

A BIG HURRAY TO THE USAPA!

By Dick Johnson

Effective June 20, the USAPA has made a greatly needed change wherein older players will play in their own age event if there are three players/teams for that event at Regional tourneys and four players at Nationals!

This is a well-deserved improvement for senior players because it restores their faith in the USAPA and enables them to continue competing. It also encourages them to keep playing our wonderful sport for fun and good health in their sunset years.

Prior to this new ruling, senior players frequently had to play younger players, sometimes significantly younger, when the USAPA/tournament directors determined there were not enough players to fill the age event.

In many cases, they were beaten by the younger players and, sadly, walked away with no medals or recognition. As a result, many seniors, including former regional and national champions who pioneered our great sport, became so discouraged that they quit competing, and some left the sport entirely.

Some older players, however, have concentrated their competitive juices and participation in other outstanding tourneys that already have age events, such as the National Senior Games, State Games of America, Huntsman, and SSIPA. These events have proven that senior players will turn out in droves when the competition is fair and welcoming.

For example, 33 players registered for the 75-9 men's singles in last



Photo from the 2015 National Senior Games in Minneapolis.

year's National Senior Games in Albuquerque. And 29 in 80-4 men's singles!

Even though older players especially say a big "Hooray!" to the USAPA for this important improvement, there are still others needed, which we hope will also be implemented someday soon.

For example, awarding medals to players who do the best in their own five-year age group, even when the tourney's registration numbers make it necessary for them to play down in age in a combined event against younger players. That's very successfully done in other great tourneys at both state and national levels. The result? Fairness to all, happier players, bigger turnouts, more money for the tourney and surrounding community, etc. And the players keep coming back year after year!

Personally, I'm grateful my wife and I found this wonderful sport in our sunset years. It helped me

get control over a pretty serious health problem and helped improve my overall health. We've found marvelous new friendships and enjoyed related travel and activities all around the world. We're appreciative of the innovative and successful advances and benefits the USAPA and its officers have brought to the game!

For senior players who may have dropped out, consider coming back! Register for the Regionals and other tourneys you may have given up on. Especially consider registering for the USA Pickleball Nationals, Oct. 31 to Nov. 8 at the outstanding Indian Wells Tennis Center in California. Win or lose, it's an experience of a lifetime watching the best players in the world! •

Dick Johnson was Player of the Year and National Senior Games "Personal Best!" His many awards include 200 medals in 110 sanctioned tournaments. Gold medals at Nationals, US Open, Huntsman, National Senior Games, State Games of America, and SSIPA Worlds. He has medaled in those majors for five consecutive years.