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The **Information Systems Education Journal** (ISEDJ) is a double-blind peer-reviewed academic journal published by **ISCAP** (Information Systems and Computing Academic Professionals). Publishing frequency is five times per year. The first year of publication was 2003.

ISEDJ is published online (<https://isedj.org>). Our sister publication, the Proceedings of the ISCAP Conference (<https://iscap.us/proceedings>) features all papers, abstracts, panels, workshops, and presentations from the conference.

The journal acceptance review process involves a minimum of three double-blind peer reviews, where both the reviewer is not aware of the identities of the authors and the authors are not aware of the identities of the reviewers. The initial reviews happen before the ISCAP conference. All papers, whether award-winners or not, are invited to resubmit for journal consideration after applying feedback from the Conference presentation. Award winning papers are assured of a publication slot; however, all re-submitted papers including award winners are subjected to a second round of three blind peer reviews to improve quality and make final accept/reject decisions. Those papers that are deemed of sufficient quality are accepted for publication in the ISEDJ journal. Currently the target acceptance rate for the journal is under 35%.

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## *Teaching Case – Student Materials*

# Paddles for Paws: Development of a Pickleball Tournament Event Management Database for a Cool Cause

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### **Hook**

Whispering Hills' Animal Shelter staff are hot under the collar... literally. Their air conditioner has had electrical problems and needs significant repair and possible replacement so the animals and workers can chill out. Volunteers at the facility plan to host a pickleball tournament fundraiser in hopes of raising much needed funds. The shelter needs our help to develop an event management system that they can use to track tournament players and volunteers.

### **Abstract**

The unprecedented increase in popularity of pickleball has driven Whispering Hills' Animal Shelter to consider offering a pickleball tournament to raise funds to repair the shelter's air conditioner. In this teaching case, students engage with a simulated client requirements' interview process to design and develop a database system for a pickleball tournament fundraiser. This immersive approach allows students to practice eliciting and documenting system needs and requirements for an event management system, focusing on players, teams, and volunteers. The case can be used in a systems analysis and design or database development course. Multiple assignment options are provided, allowing instructors to select an assignment based upon course material coverage. Suggested assignments include the development of process modeling diagrams such as data flow and swim lane diagrams, database design diagrams such as UML diagrams or ERDs, and database artifacts such as tables, queries, and reports.

**Keywords:** Teaching Case, Process Design, Swimlane Diagrams, Database Design, Tournament Event Management

**Recommended Citation:** Schwieger, D., (2026). Paddles for Paws: Development of a Pickleball Tournament Event Management Database for a Cool Cause. *Information Systems Education Journal*, v24(n3) pp 62-74. DOI <https://doi.org/10.62273/KLUJ1122>

# Paddles for Paws: Development of a Pickleball Tournament Event Management Database for a Cool Cause

*Dana Schwieger*

## 1. CASE STUDIES

Case studies provide faculty with the opportunity to incorporate simulated experiential learning opportunities into the classroom to allow students to practically apply course learning (Jenkins & Allen, 2017). Case studies engage students in the learning process and support higher order thinking as well as the development of several skills including creative problem-solving, analytical, interpersonal, communication, and teamwork (Cappel & Schwager, 2002; Freeman & Zhang, 2022).

Although working with community clients would be a more ideal approach to hands-on learning, identifying appropriate projects and working with willing clients can be challenging and adds to the complexity of content coverage. (Wharton & Parry, 2012). Written case studies, like this manuscript, provide instructors with the opportunity to provide realistic experiential learning opportunities to students without the additional concerns of managing external client expectations.

The pickleball tournament scenario was chosen due to the sport's rapidly growing popularity. The case and associated assignments were designed to give students the opportunity to apply course concepts to a simulated real-world setting. The author regularly incorporates case studies in her MBA MIS course and has written several similar cases focusing on business case writing and systems design and development concepts, all set within the fictional community of Whispering Hills.

