

IN THIS CHAPTER

- » Getting to know “the world’s fastest growing sport”
- » Discovering the rich (and rapidly growing) history of padel
- » Understanding how padel differs from other racquet sports

Chapter 1

Introducing Padel

The fact that you’re reading this right now suggests that, like tens of millions of other people around the world, the sport of padel has recently come onto your radar in a big way.

Perhaps it was via a wild video you saw on Instagram or YouTube showing a pro sprinting out the door of the court to keep a ball in play in front of a 500-year-old Baroque plaza in Spain in front of tens of thousands of fans. Or perhaps you became aware of it thanks to a padel-addicted friend who doesn’t seem capable of talking about anything else.

Or maybe you’ve seen all the pictures of padel-obsessed celebrities, such as David Beckham, Dwyane Wade, Lionel Messi, Jimmy Butler, Andy Murray, Eva Longoria, Cristiano Ronaldo, and Rafael Nadal (among many others), playing in Aspen, Beverly Hills, Mallorca, Miami, or the Hamptons.

Or, who knows? Maybe your local racquet club just put up some odd-looking courts surrounded by glass and wire that you can’t quite figure out the purpose of. (Don’t worry; if you read Chapter 2, it will all make perfect sense!)

Regardless, if you decided to pick up this book (or someone gave it to you as a gift), then you’re likely among the ever-growing group of “padel curious” people around the planet that I wrote it for.

For this reason, I dedicate this chapter to exploring what makes padel so special and why it's exploding in popularity everywhere from Australia to Azerbaijan, Belgium to Bali, Suriname to South Africa, and the United Kingdom to the United States.

Getting to Know Padel

What exactly is padel? Well, according to many enthusiasts (myself included), padel is the perfect combination of squash and tennis — yet much easier on the body than both!

Others describe it as the “new golf” given how many entrepreneurs and C-suite executives are picking it up and all the business deals that are reportedly taking place before, during, and after padel matches.

Meanwhile, players coming to padel from other racquet sports tend to see it as a more athletic (and complex) alternative to pickleball that's still fun and social, while also being great exercise. And to the thousands of investors and opportunists rushing to capitalize on it, for better or worse, it's simply, “the world's fastest growing sport.”

Of course, all of this makes sense given that padel

- » Is a racquet sport that combines elements of other racquet sports, such as tennis, squash, and platform tennis, among others
- » Uses many of the same scoring methods as tennis and virtually the same kind of ball (which I discuss more in depth in Chapters 3 and 4)
- » Is played on a court surrounded by walls (made of glass and metal mesh) that you can play shots off of, similar to squash, racquetball, or platform tennis (see Chapter 3 for more on the unique nature of a padel court)
- » Is primarily played as a doubles sport (where two teammates face off against two opponents), which tends to help make it a much more social game, similar to pickleball
- » Features a wide variety of unique rules, shots, and even expressions (which I cover in Chapters 3 and 15 respectively) that set it apart from any other racquet sport out there — and arguably make it more exciting and fun than any of them, too.

Comparing Padel to Other Racquet Sports



REMEMBER

One of the biggest attractions about padel for many current racquet sports enthusiasts and players is that it's similar enough to the sport they're coming from to feel familiar (thus making it easy to learn) but also different enough to present a real challenge (thus making it hard to master).

However, if you're not quite as in tune with racquet sports as someone like me, you may need a little bit more of an explanation as to these similarities and differences, which I cover here.

Padel versus tennis



REMEMBER

When it comes right down to it, padel is just a variation of tennis, which is why some people still refer to it as “padel tennis.” Because of all the similarities between the two sports, tennis players tend to be able to pick up padel quickly.

Among the main similarities between the two sports are the

- » **Courts:** As you can see in Figure 1-1, both feature a net that splits the court into two opposing sides and have a *service line* that you must stand behind when you serve to start a point. (See Chapters 3 and 7 for more specifics around the rules of serving.)
- » **Balls:** A padel ball is basically a slightly smaller, less inflated tennis ball, as I discuss further in Chapter 4.
- » **Scoring:** Padel scoring is virtually identical to that of tennis, except for a few notable differences that I cover in Chapter 3.

Meanwhile, the biggest differences between the two sports include the

- » **Courts:** A tennis court is significantly larger than a padel court. A padel court has side and back walls that you can play the ball off, unlike in tennis. (Be sure to see Chapter 2 for practically everything you need to know about a padel court.)
- » **Number of players on court:** Whereas padel is almost always played as a doubles sport (with four total players on court at any given time), tennis is more often played as a singles sport (with just two players squaring off) — though, doubles tennis is much more common to see than singles padel.
- » **Racquets:** Tennis racquets are longer, thinner, and strung, while padel racquets are shorter, thicker, and made of dense foam with holes in it. Padel racquets also feature a safety strap that you wear around your wrist that

prevents the racquet from hitting other players should it come out of your hand. (Chapter 4 covers what you need to know about padel gear.)

» **Strategy:** Unlike in tennis, serves and overheads aren't necessarily always used as offensive weapons in padel. (See Chapters 6 and 7 for more on these differences.) And whereas, in tennis, a lob is almost always a desperate defensive shot of last resort, more often than not in padel, lobs are instead tactical transition shots that enable the team who hits them to quickly go on offense. (See Chapter 9 for what you need to know about lobbing in padel.)

» **Amount of time playing versus picking up balls:** One aspect many people love about padel (especially compared to tennis) is that thanks to the smaller court size and walls, you tend to spend far more time playing actual points in padel than you do walking all over the place picking up balls in between points (as you tend to in tennis).

