

# Pickleball is all the rage as Oklahoma Senior Games gets underway



by **ED GODFREY**

Published: Sat, September 12, 2020 1:06 AM Updated: Sat, September 12, 2020 1:27 AM

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**Pickleball is the most popular sport in the Oklahoma Senior Games, which start today in Oklahoma City. Games are scheduled mostly on weekends through Nov. 7. [THE OKLAHOMAN ARCHIVES]**

For David Schultz of Edmond, the Oklahoma Seniors Games gives him the rare opportunity to compete in a triathlon this year.

The 69-year-old retired farmer has ran, biked and swam in triathlons since 1983, but many races were canceled this year because of COVID-19. As a result, he is really looking forward to the Oklahoma Senior Games.

"It is fun to compete with the older guys and see what guys my age and older are still doing," said Schultz, who has also entered two cycling time trials in the Oklahoma Senior Games. "There is a lot of guys way older than I am that are still competitive."

Pam Matthews of Warr Acres also is looking forward to the Senior Games, but her game is pickleball, a sport she describes as table tennis on the ground.

"It is the most fun I have ever had," Matthews said of playing pickleball.

Others evidently share her passion. There are more pickleball players in this year's Senior Games than any other sport.

Matthews, 63, partners with her husband in pickleball and enjoys the competition, but treasures the friendships made playing in a pickleball league and during the Senior Games.

"It's a great way for people to recreate and meet new people," she said.

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The Oklahoma Senior Games begin Saturday in the Oklahoma City with archery at Trosper Park and disc golf at the Will Rogers Park. On Sunday, swimming and water walking will be held at the Westwood Family Aquatic Center in Norman.

Senior athletes (age 50 and older) will be competing in 26 events across the state through Nov. 7. Events are also scheduled, mostly on weekends, in Tulsa, Muskogee, Bixby, Shawnee, Yukon, El Reno and Warr Acres.

The top finishers in each age division qualify for the National Senior Games Championships which will be held next year in Fort Lauderdale, Florida.

The Oklahoma Senior Game have been held each year since 1987, but this year participation has dropped dramatically because of COVID-19.

"This year we were expecting between 1,000 and 1,200 (participants) but because many of our athletes are sheltering at home, our number this year will be about 350," said Kathleen Fitzgerald, executive director of the non-profit Oklahoma Senior Games.

Fitzgerald said the purpose of the games is to help ensure seniors stay active.

"Our organization is interested in encouraging participation in sports as part of a healthy lifestyle as one ages," she said.

Pickleball, track and field, cycling and corn hole are the most popular activities in the Senior Games, Fitzgerald said.