

QC Pickleballer Aces Shoulder Surgery and Rehab



Pickleball is one of the fastest growing sports in the US. From teens to seniors, players will tell you it's fun, social, and fast-paced.

For retirees like Quad City Pickleball Club (QCPC) instructor Stephen Ebner, 73, it's a welcome part of his active retirement, even after a shoulder injury temporarily sidelined him.

"I retired about 10 years ago from teaching and coaching and a friend suggested we play," says Stephen. "I've been hooked ever since."

Stephen teaches intermediate and advanced players across five clinics, several days a week. But the same quick pivots, overhead shots, and bursts of footwork that make the game exciting can also strain aging joints.

After decades of coaching football and softball at Rock Island High School, Stephen's shoulder was already worn down.

"I couldn't lift my arm over my head," he recalls. "I hit a shot during pickleball and felt a tear."

He turned to **ORA Orthopedics**, where, Dr. Thomas VonGillern, ORA Hand Surgeon, confirmed the damage and recommended a reverse shoulder replacement.

ORA is the Quad Cities' largest and most comprehensive orthopedic provider proudly offering an integrated continuum of orthopedic care that includes orthopedic sub-specialty clinics, walk-in care at our Urgent OrthoCARE clinics, diagnostic imaging, bracing, physical therapy, and outpatient surgery.

In this procedure, the traditional shoulder anatomy is reversed: a metal ball is fixed to the shoulder socket, and a plastic cup is attached to the top of the humerus. This approach allows other muscles to take over the function of the damaged rotator cuff.

Stephen's surgery was performed as an outpatient procedure in partnership with the **UnityPoint Health – Trinity** surgical team—a factor in his smooth experience.

The hospital supports ORA surgeons with specialized nursing care, advanced pain-management protocols, and nationally recognized joint-replacement standards designed to reduce complications.

"Patients like Stephen benefit from coordinated care between our hospital's orthopedic team and community surgeons," says Erika Hayes, director of surgical services at UnityPoint Health – Trinity.

"That collaboration ensures safe surgery, effective pain control, and a path back to the activities they love."

Just four days after surgery, Stephen began a focused rehabilitation program designed to rebuild strength, restore mobility, and gradually reintroduce overhead movement.

His rehab emphasized stretching, strengthening, flexibility, and controlled progression—especially important given the agility and quick reaction time demanded by pickleball. Restoring balance, coordination, and confidence on the court were major milestones along the way.

After three months, Stephen was able to begin easing back into play. "At six months, I was at about 90 percent," he says. "Now, over a year later, I have no pain and no problems."

Today, he's back on the court. "The orthopedic team took great care of me, and the hospital made surgery seamless. At 73, I feel better on the days I move—and that keeps me going."

Learn More About How ORA Orthopedics and UnityPoint Health Are Strengthening Orthopedic Care: qcora.com/ora-and-unitypoint-partnership.

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