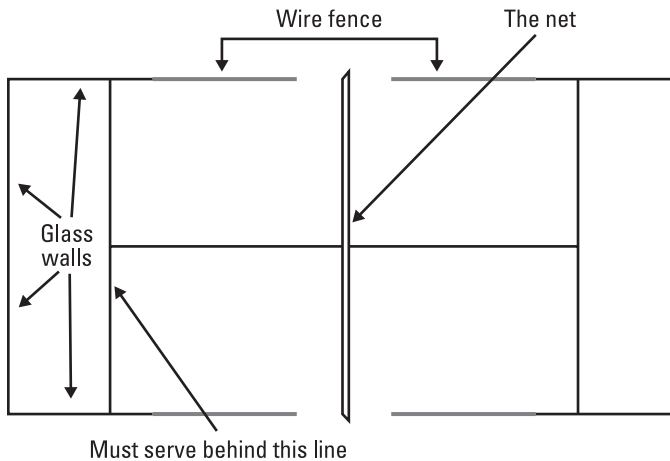
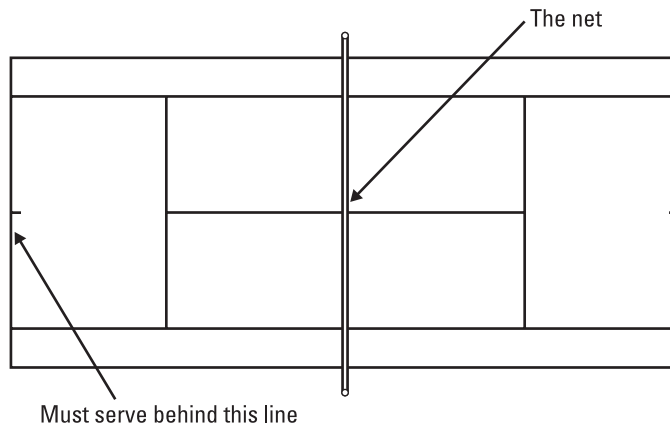


FIGURE 1-1:
Comparing and contrasting tennis and padel courts.

Padel versus squash/racquetball



REMEMBER

In both padel and squash/racquetball, you have

- » **Side and back walls:** Similar to squash or racquetball, in padel, you can play the ball off these walls in both an offensive and defensive manner, which allows points to go on much longer than if the court wasn't enclosed.
- » **More social doubles versions of the sport:** While padel is almost always played as a doubles sport, you can also play (often more social) doubles versions of both squash and racquetball, too.
- » **Similar equipment:** While each of these three sports has its own unique racquets and balls, for the most part, nearly all the other gear you need to play is quite similar. (See Chapter 4 for more on padel gear.)

On the flipside, some notable differences between padel and squash/racquetball:

- » **Racquets:** Padel is played with a short, thick racquet made of dense foam with holes in it as opposed to squash or racquetball racquets, which both have strings. In terms of shape and size, a racquetball racquet is somewhat similar to that of a padel racquet, whereas squash racquets are long and skinny (see Figure 1-2).

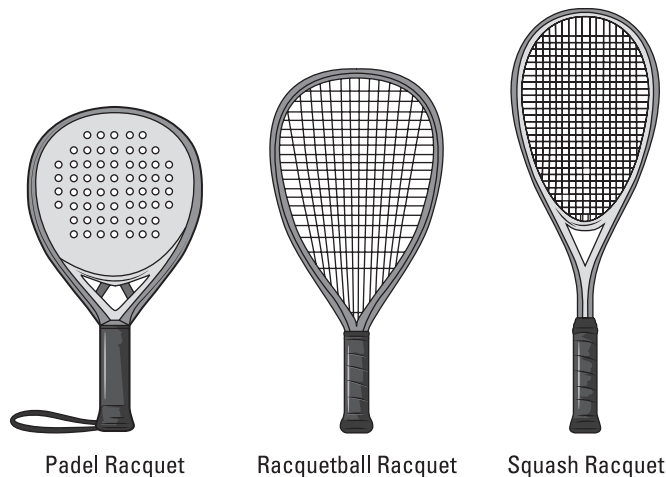


FIGURE 1-2: A padel racquet compared to a racquetball racquet compared to a squash racquet.

- » **Balls:** While padel balls and racquetballs are similar in size, racquetballs are made entirely of rubber with no felt covering and are much bouncier than padel balls. Meanwhile, squash balls are only a small fraction of the size of padel balls and either much denser and livelier (for hardball squash) or squishy and dead (for softball squash).
- » **Scoring:** Padel scoring is virtually identical to tennis with a few key exceptions. However, padel and squash/racquetball scoring is much different, with games generally being played to 9, 11, or 15 points in those depending on whether its singles or doubles and where in the world you find yourself playing.
- » **Playing off the front wall (versus over a net):** Unlike in squash or racquetball, where opponents play together on the same side of the court and take turns hitting balls to one another off the front wall, padel is instead similar to sports like tennis or pickleball, where opponents play on opposite sides of the court and hit balls back and forth to one another over a net.
- » **Indoor versus outdoor courts:** With a few notable exceptions (including outdoor courts made of steel in New York City and Chicago), nearly every squash or racquetball court you come across is indoors — as opposed to padel courts, which you find both indoors and outdoors depending on the climate.

Padel versus pickleball

In many places (including in the United States), people who aren't familiar with racquet sports tend to confuse padel and pickleball (or just assume they are one and the same).



REMEMBER

While this confusion may seem outlandish to anyone who actually plays either one, it's understandable given the similarities between the two sports. After all, they are both

- » **Exploding in popularity in new markets:** In the United States, pickleball has been all the rage over the past decade or so, with tens of millions of people picking up the game. Now, padel is starting to follow closely in its footsteps. Meanwhile, the opposite has been true in the United Kingdom, parts of Europe, and Asia, where padel exploded in popularity first and now pickleball is starting to take off as well.
- » **Extremely social sports:** A large part of the reason both pickleball and padel took off when they did was due to the fallout from the COVID-19 pandemic and people's desire to connect with friends, family, and even strangers in fun, meaningful, and positive ways. While you can play singles pickleball or padel, both sports are almost always played in doubles format, which tends to make them more social in nature.

- » **Sports with nets and balls:** Like tennis (but unlike squash or racquetball), in both pickleball and padel, you must hit a ball over the net to your opponent to keep the point going.
- » **Celebrity magnets:** In recent years, Leonardo DiCaprio, Bill Gates, Ellen DeGeneres, Andre Agassi, John McEnroe, Drew Brees, Tom Brady, Rob Gronkowski, and even Taylor Swift have gotten heavily involved in pickleball, both as players and investors/influencers. Meanwhile, on the padel side of things, everyone from David Beckham to Eva Longoria and Lionel Messi to Jimmy Butler is now obsessed with the sport and playing regularly.
- » **Tennis threat:** While many current and former tennis players are flocking to both pickleball and padel, others are sounding the alarm that these sports are a real threat to tennis as more and more tennis courts (especially in the United States) get converted to pickleball or padel courts.

