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JANUARY 2026

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CONTENT

Section 1 - Tennis

Davidovic faces off with the crowd, Djokovic distances himself from the PTPA, Aryna falls to Kyrgios, plus the welfare of players being questioned with Iga voicing her concerns, and Draper Poised for Davis Cup return

Section 2 - GRSA INTERNATIONAL

Workshops in China in full swing in 2026, and a great night remembered; the Gala Dinner at the 2025 GRSA Annual Global Stringers Conference, what a night! More workshops in China, with more scheduled.

Section 3 - Squash

Pro Kennex Wrap Around Bridge is the topic of conversation with Nick, looking at the weird and wonderful. Coll and Weaver Rule the Land, plus... PSA Commercial Arm Partners with Two Circles.

Section 4 - Padel

Rolex Officially Enters Padel by sponsoring Arturo Coello, and the Pro Padel League schedule is released.

Section 5 - Pickleball

Selkirk Sport secures \$30 million investment to fuel global pickleball growth.

Section 6 - Badminton

Saina Nehwal's transformative impact on Indian badminton, An Se Young still chasing the perfect match.

Djokovic Draws a Line Under PTPA Chapter

Novak Djokovic has formally severed ties with the Professional Tennis Players Association (PTPA), the breakaway union he co-founded four years ago, saying his decision was driven by concerns over “transparency and governance”.

The 24-time Grand Slam champion announced his withdrawal in a public statement, confirming that he has now “stepped away completely” from the organisation he launched alongside Canada’s Vasek Pospisil in 2021.

At its inception, the PTPA was positioned as a bold attempt to give players an independent voice outside the traditional power structures of the sport. It emerged amid long-standing frustrations over scheduling, prize money, and what players viewed as an imbalance of power between governing bodies and athletes.

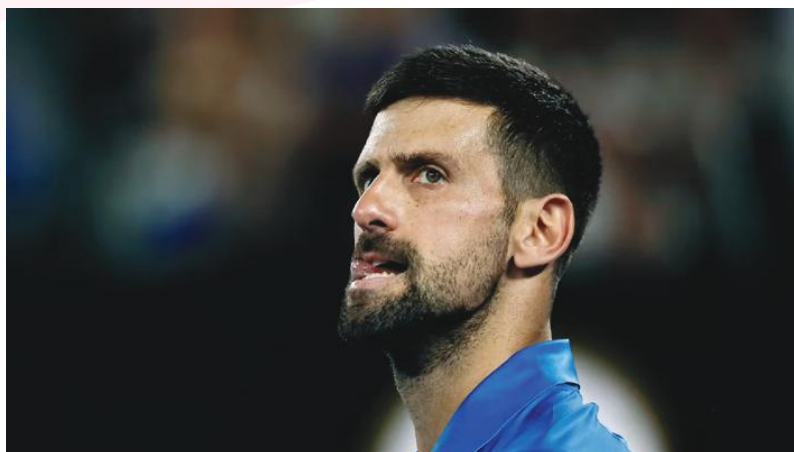
But Djokovic’s relationship with the association has gradually cooled, a process that became more visible last year when the PTPA launched legal action against tennis’ governing bodies, including the ATP, WTA and Grand Slam tournaments. The lawsuit alleged anti-competitive practices and a failure to adequately protect player welfare.

Djokovic made it clear at the time that he did not fully support the legal approach being taken. His latest statement confirms that distance has now become permanent.

“After careful consideration, I have decided to step away completely from the Professional Tennis Players Association,” Djokovic wrote.

“This decision comes after ongoing concerns regarding transparency, governance, and the way my voice and image have been represented.

“I am proud of the vision that Vasek and I shared when founding the PTPA giving players a stronger, independent voice, but it has become clear that my values and approach are no longer aligned with the current direction of the organisation.”



The Serb added that his focus would now return to tennis, family and contributing to the sport “in ways that reflect my principles and integrity”, closing the statement with a definitive note: “For me, this chapter is now closed.”

A Union Under Fire

In the wake of Djokovic's announcement, the PTPA issued a strongly worded response, claiming it has been the target of a "co-ordinated defamation and witness intimidation campaign" linked to its ongoing litigation against the tours and Grand Slams.