## 2. INTRODUCTION

Nonprofit organizations, such as animal shelters, often operate on limited budgets. Many of these facilities serve communities where a significant portion of the residents earn below the median U.S. household income level (Alley Cat Allies, 2025). While annual budgets may be prepared to cover some unexpected expenses, discretionary dollars are typically limited. In this case, Whispering Hills' Animal Shelter faces the unexpected expense of a broken air conditioner and turns to a pickleball tournament to help generate some additional funds. Shelter

administrators would like to develop a pickleball registration database that can be used to register participants, keep track of tournament play and volunteer assignments, and facilitate communication with players and volunteers before and after the event.

## 3. SETTING THE STAGE

Whispering Hills Animal Shelter is a donation-supported animal shelter. Like many facilities, they rely on local volunteers to help run and support operations.

Lisa and Mark Williams are strong community supporters with Lisa serving on the shelter's board as well as volunteering. As the case begins, Lisa is reviewing the shelter's budget in search of extra funds to allocate for the unexpected air conditioning problem. Her husband, Mark, is returning from playing pickleball at Pickleball Pete's Pickleball Complex. He is excited to share good news about a possible fund-raising pickleball tournament opportunity. Sandy, an MBA student who has previously assisted them with system development projects, will be brought onboard to interview Pete about the pickleball tournament process as well as the data and reports that would need to be collected and generated to make the event a success.

## 4. THE BROKEN AIR CONDITIONER

"Okay, Pete's is on board!" Mark excitedly exclaimed as he shut the front door and set his racket on the dining room table.

"What are you talking about?" his wife Lisa asked as she looked up from her spreadsheet.

"When I left the house this morning to play pickleball, weren't you combing the shelter's budget to find some line items you could trim to cover the costs of the broken air conditioner?"

"Yes," Lisa sighed, "that's what I am still doing. Summer will be here before you know and we need to get the air conditioner problem fixed before the heat sets in."

## 5. THE PICKLEBALL SOLUTION

Mark smiled, "I think I have a solution. As I was driving to Pickleball Pete's Pickleball Complex, I started thinking about how we could raise money to cover the costs of getting a new air conditioner or, at the very least, repair the old one. I ran into Pete, the complex owner, and told him about the shelter and its air conditioning problem. Pete offered to let us use the complex for a pickleball tournament. He thought it could provide some great exposure for the facility while supporting a good cause. What do you think?"

"Wow!" Lisa exclaimed. "With pickleball's popularity and the soft spot the shelter holds in our community, I think it's a great idea! However, I'll bet there's a lot of data that will need to be managed with the participant registrations, volunteers, and tournament play. I don't know anything about tournaments. Do you think that Pete would be willing to meet with Sandy, our MBA intern, to explain the pickleball tournament process and the data that we would need to collect?"

"I'll give Pete a call while you contact Sandy," Mark offered. "He said he would do whatever he could to help, so it's just a matter of finding a time to meet."

## 6. THE MEETING

"Thank you for finding time to meet so quickly," Sandy said to Pete as she took a seat in the snack bar of the pickleball complex the next day. "I don't know much about pickleball or hosting a pickleball tournament. Would you mind giving me an overview?"

### Registration Form

"Of course," Pete began. "Before you start advertising the event, you'll need to create a tournament registration form for players. I have an old one that you can use as a template (Appendix A). You will also want to have the players fill out a liability release form so that neither the shelter nor the pickleball complex are held liable should someone get hurt. That is a standard form that we give out to anyone who plays at our facility; so, I will provide you with that. You will want to collect those and track whether each player submitted the form.

"I suggest that you have players submit their forms and registration fees to the shelter about five days before the event. This will give office staff time to enter player data, deposit fees, set up the brackets, and place last-minute t-shirt

orders. Once you have the brackets set up, you can enter the data for the first round of tournament play into your database. Office staff can run a report for the first round that can be used to direct players to their assigned court at player check-in. I'll give you a copy of a bracket that you can use" (Appendix B).

"During the tournament," Pete continued, "your event administrators will need to maintain the brackets and update round progress in your database based upon the reports they receive from the runners. This information will be helpful throughout the event and for creating awards and certificates at the end."