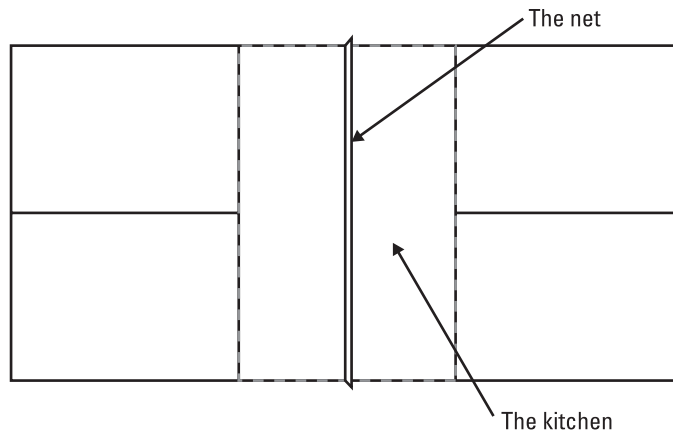


REMEMBER

While pickleball and padel share some common traits, other aspects of the two sports are strikingly different, including

- » **The racquets and balls:** As I discuss more in Chapter 4, padel is played with a thick foam racquet and what is basically a slightly smaller, less pressurized tennis ball. Meanwhile, pickleball is played with a very light, thin paddle and a hard plastic ball with holes in it, somewhat similar in size and appearance to a whiffleball. Padel racquets also feature a safety strap that you wear around your wrist that prevents the racquet from hitting other players should it come out of your hand.
- » **No walls in pickleball:** Unlike padel, which you play in a court surrounded by glass and steel fencing, pickleball isn't played in an enclosed court. Much like with tennis, because pickleball courts are open, you often have to spend much of your time on court chasing down balls between points.
- » **No kitchen in padel:** One of the key features of a pickleball court, as you can see in Figure 1-3, is that there is an area around the net known as *the kitchen* that you're not allowed to step into to play a ball out of the air. The kitchen prevents players from just standing on top of the net and slamming down any shot their opponent hits. However, in padel, no such area exists.
- » **Game versus sport:** While I generally try to avoid getting sucked into this debate, some avid padel players and fans argue that while padel is a sport that requires athleticism and fitness, pickleball is merely a game that can be played by practically anyone (which is why it's so popular with seniors). Granted, I agree that you can almost always expect a far better workout playing padel, but I'm also the first to admit I've seen some very athletic people playing pickleball at an incredibly high level. So, at the end of the day, I'd say whether pickleball is a game or sport depends largely on the players playing it.

FIGURE 1-3:
Unlike padel courts, pickleball courts feature a kitchen or no-volley zone near the net.



- » **Rules:** In addition to scoring, pickleball and padel have a number of significant rule differences, perhaps the biggest being those surrounding the kitchen and the fact that the serving team must let their opponents' return bounce in the court before hitting their third shot — which is not true in padel.
- » **Scoring:** When it comes to keeping score, padel and pickleball are two very different beasts. In pickleball, three numbers are called out before each point to indicate the score and which player is serving, with games typically being played to 11 and points only being able to be won by the serving team. Meanwhile, padel closely mimics tennis scoring, and you can win points regardless of whether you're on the team that is serving or returning. (Check out Chapter 3 for more on scoring in padel.)
- » **Strategy:** While pickleball relies heavily on dinking and fast-paced volley exchanges where all four people are at the net, padel is much more of a game of attack and defend, where (unlike in pickleball) lobs are used constantly to pull your opponents off the net and allow you and your partner to take it.

Padel versus platform tennis

As I discuss in more detail in the “Addressing the Biggest Controversy in Padel: How to Pronounce It” section later in this chapter, a whole lot of confusion (and even a little bit of contention) exists over how to properly pronounce padel here in the United States (and occasionally in some parts of Canada, too).



REMEMBER

This misunderstanding primarily stems from the fact that the cold weather, wintertime sport of platform tennis is very popular in small pockets of North America (especially New England and the Great Lakes region) and is sometimes colloquially referred to as *paddle* or even *paddle tennis* by those who play it, despite the official name of the sport being platform tennis since 1950.

Beyond the name, the two sports share some other similar characteristics in that they are played:

- » **On enclosed courts:** When coming up with the idea for padel, the sport's inventor, Enrique Corcuera, borrowed several key concepts from platform tennis, including that the court would be enclosed on all sides (as you can see in Figure 1-4) — both to prevent players from having to chase balls down and to increase the excitement and complexity of the game.



R&D Grafiska/Adobe Stock Photos



FIGURE 1-4:
A padel court
compared to a
platform-
tennis court.

robert lerich/Adobe Stock Photos

- » **With nets and balls:** Like tennis and pickleball (but unlike squash or racquetball), in both platform tennis and padel, you must hit a ball over the net to your opponent to keep the point going.
- » **Almost exclusively as a doubles sport:** Unlike with tennis or squash, where the singles game is more common than doubles, in both platform tennis and padel, playing doubles is much more common — which also tends to make both of these sports more social as well.



REMEMBER

However, despite these common traits, plenty of key differences set platform tennis and padel apart:

- » **Climate considerations:** Padel is played in virtually all climates around the world, with most courts in colder climates being indoors. Platform tennis, on the other hand, is generally considered to be a cold-weather game that's only played during the winter months (hence why it's popular in certain regions of the United States, including the Great Lakes and New England).
- » **Court composition:** One of the main reasons platform tennis is only played in winter months is that the courts are generally just raised, slatted aluminum platforms with heaters placed underneath to melt snow off the courts. Padel courts are instead designed for play in all seasons and generally made of little more than glass, steel, and turf (as you can read more about in the next chapter).
- » **Racquets and balls:** While padel racquets and platform tennis paddles may look similar to someone who's not familiar with these two sports, platform tennis paddles are thinner and more rigid than padel racquets which are thicker and have a bit more give (due to their foam cores). Meanwhile, whereas padel is played with a slightly smaller, less pressurized tennis ball, platform tennis is instead played with a solid rubber ball designed to stay bouncy even in cold temperatures.
- » **Rules regarding the walls:** Although padel and platform tennis courts are similar in that they're surrounded by walls (made of glass and steel fencing in padel and a variation of chicken wire in platform tennis), the rules are somewhat different when it comes to how the walls factor into gameplay. Similar to padel, in platform tennis, if your opponents hit a shot that hits the floor and then the wall, the ball is still in play, and you can hit it after it comes off the wall. However, unlike in padel, you can't hit a ball off your own walls in platform tennis to keep the point going. (Be sure to see Chapters 3 and 6 for more on how and when to play balls off the glass in padel).
- » **Serving:** Unlike in padel where you get two serves and both must be underhand, in platform tennis, you get only one serve, which is usually hit overhand (although you're allowed to hit an underhand serve, if you choose).

