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Hartford

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[54] INDOOR-OUTDOOR TENNIS GAME

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[51] Int. Cl. ....A63b 39/00

[58] Field of Search .....273/29 A, 30, 29 R

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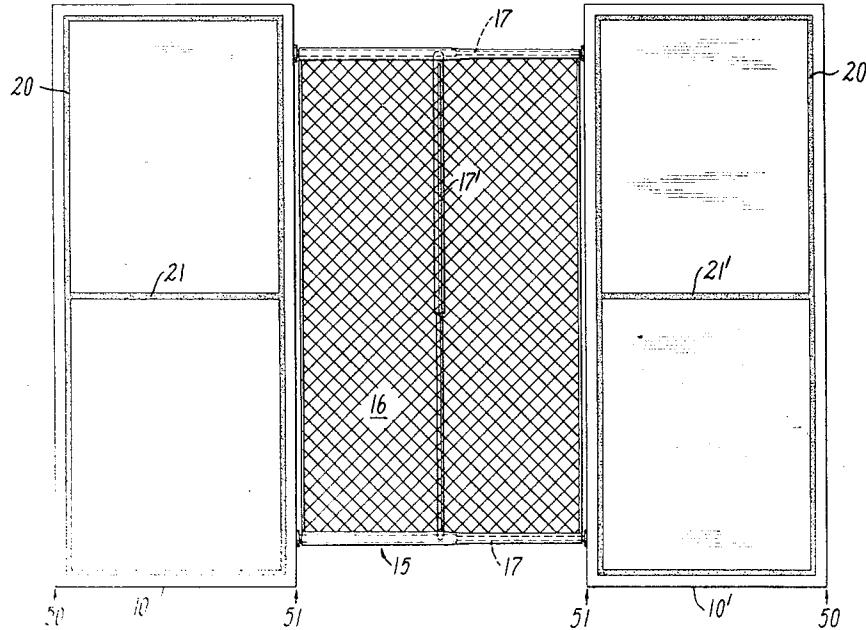
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ABSTRACT

An indoor-outdoor game apparatus wherein two to four players provided with rackets engage in play with a lightweight ball on an elevated playing surface comprising two spaced-apart playing courts, the playing courts connected by means of a ball deflector. The playing courts comprise two tables with a plurality of legs and the ball deflector preferably comprises a net stretched between the tables and substantially parallel to and slightly below the surfaces of the tables.

