

PICKLEBALL IN THE VILLAGES with George Brewer

Everyone knows when its 7:30 a.m. at the Chula Vista Pickleball Courts because that's when one of the most amazing Pickleball players to ever play in The Villages arrives just about every morning. He moves cautiously from the parking lot and slowly walks along the sidewalk leading to the courts with his most precious possession on his arm. He holds the gate open with one hand as he guides the one with him onto the courts. He is met with a chorus of "good mornings" from the players already assembled there. His smile signals back to them how much he appreciates their greeting. His objective is the same every morning. He goes to a nearby bench protected from the sun by a large canvas awning where he pauses, cleans the early morning dew from the bench and oversees the seating of his treasure. His attention to detail, his tenderness and caution is inspiring to all there who watch him out the corner of his eye as he conducts his early morning ritual. When everything meets his standards, he too sits beside her. His eyes now survey the courts, taking inventory of those already there as he waits his turn to play his beloved game, Pickleball.

Ken Cross will be 94 years old this Summer. Beverly, his wife, age is a national secret but she is always there with him as she watch's Ken play every morning. Although there is no proof that Ken knew Teddy Roosevelt, Teddy was president when Ken was a boy. Airplanes had never flown, Arizona, New Mexico and Oklahoma were still Territories.

This amazing man has won the Gold medal in his age division in every Senior Game Pickleball has ever been played in the State of Florida. Never mind that he is oldest player in the Games and who cares that he is the "only" one in his age division. To be awarded his medal he is required to play younger players every year and he half-heartedly registers a complaint with officials each year about having to play against 'Kids" who are only 80 and 85.

Trapped inside Ken is a little boy waiting to be released on those foolish enough to believe they are playing an old timer. You see, the moment Ken rises from his seat and heads for the court, the magic of metamorphosis transforms Ken's "hip pity-hop" step into the youthful stride of a warrior. His slight "bent" frame is now ramrod straight. Be warned, the little boy who lives inside Ken's heart is about to be let loose on the uninformed.

It can be depressing to play against Ken. No one that "long-in-the-tooth" should be able to move that fast and hit the ball with such accuracy. Many have turned their back on Ken, sure their volley has gotten by him, only to hear the ball wiz past as it is returned squarely in their court. It's happened to me and I still remember the smile Ken gave me when I turned to verify it was he who had returned my ball.

When he has played his 4 or so games each morning and his time on the Pickleball Courts is over for the day, he recovers his "Lady in Waiting " helping her rise, balancing her with grace and dignity as they prepare for their departure. The players on the courts

put their game on "pause" allowing Ken and Beverly to pass because they know a legend is walking by.

So why don't you come out to Chula Vista one morning and watch Ken play a game or two? Then, just for the heck of it, pick up a paddle and give Pickleball a try. If you are lucky perhaps Ken'll ask you out on the court and he'll show you a trick or two. Come on, how long has it been since someone asked you to "come out and play." Especially, someone 94 years old. You'll never forget the experience.

C U on D Courts.....George Brewer