### Pickleball Games

Pete began by explaining how the tournaments were usually run. "Each game is typically played to 11 points with the winner needing a two-point lead," Pete said. "If a score is tied at 10-10, play is continued until one player gets a two-point lead. Matches are usually best-of-three games with the winner advancing after two victories. Tournaments are generally structured as double elimination play, meaning that the team is eliminated after losing two matches. This format ensures each team plays at least four games, making the cost of the tournament more economical to the players.

"Since this is your first pickleball tournament, I suggest only offering doubles tournaments, or games for teams of two players. You can offer beginner and advanced tournaments for men's doubles, women's doubles, and mixed teams doubles which consist of a male and a female. I can provide you with eight courts for your tournament; so, you will be limited to 16 teams playing simultaneously. Thus, you may want to use four courts for the men's tournament and four courts for the women's. The mixed doubles tournament will need to be offered separately since some of the players may participate in multiple tournaments.

"Although pickleball play is generally self-officiated, you will probably want to have one referee per game as a neutral set of eyes. Although this is supposed to be a casual tournament for fun and fundraising, some players take their game play seriously, so having a referee for each game would be a nice courtesy to provide."

## 7. EVENT MANAGEMENT

"As popular as pickleball is," Pete continued, "you might be able to find some cloud-based programs

that will meet your needs. I think you may want to investigate purchasing access to pickleball tournament software before designing and building a custom database?"

"That's a great suggestion," Sandy replied. "The shelter's budget is tight; so, I am not sure what they can afford... but, it's worth investigating to find out how much the software costs and what it looks like. Since we are here, could you continue and explain the types of data collected for pickleball tournaments, how it is used, and the reports that are needed to hold a successful event?"

"Of course," Pete said. "I'm not a database expert," Pete added, "but I did have a couple of programming classes when I was in college, so I will try to talk in terms of the data you will need to collect and use.

"Coding bracket management could get a little complicated, so you may want to focus your database on event and participant management rather than assigning teams to matches and courts. You can track brackets manually on paper this year. There is plenty of data you are going to have to collect and reports you will want to create regarding players, rounds, and volunteers without having to worry about brackets, too."

### **Timeline**

Lisa looked thoughtful. "How should we begin?"

"Before the event starts," replied Pete, "you will want to record data about the event, tournaments, players, teams, volunteers, and volunteer job roles. After each round, you will want to record the round's match results for each team, or two records per court. I've participated in a pickleball tournament or two, so let me try to break down the event and roles for you a bit."

### **Event**

"If this event is successful and you decide to host it again," Pete said, "we can include an event table that can help with future planning. The table would contain fields that could be completed before the event began such as an event ID, name, the start and end dates/times, and a description. You might also want to include the location name and address as well as a description of the event that you can use for future flyers and advertisements. The event manager's ID should be included, too, so you will know who is responsible for the event. You would also want to include some fields that would be completed after the event such as total costs, amount raised, and a notes field for any additional

details that you would like to record. The notes field might be helpful to include for each entity on which you are collecting data."

### **Tournament**

"Since you plan to have women's, men's, and mixed tournaments for intermediate and advanced players," Pete continued, "you will want to collect information on your tournaments as well. You will want to include a type field to distinguish the different types of tournaments: men's, women's, or mixed. However, in the future, you may want to add additional options to this field to include tournaments for youth and singles' tournaments. If the tournament is as popular as I anticipate, it may stretch across multiple days in the future, so you may also want to include a date field. Thus, the fields you might want to include for this entity are the event ID, tournament ID, type of tournament, date, skill level, and notes."

### **Players**

Pete thought for a moment. "Data collected about the players will mostly come from the registration forms and include their first and last names, address, city, state, zip code, cell phone, email address, skill level, age class, gender, t-shirt size, emergency contact information, payment and form of payment, and liability form submission status. You will also want to include the event ID field and create a player ID field to uniquely identify each player."