Exploring Padel's Past, Present, and Future

Whatever padel ends up being to you, it's most definitely not a new racquet sport. In fact, padel has a half-century-plus history that's every bit as unique and interesting as the game itself, much of which many people have little to know awareness about, as I've come to discover first-hand.

You see, when not working on this book or playing padel, I spend a lot of time writing about the sport for *Padel Nation*, which is an American padel-focused website I founded (www.padelnation.io). Recently, after posting an article on social media, someone (who's obviously less infatuated with racquet sports than I am) responded, "How many more new racket sports do we really need? I wouldn't have imagined there's yet another way to hit a ball with a paddle/stick/whatever."

To be fair, an awful lot of racquet sports are played around the world, these days. So, with all the other racquet sports out there, what makes padel so special and worthy of your time and interest?

Well, beyond padel being about as much fun as you can possibly have playing a racquet sport, I'd argue what truly sets it apart is its unique history combined with the massive growth that is shaping its present and future, which I delve into in the following sections.

(Of course, if you're the kind of person who just wants to get out there and play padel without knowing anything about all the various events, forces, and personalities that have shaped it into such a unique sport, you can always just skip ahead to Chapter 3.)

Digging into a truly global growth phenomenon

While it's debatable whether padel being "the world's fastest growing sport" is more of a hard-and-fast fact or just an optimistic marketing tagline, the explosive growth of the sport across the world is undeniable.

In fact, according to the *World Padel Report 2025* from the sport's official international governing body, the International Padel Federation (known colloquially as FIP), padel is now played by more than 35 million players worldwide, with over 77,000 total padel courts spread across more than 24,600 clubs and facilities in over 150 countries.

Yet, as you can see in Figure 1-5, despite the torrid growth of padel in new markets like the United States and the United Kingdom (which both now have well over 1,000 courts), they aren't anywhere close to being among the top ten padel markets in the world — for now, anyway.

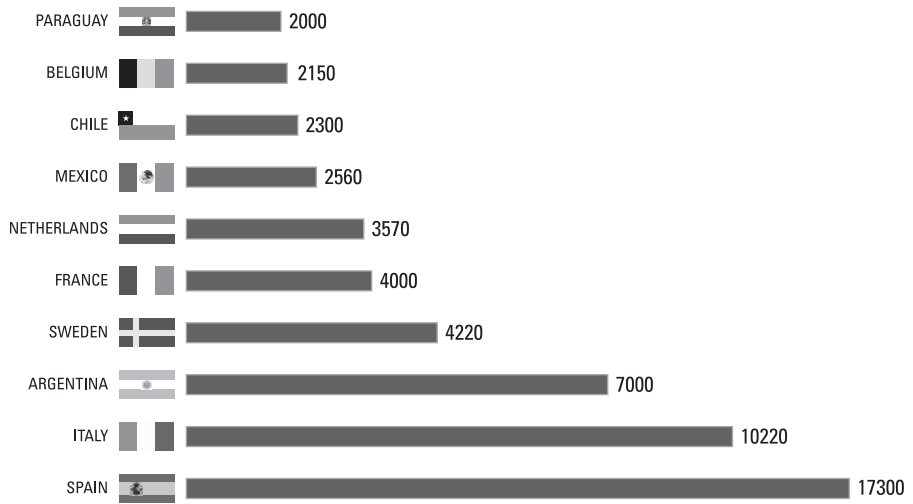


FIGURE 1-5:
The top ten biggest padel countries by court count.

Source: FIP World Padel Report 2025.

What's more, as you can also see in Figure 1-5, even though padel is now booming in places such as Southeast Asia, North America, Australia and New Zealand, the Middle East, and some parts of Africa, not a single country outside of Europe or Latin America is currently on this list.

After discovering a bit more about padel's origin story, which I cover in the following sections, this European and Latin American dominance will make more sense.

From Mexico with love (scoring)



REMEMBER

While many people may consider padel to be a new sport in some regions of the world (including in the United States), as far as sports go, it's anything but — with its origins dating all the way back to the late 1960s in the hills high above the cerulean seas of Acapulco, Mexico.

At the time, the Las Brisas neighborhood of Acapulco was a famed retreat for Hollywood celebrities, industrial magnates, and global jetsetters, including a wealthy Mexican businessman by the name of Enrique Corcuera who had a holiday home there with his wife Viviana, an Argentine model who was crowned Miss Argentina in 1964.



REMEMBER

As the ever-growing legend goes, Corcuera was an avid racquet sports player who didn't quite have enough room at his Las Brisas estate to build a full-sized tennis court, so he instead built a smaller 10-meter × 20-meter court (see Chapter 2) for a variation of tennis that wound up eventually morphing into modern-day padel.

But there's actually a little bit more to the story. . . .

As Viviana Corcuera told padel historian Minter Dial on his *Joy of Padel* podcast, her husband Enrique spent much of his childhood in France and England, where he learned to play a Basque ball game known as pelota paleta.

While he loved the game itself, the aspect he hated was the fact the game featured only a single front wall (which you use your hand to hit a ball off, a bit like you do in handball). This lack of side and back walls meant that you were forced to spend much of your time chasing balls that had bounced off court into the bushes.

So, according to her, when it came to this new sport, he came up with the idea for walls before anything else and told her, “Viviana, let's make a [game with a] closed court, because I'm not going to go chasing the balls anymore.”

And given that the original padel court was on a cliffside hundreds of feet above the ocean, this wound up being quite a prescient decision!

According to his son (who is also named Enrique), Corcuera was further inspired by other games and sports where walls factored into play. This included a derivative of pelota paleta known as fronton that he played on a modified court he had built at a sugar cane farm he owned in Mexico, as well as the North American game of platform tennis (which some people colloquially call paddle tennis or just paddle — hence the confusion about how to pronounce padel in the United States and Canada, which I delve into later in this chapter).



