeritus. Thank you, Steve.

Who are the Golden Racquet Members?

By Art Politano



Golden Racquets has 317 active members, roughly 70 % men (221) and 30 % women (96). The median age of the men is 74; as is the median age for women. The median rating is 3.8 for the active membership: for the men is 3.9; the women 3.7. The median represents the midpoint of all the active membership. If you are wondering: does tennis performance change as we age? The answer is: only a little. Full age-related performance would be -1.0. For Golden Racquets, at “this time”, with this membership, it is only -0.23. By “this time”, I mean the current GR Roster, which may include some incomplete data.

THE END