### **Teams**

"The role of the Teams table," Pete continued, "is to identify the teams and their members as well as the tournament of play and skill level. Thus, this table will include the event ID, a generated team ID, team member 1's ID, team member 2's ID, the skill level of the strongest player, and the tournament ID in which the team plans to participate. A player may be listed in two records if they participate in the men's or women's tournament as well as a mixed doubles tournament. You might also want to include a notes field to record any data that would be helpful to reference in the future."

### **Workers**

"We also want to collect data about the volunteers who work the event," Lisa interjected.

"Sure," Pete responded. "The people who work the event will probably include shelter administration and staff as well as community volunteers. I have an example of a volunteer registration form that can give you an idea of the type of data that is collected. (Appendix C) The

volunteer registration form will contain the volunteers' data such as their first name, last name, address, city, state, zip code, cell phone, email address, age, role with the facility (such as an administrator, employee, or volunteer), job preference, work timeframe availability, guardian's name and cell phone (if applicable), t-shirt size, job preference, liability release form submission status, and notes. You will also want to include the event ID and create a worker ID number to uniquely identify each worker."

### **Worker Roles**

Pete paused, thinking about what else might be needed. "Some of the roles that you may need for the tournament are setup, registration desk, snack table, referees, runner, administration, and clean-up. The runners will collect match results throughout the event and relay this information to administration. Administration will oversee maintaining the brackets and assigning teams to courts for each round. Some of the fields that you might collect to describe this entity would be role ID, role name, role description, and a notes field."

### **Worker Assignment**

"You will want to use this table to match your workers to their roles, their tournament, and for some, their court. Thus," Pete continued, "you may want to include the event ID, tournament ID, worker ID, role ID, court ID, and notes. The notes field might be used to store reminders for the event, or it could be used after the event to record notes about role performance or concerns the volunteer voiced about the role."

### **Rounds**

"For each round in the tournament," Pete said, "you will want to record the event ID, tournament ID, round ID, court ID, round date, and round time. You might also want to include a notes field to record anything that might be helpful to know about rounds for future events."

### **Match.**

"Each round," Pete continued, "would have multiple matches playing simultaneously on multiple courts. The match table would consist of the event ID, round ID, match ID, court ID, winning team ID, and, again, a notes field to record anything you might need to know for the future."

### **Games**

"There are at least two, and possibly three, games," Pete noted, in each match since a team must win two games to win the match. This table will identify the teams, scores, and winners of each game. The fields that you might want to

include in this table are Event ID, round ID, match ID, game ID, team 1 ID, team 2 ID, team 1 score, team 2 score, the winning team's ID, and any notes you would like to remember."

"From the game play perspective," Pete said, "since you will handle tournament court and team assignments using a bracket, there will not be a lot of reports. While you finish writing your notes, I'll sketch out my thoughts for the reports."

## **8. REPORTS**

Based upon Pete's work with pickleball tournaments, he thought the following reports would be beneficial to the tournament's success.

### **Team Rosters**

Pete thought that a roster of teams and their members would be needed before, during, and after the event. The roster would include the team ID number, the team member names, their skill level, and the tournament in which they were playing.

### **Round Results**

He also thought that Round Results reports would be helpful to keep track of round performance during and at the end of the event. He suggested that the report include the tournament ID, round ID, court ID, team IDs, team member last names, scores, and result. (Appendix D)

### **Volunteer Assignment Lists**

Since volunteers are integral to the success of the event, he also thought that lists of volunteers and the roles they were assigned would be beneficial. Pete noted volunteer assignments that would be helpful include a referee for each court, people to help setup, registration desk workers, volunteers on the floor making sure that the players have water and snacks in the rest area, runners to handle any issues and to relay round results to the tournament administrators, and tournament administrators. He thought this report might include the tournament ID, volunteer ID, their name, their phone number, when they can work, and their assigned tournament role.

### **Participation Certificates and Emails**

Sandy thoughtfully looked at Pete's notes, "Those look great. We could also use the database to create awards and participation certificates for the tournament winners, players and volunteers as well as send out courtesy reminders before the event to remind everyone of the location and starting time." (Appendix E) "We could also inform the volunteers of their role assignment for the event in their email. After the event is over,

we could send out thank you notes to both the participants and the volunteers. Hopefully, the event will be so successful that we will want to host it next year and can use it in the future to invite people to participate in the bigger and better multi-day second annual event!"