REMEMBER

As it turned out, the walls gave this new sport (which in its earliest days was originally known as Tennis Corcuera or Paddle Corcuera and played with small, thin wooden racquets meant for a children's game known as paddle) an added dynamic that made it far more interesting to play than regular tennis — so much so, that it began attracting notable personalities from across the globe to the Corcuera's hillside court, including the likes of

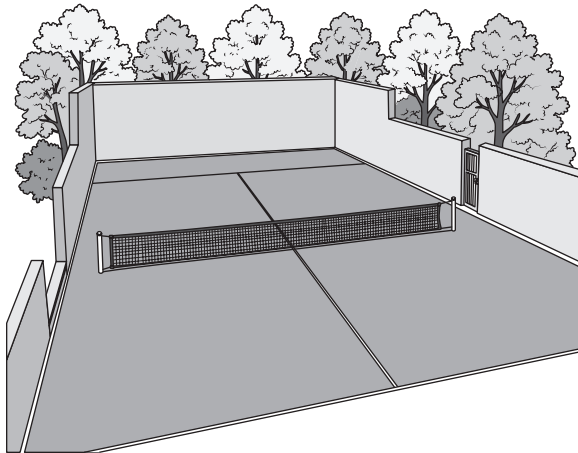
- » The parents of Minter Dial, whose padel podcast I mentioned earlier in this section and who played on this original court as a child.
- » The parents of Nalle Grinda, who would go on to be a French tennis and padel pro before eventually founding a brand of padel clubs known as PadelX, with locations in downtown Miami and Boca Raton, Florida.

- »» Former United States Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, who was a regular on the court and was known for always wanting to play bright and early at 8 a.m. despite all his fellow players routinely staying out at Acapulco's night clubs until just a few hours prior.
- »» Prince Alfonso of Hohenlohe-Langenburg, a Spanish-born businessman and European royal who spent his summer holidays at Corcuera's home in Las Brisas and later built padel courts at the Marbella Club Hotel on the famed Costa del Sol in southern Spain (which I cover in the next section).
- »» Ignacio Soto Borja, who played a crucial role in helping to develop and formalize the rules of padel, grow awareness and acceptance of the sport across Mexico, and chronicle the history of the game (both through the padel museum he runs in Mexico City and his book "La Historia Oficial del Pádel" (The Official History of Padel).

Granted, with all the developments that have taken place in padel over the past half-century, many modern players would likely be shocked by the look of the original court that Corcuera built and the sport he, his wife, and his friends developed around it. For example:

- »» As I discuss more in Chapter 2, whereas nearly all padel courts today feature side and back walls made of glass and steel fencing, the walls of many early courts (including Corcuera's original Acapulco court) were instead made largely of concrete, as you can see in Figure 1-6.

FIGURE 1-6: Many early padel courts (including the original Corcuera court in Acapulco) featured concrete walls and floors, unlike modern courts which feature glass and wire mesh walls and are covered in turf.



- » As you can read more about in Chapter 4, padel racquets have evolved from flimsy, thin paddles made of wood, plastic, and other composites to thick, sturdy racquets made from high-tech materials, including carbon fiber, Kevlar, and EVA foam among other things.
- » Believe it or not, according to several members of the Corcuera family, the rules of padel weren't officially solidified for over a decade after the sport's creation. And, perhaps not surprisingly, the rules of the sport that were played on that original court (which included provisions for balls hitting the various tree branches that hung down over the court) have changed significantly over the years along with the courts and equipment.

The spread to Argentina, Spain, and beyond

While it's clear that people loved to travel from all over the world to visit the Corcueras in Acapulco and play padel on their court, over time, these visitors decided to bring the sport with them back to their respective countries.

The two most notable of these padel super spreaders were Prince Alfonso of Hohenlohe-Langenburg (which, believe it or not, is a shortened version of his given name and title) and an Argentine named Julio Menditeguy.

After spending numerous summer holidays in Acapulco and falling in love with the game the Corcueras had created, Spanish businessman Prince Alfonso decided to build two courts at the legendary Marbella Club Hotel on the famed Costa del Sol in Spain in 1974 — thus sparking Spain's growing obsession with the sport ever since and establishing padel as a status sport initially played only by Spain's elite.

Meanwhile, one of Prince Alfonso's friends and Marbella Club members, Julio Menditeguy, loved the game so much from the first time he set foot on court that he decided to bring the sport back to Argentina with him in 1975, where he was instrumental in helping establish padel at Club Tortugas, Mar del Plata Ocean Club, and Tedy Pini's Hotel among other venues.

Over the next 10 to 15 years, padel slowly began to catch on and then eventually take off in both Spain and Argentina, while also slowly spreading to countries, such as Brazil and Uruguay.

Other notable developments in the early decades of padel include

- » The world's first national padel association (the Asociación Padel Argentino) being founded in 1988

- »» The first-ever international competition between Spain and Argentina taking place that same year in Mar del Plata, Argentina
- »» The Baigts brothers, who were former rugby players from Club Paris Université, first bringing the sport to France via the Fédération Française de Padel in 1989, with padel receiving official recognition from the French Ministry of Sport in 1992
- »» Argentine Padel coach Jorge Galeotti developing the first detachable and transportable glass court (known as The Crystal Palace) in 1989, which proved pivotal to the sport's international expansion and perception as a spectator sport
- »» The International Padel Federation (FIP) being founded in Madrid by the Argentine, Spanish, and Uruguayan padel associations on July 12, 1991
- »» A group of Argentine and Italian padel enthusiasts, including Martin Calvelo, Edoardo Caoduro, and future FIP President Daniel Patti, combining forces both to launch the first Italian Padel Federation (known as the Federazione Italiana Gioco Padel) and hold Italy's first-ever padel exhibition in Bologna in 1991
- »» FIP establishing a biennial World Padel Championship, with the first edition being held in Madrid and Seville, Spain in 1992 (which you can read much more about in Chapter 16)

Padel's long sleeping giant: North America

As a bona fide racquet sports nerd, I'd love nothing more than to delve into padel's unique and specific history in every country it's currently played in. However, there are only so many pages allotted for this chapter and hours in the day (and my editors wanted me to cut this section entirely!), so for now I must stick to what I know about padel in the United States and their neighbors to the north, Canada.