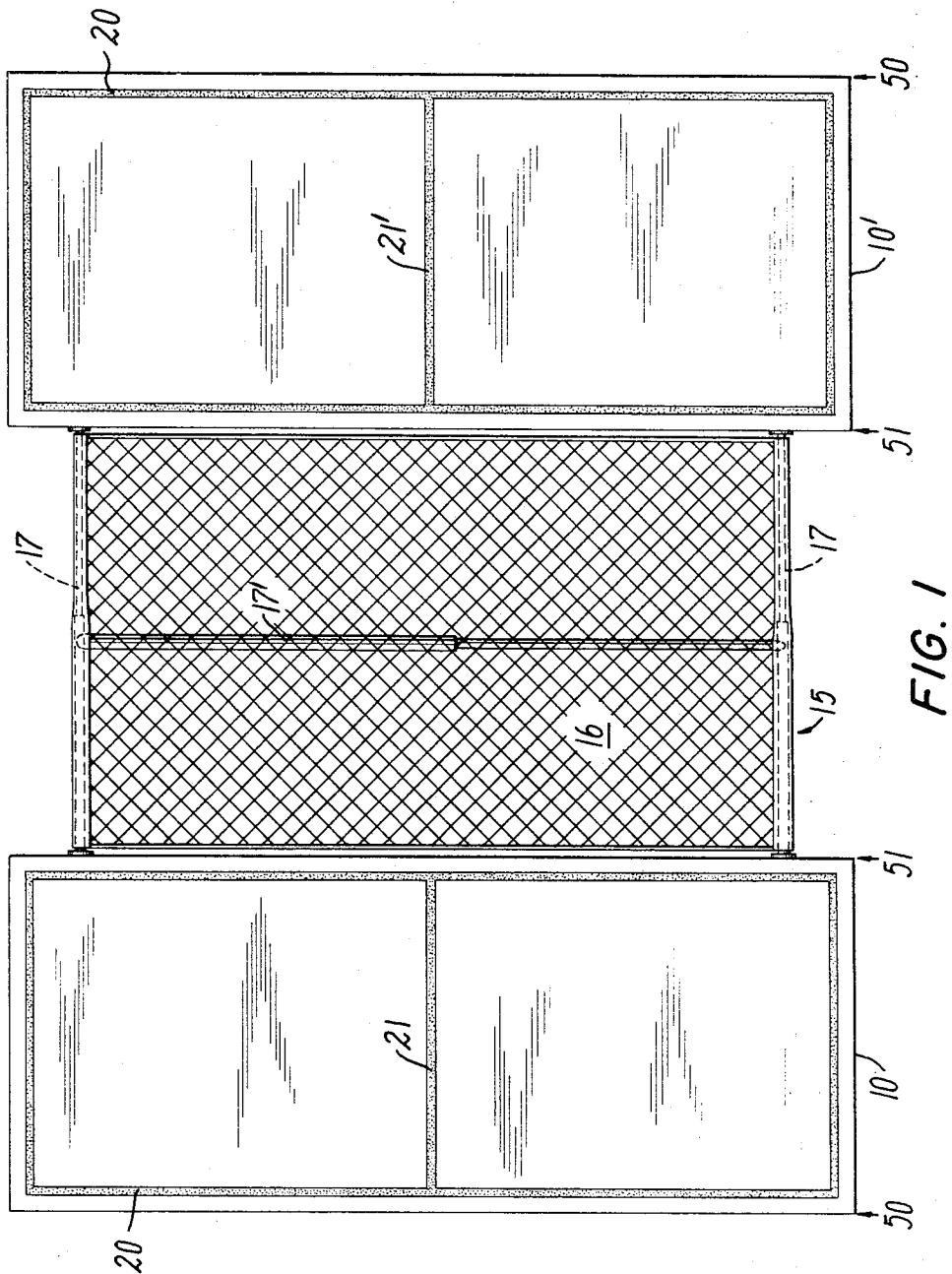
7 Claims, 6 Drawing Figures



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SHEET 1 OF 3



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SHEET 2 OF 3

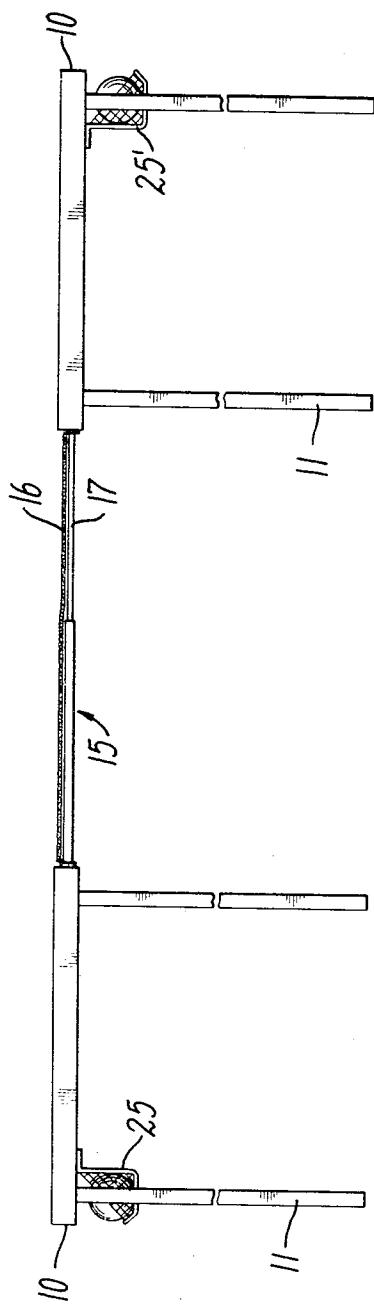


FIG. 2

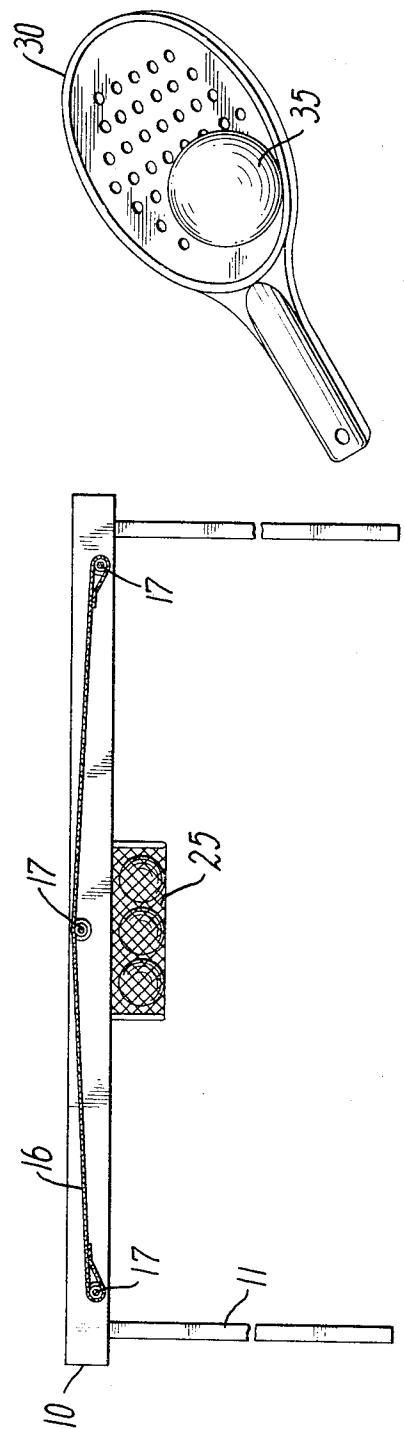


FIG. 3

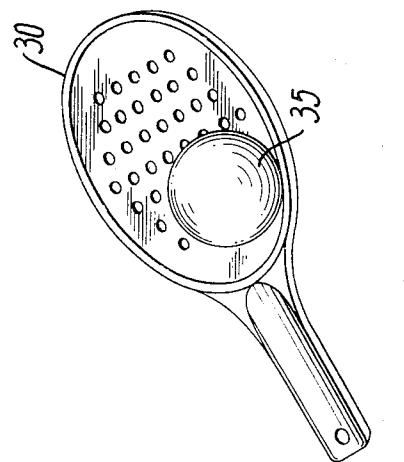


FIG. 4

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SHEET 3 OF 3

