

High speed on the courts

If you thought badminton was lazily swatting at a shuttlecock, then ANGELA BENSTED suggests you had better think again.

Some people hear “badminton” and visualise ladies in long frocks and chaps in straw boaters, languidly batting at feathered shuttles as a picnic pastime.

“I remembered playing shuttlecock on the beach and I thought any fool can do that,” says Joy Iles, convenor of Brisbane’s Midweek Badminton Club, who was introduced to the sport by a neighbour many years ago.

She had played tennis before and didn’t expect this new game to be a challenge.

“But I was so bad,” Joy says, shaking her head. “I was the worst one out there. My neighbour told me to go home and practise in the kitchen.”

An Olympic sport since 1992, there were 46 shots volleyed in one 42-second rally during the mixed doubles semi-final at the 2000 Sydney games.

“That gives you some idea of the speed of the game at the top level,” Joy’s husband Bryan says.

Despite an average age of “retired” and a good smattering of knee and elbow braces among the players, it’s a very fit bunch on the Redlands PCYC courts on Wednesday mornings.

Some of the players slamming the shuttlecock around once played at high level, others have come to it later, perhaps because their children played or they were looking for a sport less demanding than tennis or squash.

Many are surprised to find it’s not an easy transition.

Badminton is trickier – and more aggressive – than it looks.

And while the court may be smaller, players don’t stand still.



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The sport takes its name from Badminton House, home of the English Duke of Beaufort, who introduced a version of the game, Poona, from India in 1873.

While the rules of the modern game developed in England, Asian countries now dominate the sport and the International Badminton Foundation is headquartered in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

“In China, everyone has a badminton racquet,” Joy says. “You’ll

see badminton on the TV there more than you’ll see tennis on the TV here.”

Despite her shaky introduction to the sport, Joy fell in love with the sport and went on to play at a high level, making it as far as A-grade. “I kept the good players honest,” she says.

Bryan, who started playing only to give Joy some hitting practise, served on the board of the Queensland Badminton Association for 20 years, 14 of them as president. He was awarded the Australian Sports Medal in 2000.



The Midweek Badminton Club (midweekbadminton.org) meets at Capalaba and Shailer Park.

With an average age of 70 and the oldest member just celebrating his 90th birthday, Joy reckons the club is ideal for retirees.

“We believe we can still move enough to get some fitness and camaraderie from a challenging morning of badminton,” she says.

✂ For information on other clubs in Brisbane visit brisbanebadminton.org



DID YOU KNOW?

- Badminton has clocked the fastest hit in sport, with a smash by Malaysian Tan Boon Heong reaching 421 kph to beat golf, tennis, soccer, baseball and hockey
- A shuttlecock, also known as a birdie, is made from 16 feathers from the left wing of a goose attached to a piece of goat skin covered cork.
- In competition, badminton players compete for about half the time of a tennis match, but can run twice as far and hit nearly twice as many shots.