REMEMBER

Many of my padel playing friends who have just discovered the sport recently are shocked when I tell them that padel first came to the United States and Canada in the early 1990s in Houston, Texas and Calgary, Alberta.

As I've learned from conversations with United States padel pioneer, Mike May (who served as the president of the United States Padel Association for 21 years and represented Team USA in 13 world padel championships), the first court in the United States was built at The Houstonian Club in Houston, TX, in early 1994.



TECHNICAL
STUFF

The year prior, Argentine padel enthusiast Felipe Arnold and Houston businessman Ed Thompson (who had been a former Mr. Texas bodybuilder) combined forces to try to bring padel to the United States after seeing its soaring popularity in Argentina.

As part of this push, they decided to field the first-ever United States padel team to compete in the 1993 Tri-National Cup in Acapulco, Mexico between the United States, Canada, and Mexico.

The only problem was that the team they put together (which you can see in the photos in Figure 1-7) included top tennis pros from around the Houston area, such as Mike May, had never played padel.



FIGURE 1-7:
The first-ever
Team USA
competing at the
Tri-National Padel
Cup in Acapulco,
Mexico in 1993.

Courtesy of Mike May

As May remembers it: “We trained at the Villa Vera resort until 2 a.m. in the morning to be ready for our television debut for the Tri-National Cup despite never having seen a padel court before.”

After finishing the Tri-National Cup, Arnold and Thompson imported the very same glass and steel-constructed padel court that was used on the beaches of the Hotel Acapulco Plaza to Houston. And in the spring of 1994, they erected it on the front lawn of The Houstonian Club where Team USA competed once again against Mexico in an exhibition to officially launch padel in the United States.

This exhibition court was eventually replaced by two permanent courts at The Houstonian Club (which are pictured in Figure 1-8) as the sport grew in popularity in the area and began attracting players from around the world including

Viviana Corcuera and Sandra di Portanova (both pictured in Figure 1-8), a Baroness and philanthropist who actually introduced *padel* to the legendary Spanish opera singer Placido Domingo.



FIGURE 1-8:
The first-ever permanent *padel* courts in the United States at the Houstonian Club.

Courtesy of Mike May

In 1995, another Houston-area club known as Paddle Recreation opened. That same year private and semi-private courts were built in Martha’s Vineyard, Massachusetts, by a family who were obviously fans of the sport, and in Chattanooga, Tennessee, by a group of well-heeled racquet sports enthusiasts who had been traveling around the world to play and decided to finally just build their own court.

However, before any of this happened in the United States, Bill Stamile — a Canadian with Argentine roots — first introduced the sport to Canada in 1991 before going on to establish the country’s first governing body for the sport and building its first temporary court, along with his brother Angelo, in Calgary in 1992 (which you can see in the photo in Figure 1-9).

The sport proved to be so successful out of the gate in Calgary that Stamile and his brother then went on to spearhead a campaign to bring two permanent courts to a local racquet and health club the next year.

FIGURE 1-9:
Canada's
first-ever padel
court was built in
Calgary, Alberta,
in 1992.



Courtesy of Bill Stamile

Stamile was also instrumental in training and coaching the first Canadian National Padel Team, which took part in the 1994 World Padel Championships in Argentina, as well as hosting the event 14 years later in Calgary in 2008 (with 16 countries and more than 300 athletes and coaches represented).

In 2010, former French tennis and padel pro, Nalle Grinda, who grew up playing on the original Corcuera court in Acapulco, moved from France to Miami, only to discover no padel courts in the area.

But then shortly thereafter, he met an Argentine named Adrian Beltramino, who wanted to open a court in Miami Gardens. Grinda helped him get that project off the ground before going on to help build Miami's second court at the home of Wayne Boich, who is now a leading figure in the U.S. padel world and the founder of the ultra-luxe Reserve Padel clubs in Florida and New York.

As Grinda told me in an interview for an article I wrote in 2024: "That's where the game really picked up. We had a group called 'the mafia.' We started organizing some tournaments and flying over some pros from Europe. Then we started doing these Pro-Ams with them that really brought a lot of attention to the game in Miami. And that's what generated the first few clubs opening around the city."

Meanwhile, several more padel courts and clubs also opened around South Florida and the greater Houston area in the early 2010s. The first-ever padel courts in New York (both at private residences) went up around the same time as well.

In 2011, South End Racquet Club added two outdoor padel courts to its facility in Torrance, California, just south of Los Angeles (which were the first in the state of California), while Sunset Padel (which is now known as The Padel Courts) opened a two-court outdoor facility in Hollywood in 1993 and hosted the first-ever California Cup that December.

Then, in 2016, Wynwood Padel Club became the first major padel club to open in Miami (and the entire United States) with eight outdoor courts.

The following year, Mike May opened his own two-court club in Houston, known as iPadel, and before long, the first-ever pop-up padel courts opened outside Philadelphia at a facility called PADELphia.

The latter half of the 2010s into early 2020 also saw new courts and clubs open in places around the United States, including

- » Las Vegas, Nevada (formerly RRA, now P1 Padel)
- » Oklahoma City, Oklahoma (at the Greens Country Club)
- » Dallas, Texas (at T Bar M Racquet Club)
- » Key Biscayne, Florida (at The Cliff Drysdale Tennis Center at the Ritz Carlton)
- » Zephyrhills, Florida (formerly Sarah Vande Berg Tennis Center, now the Mouratoglou Academy)

Even so, prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the entire United States was only home to a few dozen total padel courts, which makes the fact that six years later, there are well over a thousand (with dozens more opening each month or sometimes each week) even more impressive — and for the reasons I discuss in the next section, also a bit worrisome.

Stockholm syndrome



WARNING

While the padel world is largely dominated by Spanish-speaking countries, Sweden has been one notable exception — and both the sport's biggest (and briefest) success story and cautionary tale.

Although official records are scant, it's believed the first padel court in Sweden was a homemade version built by a carpenter in 1998 who discovered the sport on a trip to Spain.

For the next decade and a half, there was little talk of the sport in this Nordic country until a handful of notable Swedish pro athletes and celebrities including Jonas Björkman (a former pro tennis star), Måns Zelmerlöw (a popular Swedish musician), Peter Forsberg (a Stanley Cup champion hockey player), and Zlatan Ibrahimovic (a Swedish soccer legend) began promoting the sport and investing in clubs around the country.



