

THE WINNING DESTINATION

Finishing Touches Put On Hamilton County's Major Play In Pickleball

John Moorin's vision for pickleball in Hamilton County is ambitious. The thought is not just casual fun between friends, but America's fastest growing game mirroring the area's most popular events. The pop-up Holiday Pickleball Festival and upcoming Association of Pickleball Players (APP) U.S. Collegiate Championships and Midwest Open at Grand Park has brought pickleball fever to the area.

"When you think of the holiday lights at Newfields or the Christkindlmarkt in Carmel, we can do that with this pickleball event," Moorin said. "This will make national pickleball news."

Grand Park, Hamilton County and all the partnering organizations have been in the kitchen all fall preparing for the nation's largest collegiate pickleball event. Moorin, a local nationally-ranked pickleball pro, has been key in gathering local and industry interest to bring the event to Westfield. As of Dec. 18, 373 amateur competitors are registered to play in the APP event and 27 teams, comprising of 117 players for the collegiate championship.

The entire journey started when the county needed something in the slow January timeslot, and the APP was looking for venues. Add in some national TV interest from CBS Sports and \$1.2 million spent on putting in 24 pickleball courts, and a college and amateur headlining event was born.

"Grand Park is an unbelievable facility – the APP was blown away," Moorin said. "The tourism board did a great job and put together a really nice package for the APP, and now we'll have thousands of people coming through during the offseason. We want to stick our stake into this and do a good job and build something. This first year is going to be very good and then it'll go to great and beyond."

Founded in 2019, the APP is a pro tour that also serves amateur and youth players. The Midwest Open will have players from 3.0 to 5.0 skill levels and of all different ages coming from 17 different states. The collegiate tourney features players from 17 states and Canada, and Moorin estimates that eight of the country's 10 best teams will be competing.

Pickleball is the engine to improvements that athletes in many sports will enjoy. Grand Park put down multi-purpose floors on top of its turf fields, with the pickleball courts going on top of those floors. After the pickleball events, those floors can be used for additional basketball and volleyball events. Moorin said all the surfaces and nets are top of the line and professional quality. Of the 24 courts in the facility, there is a single championship court which is overlooked by a restaurant and retail for fans.

"Hamilton County really stepped up and it'll be great for the entire state too," Moorin said. "Our airport is really great and we'll have a lot of people coming through there seeing what we have to offer. We are really going to impress some people."