## 9. WRAPPING UP

Sandy paused for a moment. "Wow, Pete! You've been a great help! Thank you for your expertise. Your knowledge of pickleball and databases has really given me a jumpstart in this project. If you are available, I would like to meet with you again after I have had some time to read through my notes and diagram out the process and database model to see if there is anything that I missed or did not understand before moving forward."

## 10. ASSIGNMENTS

This project offers multiple learning paths depending on the role and activities your instructor has in mind. Confirm your assigned role and tasks with your instructor.

### Process Model Diagrams

Assume the role of Sandy, the MBA student. Create diagrams illustrating the functional process steps for the player registration and volunteer registration and role assignment process to verify that you have identified all of the steps and understand how the pickleball tournament event management process works.

1. Create a diagram modeling the event management process.
2. Write a short narrative to accompany your diagram to verify and support your interpretation of the process.
3. Once the narrative is written:
  - a. Compare the narrative to the diagram to identify and/or clarify missing steps in the process.
  - b. Compare the narrative to the actual description in the case to identify missing steps in the diagram or areas needing clarification.
4. As the diagram is developed, record any assumptions or interpretations you make, regarding the process, in a separate document.

### Data Flow Diagrams

Assume the role of Sandy, the MBA student. Create a data flow diagram to illustrate the flow of data through the pickleball tournament event management process to verify that you

understand how the data is collected, processed, stored, and disseminated.

1. Create a diagram modeling the flow of data through the process.
2. Write a short narrative to accompany your diagram to verify and support your interpretation of the process.
3. Once the narrative is written:
  - a. Compare the narrative to the diagram to identify and/or clarify missing steps in the process.
  - b. Compare the narrative to the actual description in the case to identify missing steps in the diagram or areas needing clarification.
4. As the diagram is developed, record any assumptions you make regarding the processes in a separate document.

### Research Commercially Available Software Packages

Assume the role of Sandy and use AI as a starting point to help you research commercially available pickleball tournament management systems. Be sure to verify the accuracy of the results provided and delve deeper into the system recommendations. Write a short memo to Lisa describing the two best products available. In your memo, provide:

- the name of the software;
- the URL to the software's website;
- the cost;
- how the software is accessed (cloud-based or installed locally);
- a brief description of the software and its capabilities;
- pros and cons of the software; and
- your recommendation, buy or build and if buy, which one.

### Systems Analysis Design and Database Development

Assume the role of Sandy, the MBA student, in building the database.

1. Accumulate the functional and technical requirements for the system.
2. Prioritize the requirements.
3. Create system development diagrams.
4. Create a data dictionary.
5. Create the database.
6. Create queries to generate records needed for player and volunteer check-in, team rosters, round results, volunteer assignments, and data needed for various mail-merged emails (e.g., participation certificates, winner award certificates,

thank you letters, and general communication).

7. Create reports for the queries including attendance, team rosters, round results, volunteer assignments, and informational emails and letters to players and volunteers.
8. Sandy needs to incorporate privacy, security, and data error handling measures throughout the database. Include a brief written report describing:
  - a. the measures that were taken,
  - b. the data those measures will protect, and
  - c. how those measures will protect the data.
9. Use AI to generate records to populate your database.
10. As the database is developed, record any assumptions made in a short report.

### Future System Enhancements

Once the initial system has been developed, future updates can be made to further enhance its capabilities such as:

1. Version 2.0 enhancements such as automated bracket team assignment, automated court assignment, and the addition of singles and youth tournaments,
2. Automation of reports and messages,
3. Enhanced privacy and security measures,
4. Integration with other systems,
5. Scalability, and
6. Data analytics.

Students may want to:

1. Write a short narrative explaining how one or more of the capabilities could be incorporated into their system and the value those capabilities would provide for the organization.
2. Incorporate one or more of the capabilities into your system.

## 11. POTENTIAL CHALLENGES & OBSTACLES

### System Complexity

The tournament management system is somewhat complex. Students should focus on creating the people-oriented portions first (players and volunteers) and then incorporating more of the tournament management details.