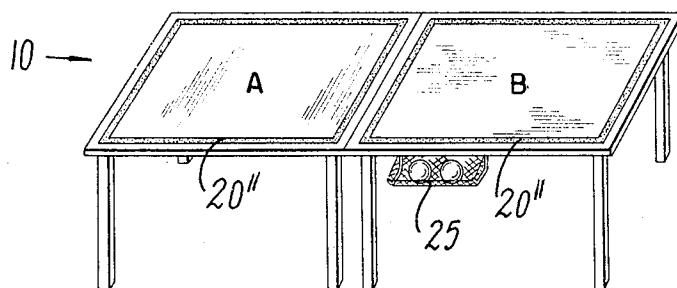
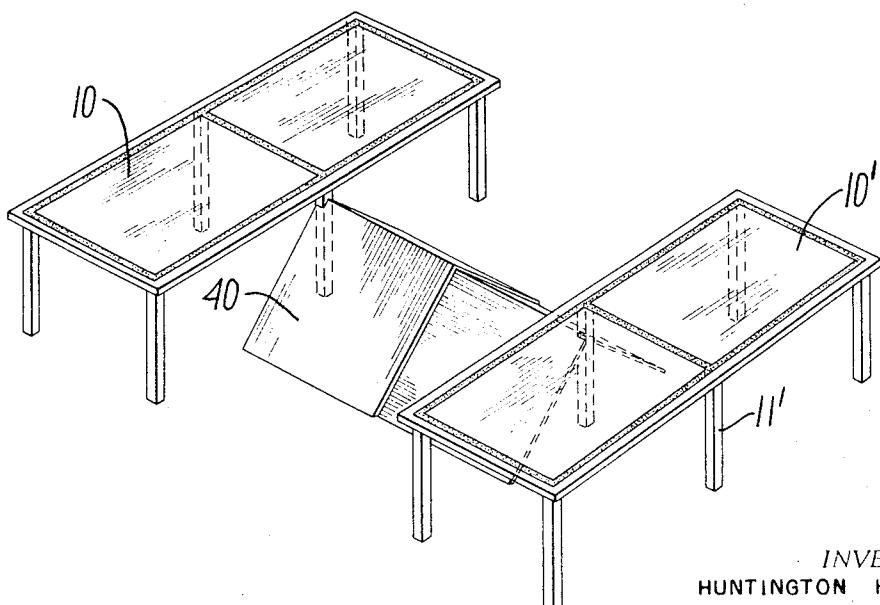


FIG. 5

FIG. 6



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## INDOOR-OUTDOOR TENNIS GAME

The present invention relates to a novel racket and ball game played on an elevated playing surface. The preferred type of racket, ball, and playing surface provide a game that can be used both indoors and outdoors and which simulates playing lawn tennis.

