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## Even the Elite of Paddle Tennis Play for Peer Recognition Only

By RALPH NICHOLS

Richard Roth lopes across court. He slaps a drop volley then crouches at the net to defend against a return.

Roth's lanky 6-foot, 2-inch frame poses a formidable obstacle against an opponent's lob. His agile, nimble moves and powerful shots befit his No. 1 ranking by the United States Paddle Tennis Assn.

But Roth has a problem, and it has nothing to do with an overhead lob. He spends more time explaining what paddle tennis is than competing in it.

"They get it mixed up with racquetball or Ping-Pong," said Roth, of Sherman Oaks.

Roth, 22, fits the stereotype of a top paddle tennis player: quick, powerful and young.

"The really good paddle tennis players are in their 20s and can run all day," said Greg Lawrence, president of the Culver City-based USPTA.

Players swat a "deadened" tennis ball with an oval-faced wooden paddle and compete on a 20-by-50-foot court. The scoring and rules are essentially the same as tennis.

But other than the 75,000 paddle tennis players nationwide, the sport remains an enigma.

"A lot of people ask me what paddle tennis is," Roth said. "I ask them if they know where Venice is."

The eight outdoor courts next to the beach in Venice attract curious onlookers to the tennis-like sport.

Venice will play host to the USPTA Pacific Coast championships this weekend.

"Paddle tennis is very much a beach sport," said Lawrence, of West Los Angeles. "They build paddle tennis courts when there's not enough room for tennis courts."

Roth will compete in this weekend's tournament, his second since winning the USPTA national championship in Charleston, S.C., this month.

After winning the national doubles title, Roth and his partner, Dave Stahl of Culver City, placed second at the USPTA national beach championships in Florida.

Roth has been a paddle tennis devotee for 12 years. The national championship was his first title outside of several junior tournament victories as a youth.

He finished second in the USPTA state championships in July with his other doubles partner, Steven Reifman of Westwood, to Lawrence and Scott Freedman of Culver City.

A lack of community recognition doesn't particularly bother Roth.

"We all get satisfaction from our peers," Lawrence said. "That's about it."

Roth and Lawrence practice on weekends at the Sand and Sea Club in Santa Monica. They compete against other top paddle tennis players, such as Mark Weinstein, 34, of Tarzana, ranked fifth in the USPTA.

*Times Staff Writer*

**Photo:**

Mark Weinstein, left, and Ricahrd Roth will become opponents in the Pacific Coast championships.

**Photographer:**

JOE VITTI / Los Angeles Times

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