### Time Management

Projects normally take longer than one would expect. Breaking the project down into small goals to be completed over a period of time will allow time for asking the instructor questions that may arise.

### Diagrams and Symbols

Should a student be unfamiliar with business process mapping or data flow diagrams, there are many resources available online that describe the diagrams and provide examples of the diagrams and their symbols including:

- Creately Business Process Modeling Techniques with Examples: <https://creately.com/blog/bpm/business-process-modeling-techniques/>
- Asana's Guide to Process Mapping Process Mapping <https://asana.com/resources/process-mapping>
- The tutorials associated with business modeling software such as Lucidchart, draw.io, smartdraw.com, and Visio.

## 12. CONCLUSION

After Sandy developed her database vision, diagrams, and mock-ups, she met again with Pete to review the details. Once she felt comfortable with the plan, she met with the shelter's board to discuss what she had found.

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**APPENDIX A**

**Player Registration Form**

**Organization Name**

**Pickleball Tournament Fundraiser**

**Player Registration Form**

First Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Last Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City/State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip Code: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_ Cell phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Skill Level: (Circle one) Intermediate Advanced Gender: \_\_\_ Male \_\_\_ Female

T-Shirt Size: (Circle one) S M L XL XXL Age Class: \_\_\_ Teen \_\_\_ Adult \_\_\_ Senior

**Emergency Contact**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Cell phone: \_\_\_\_\_

**Events**

\_\_\_\_\_ Men's Doubles Partner Name \_\_\_\_\_

Need Partner: \_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_ No Partner Skill Level: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ Women's Doubles Partner Name \_\_\_\_\_

Need Partner: \_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_ No Partner Skill Level: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ Mixed's Doubles Partner Name \_\_\_\_\_

Need Partner: \_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_ No Partner Skill Level: \_\_\_\_\_

The tournament is a double elimination tournament. You must play in the higher skill level if partners are not the same skill level. The tournament will be double elimination. Top bracket matches will be 2 out of 3 games to 11 points with a win by 2.