There are many games and sports played with a ball struck by a racket which utilize an elevated playing surface, such as table tennis, but all of such games and sports separate the elevated playing surface into two courts by a vertically extending barrier or net. When these games are played, the closeness of the two playing courts, the type of hard ball typically utilized, and the vertical net between the playing courts combine to deprive the users of the game with the simulation of lawn tennis. In table tennis, in particular, the players usually do not stroke the ball with their rackets, either forehand or backhand, do not serve overhand, and do not volley. Thus, as games which may be used indoors and provide tennis players with exercise and practice, known racket and ball games played on elevated surfaces are deficient.

## SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

The present racket and ball game overcomes the above-mentioned problems and provides a game which gives the players the feeling of playing lawn tennis. Specifically, the novel game is played on an elevated playing surface comprised of two separate playing courts, such as two tables, the courts being separated a prespecified distance apart. A ball deflector is positioned between and connected to the two tables. Preferably the ball deflector is a net which is stretched between the tables substantially parallel to and slightly below the upper surfaces thereon. The ball deflector deflects any errant balls landing between the tables and maintains the playing courts the prespecified distance apart. The rackets utilized for the game preferably are similar to paddle tennis rackets but with gut like a tennis racket, and the ball utilized preferably is a lightweight sponge-type ball.

## BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

The invention may be more effectively understood by referring to the accompanying drawings, wherein:

FIG. 1 is a top plan view of the novel playing surface;

FIG. 2 is a side elevational view of the novel playing surface;

FIG. 3 is a cross-sectional view of the novel playing surface through the ball deflector and showing another embodiment thereof;

FIG. 4 is an isometric view of a ball and racket utilized in playing the novel game, and shows generally the relative sizes thereof;

FIG. 5 is an isometric view of one of the playing courts illustrating the preferred two-sectioned embodiment thereof; and

FIG. 6 is an isometric view of the novel playing surface showing another embodiment of the ball deflector.

## DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

As shown in FIGS. 1 and 2, the playing surface comprises two courts or tables 10 and 10' each supported by a plurality of legs 11. The table 10 and 10' are

spaced a distance apart and are separated by a ball deflector indicated generally by reference numeral 15. In particular, the ball deflector 15 preferably comprises a fine mesh net 16 supported by a plurality of metal rods 17.

The net 16 can be any mesh net but should be durable for continued use both indoors and outdoors, able to be stretched tightly without failing or tearing, and have holes small enough to prevent the ball from settling on its surface. Preferably the net has openings on the order of one fourth to one half inch. The net 16 can be attached permanently to each of the tables 10 and 10' and the rods 17 by, for example, staples or nails, or it can be attached in a removable fashion, such as by hooks (not shown). The net 16 can be positioned across the full width of the space between the tables 10 and 10', but preferably is smaller in width, as shown in FIG. 1.

The rods 17 can be of any material with sufficient mechanical strength to be connected to the tables 10 and 10' and positioned therebetween without sagging or buckling. The rods 17 basically perform two functions, (1) they support the net in a taut position, and (2) they maintain the tables 10 and 10' a prespecified distance apart. Preferably the rods 17 are telescopic or adjustable so that the tables 10 and 10' can be movable relative to one another for different games or for different abilities and ages of players. To prevent the rods 17 from buckling inwardly, a rod 17' can be positioned therebetween (FIG. 1). Rod 17' also acts to support the net 16.

Although two rods 17 and one rod 17' are shown in FIGS. 1 and 2, it is understood that any number of rods 17 and 17' can be utilized. If it is preferred to arch the net 16 in its center, three rods 17 can be provided, as shown in FIG. 3. In FIG. 3, the three rods 17 are not in the same horizontal plane, the center rod being slightly above a plane passing through the two outer rods. The position of the center rod also facilitates placement of rod 17' between the outer rods. The arch in the net 16 is preferred in some cases to direct errant balls landing between the tables toward the sides and off the playing surface. In this manner, the players do not have to reach over the tables 10 and 10' or onto the net 16 in order to retrieve errant balls.

The tables 10 and 10' can be of any conventional type, such as two table tennis tables, although preferably the tables are wider, longer and lower than standard table tennis tables. The tables can be made of plywood or any other relatively lightweight material with good mechanical strength, such as high density polystyrene or aluminum. If polystyrene or a similar material is utilized, the tables can be backed with wood or metal strips for added strength. It is also preferable to round the corners (not shown) of the tables 10 and 10', at least the corners nearest the players, in order to prevent injuries.