WARNING

With these celebrity endorsements, the sport began to take off in the latter half of the 2010s. The COVID-19 pandemic only poured gasoline on the fire, sending the total court count across the country soaring from just a few hundred in 2018 to well over 5,000 in 2022 by some estimates, despite Sweden having a population of only 10 million.

Before long, clubs that had only invested in building courts rather than community largely sat empty for most of the day and soaring energy prices put enormous financial strain on nearly all clubs in Sweden given that they were virtually all indoors and climate controlled.

In 2023, the internationally renowned financial magazine, *Bloomberg* published an article entitled “Sweden Holds Grim Warning for the \$4 Billion Padel Craze.” Meanwhile another exposé on padel’s collapse in Sweden from *The Straits Times* reported that

- » Ninety padel-related companies filed for bankruptcy that year alone.
- » Leading club operator We Are Padel closed around 50 of its clubs in Sweden in 2023, leaving only 13 after its owners recorded a 716 million Swedish kronor (or \$87.2 million) loss in 2022.
- » Thousands of courts were being shuttered after operators were hit by “a triple whammy of ballooning competition, surging inflation, and waning interest from a middle class whose appetite for the sport previously seemed insatiable.”

Granted, many of Sweden’s biggest padel proponents argue that it was more of a much-needed correction than an outright collapse. And given that Sweden’s padel market seems to have stabilized and the country still has the fourth most courts of any country in the world, they’re likely right.



REMEMBER

Nonetheless, Sweden’s great boom and bust padel experience shouldn’t be ignored by operators or investors in all the other countries around the world where padel is starting to explode.

Navigating padel's final frontiers



The padel world is currently basically divided into countries and regions where the game is already mainstream and has been played for decades (especially in South America and Europe) and places where the sport is just starting to take off or still virtually unheard of (such as North America, Asia, Africa, the Middle East, and Australia/New Zealand).

In fact, whereas Spain now has well over 17,000 padel courts and 6.2 million regular players (according to the *World Padel Report 2025* from FIP), South Korea only has an estimated 10 courts and 2,000 players — despite having a very similar sized population.

Meanwhile, South Africa — which also has a population roughly equivalent to that of Spain or South Korea — is experiencing a padel boom with an estimated 100,000 players now playing on more than 1,000 courts spread across the country.

Other smaller countries with a surprisingly large number of padel players and courts include

- » **The Netherlands:** With an estimated 3,500 plus courts (sixth most of any country), this country has more than 600,000 players despite only being the world's 69th most populous country.
- » **Paraguay:** Landlocked and only the world's 112th largest country by population, this South American nation is the world's tenth biggest padel market with an estimated 2,000 courts and half a million players.
- » **Sweden:** Even though it only ranks number 88 in terms of most populous countries, Sweden is still home to an incredible 4,200-plus courts (despite the massive padel market contraction I discussed in the previous "Stockholm syndrome" section) and 700,000 players.

As surprising as those figures may be, perhaps even more shocking are the numbers relating to large countries where padel is just now starting to catch on:

- » **Brazil,** a country with a relatively large playing population of 500,000 yet only about 1,000 total courts spread across the world's fifth largest country by size and seventh largest by population
- » **China,** which, despite being the world's second most populous country, only currently has an estimated 200 or so padel courts and 60,000 amateur players
- » **Indonesia,** which is the world's fourth most populated country, yet still home to only an estimated 350 courts spread across 100 clubs (including one of the ten must-visit padel clubs around the world that I call out in Chapter 21)

- » **Japan**, with only roughly 50 courts and 40,000 players despite being the world's 11th most populous country
- » **The United States**, where padel is undeniably starting to take off, yet there are still not even 1,500 total courts and only about 250,000 people reportedly play (compared to an estimated 25 million-plus that play pickleball)



TECHNICAL
STUFF

To get some sense of just how big padel could potentially get in the United States alone, consider the fact that in France (which is only the fifth largest padel market by number of courts), there is roughly one padel court for every 16,200 residents. And were you to extrapolate that number out for the United States population, it would mean you could expect that the United States may one day have more than 21,000 total courts.

Meanwhile, were padel to become as popular as it is in Italy (where there is one court for roughly every 5,800 residents), you could expect the United States to one day have nearly 60,000 courts. So, it's little wonder that so many entrepreneurs and opportunists are flooding into the United States padel industry at the moment.



REMEMBER

Beyond the United States, the *World Padel Report 2025* cites France, Germany, Ireland, Israel, Lebanon, Mexico, Morocco, Pakistan, Portugal, South Africa, Switzerland, Thailand, Tunisia and the United Kingdom as being among the countries where padel is growing fastest.

FIP further lists countries including Algeria, Angola, Bolivia, Canada, China, Colombia, Croatia, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Ghana, India, Ivory Coast, Kenya, Mauritius, Panama, the Philippines, Poland, Romania, Senegal, and Venezuela as being the next tier of emerging padel nations.



TIP

If you're curious to read more about padel's growth around the world, you access the full 108-page *World Padel Report 2025* on the International Padel Federation's website at www.padel.fip.com.

Understanding What Makes Padel So Popular

Millions of people around the world are now obsessed with padel. But until you've played, it may be hard to understand exactly why. So, here are a few main reasons padel addicts often give for why they love the sport so much:

- » **"Easy to learn, but hard to master":** I hear this phrase daily (if not more) from people in the padel community — and it's 100-percent true. Padel is

simple enough that just about anyone with a little athleticism, enthusiasm, and eye-hand coordination can have fun playing it the very first time they step on court. But, thanks in large part to the unique setup of the court and rules that stem from it (which I cover in Chapters 2 and 3), it takes most players years to truly master it.