**Fees:**

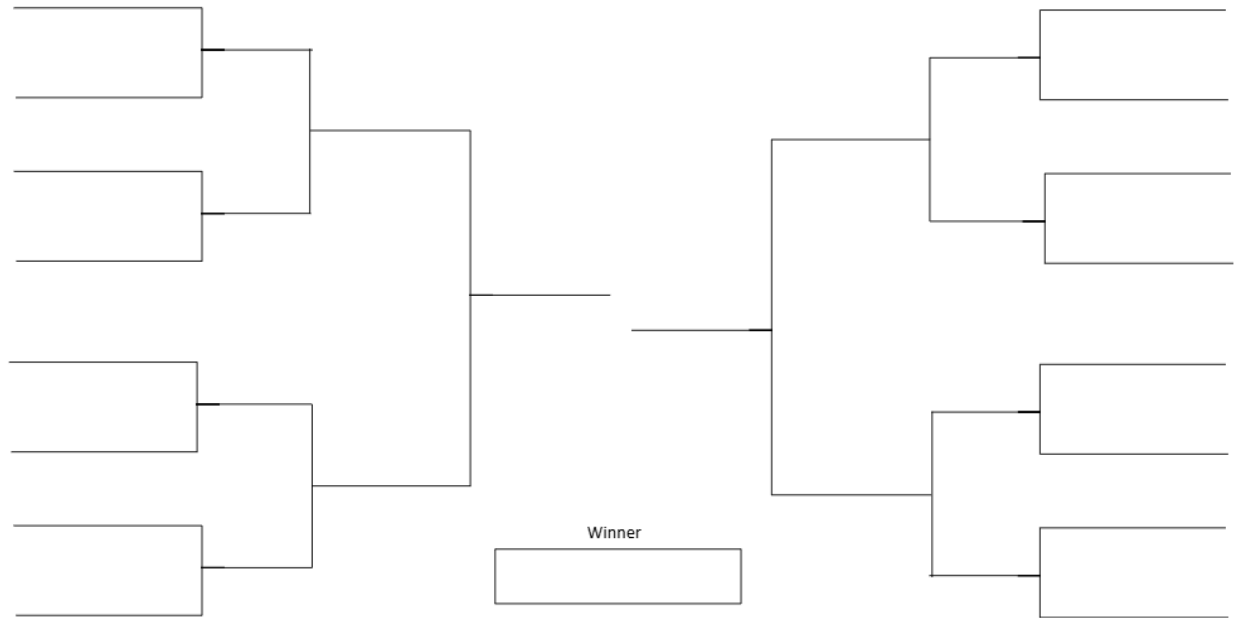
\$25 per person for first tournament

\$10 per person for the second

Make checks payable to Whispering Hills Animal Shelter. Amount included: \_\_\_\_\_

Liability release form included: \_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_ No

**APPENDIX B**  
**Bracket Example**



**APPENDIX C**

**Volunteer Registration Form**

**Organization Name**

**Pickleball Tournament Fundraiser**

**Volunteer Registration Form**

First Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Last Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City/State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip code: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_ Cell phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Age: \_\_\_\_\_ Gender: \_\_\_ Male \_\_\_ Female

Shelter Relationship: (Circle One) Volunteer Employee Administrator

T-Shirt Size: (Circle one) S M L XL XXL XXXL

Guardian Contact Info (If under 18 years old.)

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Cell phone: \_\_\_\_\_

**Emergency Contact**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Cell phone: \_\_\_\_\_

**Volunteer Interest**

Time Availability of Event: \_\_\_ Morning \_\_\_ Afternoon \_\_\_ All Day

Job Role Preference (Please rank 1 to 3 with one being top interest)

\_\_\_ Setup \_\_\_ Registration \_\_\_ Snacks \_\_\_ Referee \_\_\_ Runner \_\_\_ Cleanup

## APPENDIX D

### Pickleball Round Results Report Example

#### Round Results

##### June 2025 Doubles Pickleball Tournament

	Tournament ID	Round	Court ID	Team ID	Team Names	Score	Results
1	MenInt01	Rnd01	Crt01	MID01	Anderson/Wilson	2/3	Won
2	MenInt02	Rnd01	Crt02	MID02	Brown/James	2/3	Lost
3	MenAdv01	Rnd01	Crt03	MID03	Smith/Carter	2/3	Won
4	MenAdv02	Rnd01	Crt04	MID04	Thomas/Robins	2/3	Lost
5	WomInt01	Rnd01	Crt05	WID01	Davidson/Jones	3/5	Lost
6	WomInt02	Rnd01	Crt06	WID02	Warren/Miller	3/5	Won
7	WomAdv01	Rnd01	Crt06	WID03	Brown/Thomas	2/3	Won
8	WomAdv02	Rnd01	Crt08	WID04	Anderson/Wilson	2/3	Lost
9	MixInt01	Rnd01	Crt01	XID01	Wilson/Wilson	3/5	Won
10	MixInt01	Rnd01	Crt02	XID01	Brown/Brown	3/5	Lost

## Appendix E

### Email to Volunteer Report Example

#### **Whispering Hills**

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Dear Amanda,

Thank you so very much for volunteering to help at the Whispering Hills' Animal Shelter pickleball tournament. The Shelter would not be able to continue without supporters like you. We are so grateful for you and your assistance.

Just a reminder, the event will start at 8:00 a.m. on Saturday, June 7<sup>th</sup>. We are asking volunteers assigned to registration to arrive 1 hour before the event starts and all other volunteers to arrive 30 minutes before their shift starts to sign in and get instructions.

You will be helping with: **Snack bar**

Just a reminder, Pickleball Pete's is located in Whispering Hills, MO at  
1000 Main Street

For questions, please contact the office at (555) 555-2222.

Sincerely,  
Lisa

#### **Whispering Hills' Animal Shelter**

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Tel (XXX) 555-2222	100 Shelter Lane
Fax Fax (XXX) 555-2223	Whispering Hills, MO 63901

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