Although tables 10 and 10' are depicted in FIGS. 1 and 2 as being of one piece, it is preferred that each table be comprised of two sections A and B (FIG. 5). Dividing each table into two sections facilitates handling and storing of the game apparatus. Sections A and B are generally rectangular in shape, are substantially the same size, and each have four legs. Means (not shown) for releasably fastening together sections A and B also can be provided.

For playing, the edges of the tables 10 and 10' are marked by thin rectangular-shaped border strips 20 and 20', respectively, and thin mid-line strips 21 and 21', respectively, which divide each of the tables 10 and 10' into two playing courts (FIG. 1). The strips preferably are painted on the tables, but they also can consist of strips of colored tape. The strips 20 and 20' are provided so that the players can readily ascertain the positions of the outside edges of the courts and the strips 21 and 21' are provided particularly for doubles play wherein two teams of two players use the game apparatus. When each table 10 and 10' is comprised of two sections A and B (FIG. 5), the mid-line strips are unnecessary and each section is marked only with a thin rectangular-shaped border strip 20".

Under each of the tables 10 and 10' (FIGS. 1-3) is provided a ball holder 25 and 25' which stores extra balls for play. The holders 25 and 25' are preferably located generally in the longitudinal center of the tables 10 and 10' and close to their outside edges 50 (FIG. 1). When the tables 10 and 10' are comprised of two sections A and B, the ball holder can be located under either section. As shown in FIG. 5, ball holder 25 is located beneath section B of table 10.

The racket and ball preferably used with the novel game apparatus are shown in FIG. 4. The racket or bat 30 can be of any standard paddle tennis or paddle ball paddle, either string or wood. Preferably, however, the paddle is made of string and weighs slightly less than standard paddles. For example, most wood paddle tennis paddles weigh 14 to 16 ounces and for the present game, a string paddle weighing approximately 10 to 12 ounces is preferred.

The ball 35 can be of any rubber or plastic type, such as a solid rubber ball or an air filled latex ball, but preferably is a sponge-type ball, for example, foamed urethane, approximately 4 inches in diameter and one half to three fourths ounces in weight. A ball meeting these latter specifications is presently marketed under the trademark NERF, a product of Parker Brothers. An advantage of using a sponge-type ball lies in the noiseless manner in which the game is played.

A foamed urethane ball one half to three fourths ounces in weight is preferred when the game is used indoors, but when the game is used outdoors where wind and atmospheric conditions are factors, the ball preferably is slightly heavier, for example, on the order of 1 to 1 1/4 ounces in weight. Further, when the game is used outdoors at night, the ball 35 and the strips 20, 20", 21 and 21' can be made luminous.

When the game is used outdoors on grass or any other soft surface, spikes or talons (not shown) can be attached to one or more of the legs 17 of the tables 10 and 10' to anchor the tables in position.

FIG. 6 illustrates the novel two-table game apparatus utilizing another form of ball deflector 40. This embodiment is preferably utilized where the tables 10 and 10' have one or more legs 11' in the center thereof, for example, when the two-sectioned embodiment shown in FIG. 5 is used. The ball deflector 40 has an inverted-V shape and is connected by means (not shown) to the legs 11'. The deflector 40 thus rests on the ground and connects the tables 10 and 10' together and maintains them a prespecified distance apart.

The ball deflector 40 can be made of any light-weight material with good mechanical strength. Such materials

can be, for example, thin plywood, sheet metal, or polystyrene. Similar to rods 17, the ball deflector 40 preferably should be made adjustable to facilitate movement of the tables 10 and 10' relative to one another. For example, the ball deflector 40 can be made of two overlapping sections that are slidable relative to one another. To facilitate sliding and yet maintain the overlapping sections together, the uppermost of the overlapping sections can be provided with longitudinal slots (not shown) and the lower of the sections can be provided with pegs or screws (not shown) corresponding to the slots.

It has been found that there are preferred dimensions for the novel game apparatus which provide a competitive, active game simulating lawn tennis. Each of the tables 10 and 10' should be a total of 6 feet by 12 feet in surface area and approximately 26 inches to 30 inches from the floor or ground. If two sections A and B are used, each section thus should be 6 feet by 6 feet in area. For play, the tables 10 and 10' should be spaced 4 feet to 6 feet apart with the most preferred distance being 6 feet. With these dimensions, the players standing on opposite ends of the playing surface have an overall court approximately 12 feet by 18 feet in area, and an opposite court 6 feet by 12 feet in which to serve or return the ball. When women and children use the game apparatus, the tables 10 and 10' can be moved closer together so that the ball deflector is narrowed to 4 feet in width. The net should be approximately 6 feet by 8 feet in area, stretched tautly between the tables, and positioned approximately one fourth inch to 2 inches below the surfaces of the tables. Although separate nets of 4 feet by 8 feet and 6 feet by 8 feet can be provided, preferably one net of the greater area is utilized and simply adjusted to the smaller distance.