- » **An incredibly social sport:** In a post-COVID world where so many people are seeking meaningful social connections with friends, families, and strangers alike, padel is the perfect before- or after-work activity. That's especially true given that it's almost always played as a doubles sport (where four people share the court at the same time), and people tend to stick around after matches to share coffees, beers, meals, and laughs.
- » **Easier on the body than squash or tennis:** While plenty of young people are flocking to padel, many players who are starting to pick up the game are long-time tennis or squash players who still love playing those sports but find them to be too grueling to play beyond a certain age. (I know the feeling!) So, padel is the perfect alternative, especially because it's basically a combination of squash and tennis that provides plenty of exercise but isn't quite as hard on the body.
- » **An escape from the digital world:** With so much of our lives being dominated by screens (and now increasingly artificial intelligence, or AI), many people are craving activities that give them a break from technology, however brief. And while technology certainly plays a role in padel — be it via court booking apps or on-court AI-enhanced video recording — by and large, padel is a purely “analog” experience (as I discuss more in Chapter 19).
- » **Visually stunning:** Whether it's the look of the glass walls and steel fences surrounding the courts, the brightly colored turf padel is played on, or the sun-drenched pros running outside the court to make miraculous gets, padel is undeniably a feast for the eyes. And in a world where people spend so much time watching videos on Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube, it seems as though it were almost custom made for our hyper-visual era.

Getting a Handle on the Basics of the Game

In this book, I delve into all the specifics you need to know to understand, play, and enjoy the sport of padel.



REMEMBER

But for now, here are a few basics to keep in mind about the

- » **Court:** Much like with tennis or pickleball, a padel court is divided into two sides by a net, which you must hit the ball over to keep the point going. (See Chapter 2 for more about all the specifics of a padel court.) However, unlike with tennis or pickleball, the court is surrounded by walls (made of glass and steel fencing) that you can play the ball off. Furthermore, modern padel courts all feature a turf playing surface.
- » **Gear:** While the equipment you use for padel is similar to what you find in most other racquet sports, padel racquets are unique from any other sport, as I discuss in Chapter 4. Meanwhile, padel balls look and feel almost identical to tennis balls. However, they're slightly smaller and less pressurized.
- » **Rules:** Many people describe padel as being a “perfect cross between squash and tennis.” And while some of this sentiment certainly has to do with the design of the court, much of it also has to do with the fact that the rules largely revolve around hitting the ball over the net (as you do in tennis) and being able to play the ball off the side or back walls (as you do in squash) — both of which I discuss in more depth in Chapter 3.
- » **Scoring:** Padel scoring is almost identical to that of tennis with players trying to earn enough points to win a game, enough games to win a set, and enough sets to win the match. Like tennis, padel also employs *love scoring* (with individual games following a Love, 15, 30, 40 scoring progression), though there are some unique scoring quirks to padel, such as the golden point and star point, which I also cover in Chapter 3.
- » **Strategy:** As I discuss throughout this book (and especially in Chapters 9, 11, and 19), padel is a sport that tends to reward patience and perseverance over brute power. As such, you rarely see padel players hitting aces off their serves, and overheads are played defensively as often as they are offensively. What's more, unlike in tennis or pickleball, the lob is one of the most effective and important shots you hit in padel. (Be sure to see Chapter 11 for a deep-dive on winning strategies.)

Addressing the Biggest Controversy in Padel: How to Pronounce It

Given that the United States is among the very few places around the world where the sport of football is called soccer, perhaps it's no surprise that padel is pronounced in two distinctly different ways here, too (although there is a pretty good reason for it, which I cover here).

In the first camp, you have people such as United States padel legend Mike May, who served as the President of the United States Padel Association for 21 years and represented Team USA in 13 World Padel Championships. In a widely circulated video that he put together for social media (which you can view on my website at www.padelnation.io/notes) both May and the former President of the International Padel Federation (FIP), Daniel Patti, confirm that the sport is pronounced “paddle.”

However, in the other camp, which is largely made up of North American players who have just discovered the sport within the past year or two, you have those who insist that the sport should be pronounced “*puh-DEL*” — which admittedly may sound sexier but is simply not correct.

So, what gives?

As I alluded to an earlier section about padel versus platform tennis, much of the confusion comes from the fact when a group of court builders and padel enthusiasts (including Marcos del Pilar, who is often referred to as “the Godfather of United States padel”) began trying to promote and market the sport in the mid-to-late 2010s in the United States they ran into a problem.

Namely that in certain pockets of the country (including primarily the Great Lakes region and Northeastern United States), many people colloquially refer to the sport of platform tennis as “paddle” or “paddle tennis” despite the fact that the governing body of that sport officially declared its name to be platform tennis (and not paddle or paddle tennis) clear back in 1950.

Further complicating matters was the fact that a third sport (which has officially been branded as POP tennis since 2015) is played in a select few locations around the United States, including Venice Beach, California, that had for a time also been called paddle tennis.

So, this group began brainstorming completely new names for the sport, before eventually realizing that the easiest way to both honor its original name while also solving their branding problem would be to simply pronounce the word differently (as you can discover more about in another video from Marcos del Pilar himself on my website at www.padelnation.io/notes).

Thus, “*puh-DEL*” was born.

And not long after, the first-ever pop-up padel facility in the United States opened just outside Philadelphia with the incredibly catchy name PADELphia (which, of course, only sounds right if you pronounce it *puh-DEL*).

So, nowadays, you have those who pronounce the sport as the other 99.9 percent of players around the world do . . . and those who pronounce it the “American way.”

While it remains to be seen if this debate can ever truly be settled, my hope is that the proper pronunciation (which, again, sounds “paddle” in English) will win out given that there are now 35 million padel players around the world compared to just an estimated 35,000 or so platform tennis players.

But, at the end of the day, my take is that it really doesn’t matter how you pronounce the sport if you love playing it!

“The Only Rule in Padel”

As we often did before we had our own court to play on in South Carolina (which we opened in December of 2022), a group of friends and I would travel around the country to play anytime we could in the early 2020s.

One of these trips led us to a squash club in South Florida that had just built an indoor padel court where we had a close contact through a good friend in the squash world.

Given how little any of us had played, we decided to start by taking a lesson with their incredibly dashing and affable pro, Alfonso, who went by the nickname Fonsi.

While Fonsi was a great — and very patient — teacher, his one quirk was that he began almost every sentence he spoke during our group lesson with, “There is only one rule in padel. . .” and then he’d give us another tip or bit of strategy to keep in mind (which we all got a big kick out of!).

Predictably, the lesson ended with Fonsi prefacing his final point in the exact same manner — and while I forget many of the other bits of padel wisdom he imparted on us that day, I’ll never forget this one as it’s the truest thing I’ve ever heard about playing padel. . . .

That’s because, with an ear-to-ear grin, he summed up our time on court together by telling us, “Remember, there is only one rule in padel . . . *padel is life!*”

And for an ever-growing number of us — including perhaps you, too, one day soon — it truly is.

