

July 11, 2006  
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**Soccer takes to the court**  
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The Marion Star

MARION -- Pleasant senior Jon Ehrman had just completed an open field practice with the Spartan soccer team. A few minutes later Ehrman was once again kicking and bouncing a soccer ball, but not quite the same way as he had earlier. Ehrman, along with Chase Gherman and Andrew Beatty, got together at the Marion Racquet and Health Club for a game of international court soccer.

Started in 1986 by John Birks at the Metro YMCA in Portland, Ore., international court soccer combines the sports of racquetball and soccer into one. The game is played on a regulation racquetball court and uses a lot of racquetball rules, but the ball is about the size of a volleyball with a tennis-ball texture on the outside. Like in soccer, the player is not allowed to touch the ball with his hands or arms.

Birks got the idea for the game while he and a friend, John Wagner, were waiting for a basketball court to come open at the YMCA in Portland. The two men decided to warm up by kicking around a volleyball in a vacant racquetball court. "We were both competitive people, so we started to compete," Birks said in a Jan. 20, 2003 article of the Seattle Times. "The rules just kind of developed as we went along."

Marion Racquet and Health Club manager Randy Hensel heard about the game from a friend. "I thought it would be something else we could offer to our members," Hensel said. Ehrman likes the way playing the indoor game has helped his ball-handling skills. One of the rules is the receiving player is allowed three touches of the ball before he has to kick it toward the front wall. "It will help me improve my ball control," Ehrman said, adding that the way the ball bounces off the walls can make for some interesting kicks. The physical activity of the sport also helped draw Gherman to play the game. "It is a great cardio workout," Gherman said.

The game is starting to gain popularity and last May the North American Championships were held in Salem, Ore. Hensel said a league with eight players has been formed at the racquet club and is anxious to see more people get involved. Regardless of the health benefit and improvement of soccer skills, Beatty is also interested in another facet of the game. "It is just fun to play," Beatty said.

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