When playing the novel game and using the novel equipment disclosed herein, the player serving in singles play stands beyond the backline 50 of his respective table 10 or 10' on either one side or the other of the mid-strip 21 or 21'. A player may serve from beyond the corners of the table, but not forward of the backline 50. The server then throws the ball 35 into the air and serves it to the diagonally adjacent portion of the opponent's table with an overhand stroke of the racket 30, the stroke being similar to that used in lawn tennis. Service thus is diagonally across the ball deflector 16 from one-half of one of the tables 10 or 10' to the diagonally opposite one-half of the other table.

On the serve, if the ball 35 hits the inside edge 51 of the opposite table and bounces onto the opposite table, or if the ball 35 lands on the border strips 20 or 20', except that portion nearest edge 51, then the serve is a "let" and the server is allowed to take the serve over. On a return or during a rally, however, all of the border strip 20 and the edge 51 is in play. Also, on the serve, if the ball 35 lands on the mid-line strip 21 and 21', it is in play.

Whether on the serve or otherwise, if the ball 35 hits the net 16, the inside edge 51 of the opposite table and bounces back onto the net 16, or fails to drop within the opposing court 10 or 10', his opponent registers a point. The players are free to move back and forth beyond their respective end lines 50, except when serving.

The game thus is played like lawn tennis and also is scored like lawn tennis, with the exception of the serve where the server only has one serve per point as opposed to two in lawn tennis. In scoring, the first two points count fifteen each, the third ten, and the fourth wins the game. However, if both players have forty points, the score is "deuce." The next player to score has the "advantage" and the one who scores two successive points after "deuce" is the winner. Six games constitute a set but again a player must win by two games. Thus, if the score goes to five games each, a player must win two successive games to win the set. Most matches are decided on a best two-out-of-three sets although the best three-out-of-five sets may be played.

The service changes hands from one player to the opposing one after each game. Also, a player must keep one foot on the floor or ground at all times and may place one hand on the table in reaching for the ball.

When playing doubles, the service, play and scoring are conducted similar to singles play. The player of the serving team stands behind the line 50 on either one side or the other of mid-line strip 21 or 21' and serves the ball 35 to the diagonally adjacent portion of the opponents' table. When the ball is rallied between the teams, the ball 35 can be returned to either of the opposite double courts and can be returned by the player standing at that position, i.e., the double players do not have to alternate in returning and rallying the ball 35. The members of the double teams only switch positions behind the end lines 50 after every other game.

From the foregoing, it is apparent that a novel, interesting and conveniently playable game and game structures have been disclosed herein. While the game shown and described in detail presents preferred embodiments of the invention and have illustrated

preferred methods of practicing the same, it is to be understood that the invention is not limited thereto but may be otherwise variously embodied and practiced within the scope of the following claims.

5 I claim:

1. A game apparatus comprising two tables, each table having an upper surface and at least one supporting leg member, the upper surfaces of the tables having substantially the same elevation, and a net positioned 10 between the two tables, the plane of the net being substantially parallel to the plane of the surfaces of the tables and the net being substantially in the same plane as the surfaces of the tables.

2. A game apparatus as defined in claim 1 wherein 15 the net is stretched between the two tables and at least one portion of the net is raised.

3. A game apparatus as defined in claim 1 further comprising at least one rod positioned between and attached to the two tables.

20 4. A game apparatus as defined in claim 1 wherein each of the two tables comprises two adjacent sections, each section having at least one supporting leg member.

5. A game apparatus as defined in claim 1 further 25 comprising a ball holder positioned below and attached to at least one of the tables.

6. A game apparatus as defined in claim 1 wherein the playing surfaces are elevated approximately 26 inches from ground, each table is approximately 6 feet by 12 feet in area, the tables are at least 4 feet apart, and the net is fine mesh and positioned between one-fourth to 2 inches below said surfaces.

30 7. A game apparatus as defined in claim 6 wherein each of the tables comprise two sections approximately 6 feet by 6 feet in area.

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