The organisation alleged that inaccurate and misleading narratives had been circulated to undermine its credibility, staff and objectives. According to the PTPA, a federal court has already ruled that such conduct was improper and ordered it to cease.

"We are working closely with legal counsel, law enforcement and players to evaluate all available options to address the spread of misinformation," the statement said.



Despite the turbulence, the PTPA insisted it remains focused on what it describes as systemic issues within professional tennis — including what it has labelled an "unsustainable" playing calendar, intrusive integrity procedures by the International Tennis Integrity Agency (ITIA), and alleged collusion between tours and tournaments that may artificially suppress prize money.

The lawsuit was filed by the PTPA alongside 12 players, among them Pospisil and Australia's Nick Kyrgios, who said they were acting on behalf of the wider playing population.

A Divided Locker Room

Notably, the legal action has never enjoyed unanimous player backing. World number one Carlos Alcaraz, whose comments on the crowded schedule were referenced in the complaint, later clarified that he did not support the lawsuit itself.

That division reflects the broader challenge facing the PTPA: representing a global player base with differing priorities, risk tolerances and views on confrontation versus collaboration.

In its closing remarks, the organisation reiterated its founding mission.

"Players created the PTPA to secure a stronger, more transparent voice in professional tennis," the statement read. "We always welcome the opportunity to address issues with any player, and remain available to do so."

For Djokovic, however, the experiment appears to have run its course. One of the most influential figures in tennis history has stepped aside — leaving the future direction, credibility and impact of the PTPA under sharper scrutiny than ever.

ARYNA FELL TO NICK IN BATTLE OF THE SEXES

Aryna Sabalenka has brushed aside criticism of her headline-grabbing “Battle of the Sexes” exhibition with Nick Kyrgios, insisting the experience sharpened her fitness and showcased tennis to a wider audience.

The world number one began her 2026 campaign in emphatic fashion at the Brisbane International, dismantling Spain’s Cristina Bucsa 6–0 6–1 in just 47 minutes to reach the second round. Yet it was her recent loss to Kyrgios, a 6–3 6–3 defeat in a Dubai exhibition last month that continued to dominate the conversation.

Sabalenka, a four-time Grand Slam champion, was unapologetic about taking part in the much-publicised contest, arguing that the physical demands alone made it worthwhile.

“When you play against a guy, the intensity is completely different,” she explained. “Especially when it’s Nick, he’s drop-shotting every other ball, so you’re moving constantly. From a fitness point of view, it was really good for me.”



The match drew mixed reactions across the sport. Wimbledon champion Iga Swiatek was among the critics this week, suggesting the exhibition had little connection to genuine social progress, a reference to the iconic 1973 encounter between Billie Jean King and Bobby Riggs.

Sabalenka, however, rejected the comparison and the criticism alike, stressing that the event was never meant to carry symbolic weight.

“It wasn’t about proving anything to anyone,” she said. “It brought so many eyes to tennis, and that’s a good thing. It showed how big our sport can be.”

For Sabalenka, the takeaway was simple: entertainment, exposure and a physical test against one of the game’s most unpredictable talents.

“It was fun,” she added. “And it was a great challenge.”

Did you know?

The original Billie Jean King–Bobby Riggs match in 1973 attracted an estimated global television audience of more than 90 million, a reminder of just how powerful spectacle can be in tennis, even decades later.

‘We Need to Protect Players’

Is tennis heading for breaking point — and can the sport save itself in time?



Wimbledon champion Iga Swiatek believes the tennis season has become “too long and too intense”.

When Daria Kasatkina shut down her 2025 season early, the message was raw and unmistakable.

“I’ve hit a wall,” she wrote. “The schedule is too much. Mentally and emotionally I’m at breaking point, and I’m not alone.”

She wasn’t.

Within weeks, Elina Svitolina admitted she was no longer in the mental space to compete. World champions Iga Swiatek and Carlos Alcaraz echoed the same concern. The sport’s biggest stars were not complaining, they were warning.

As the tennis world gathers in Australia for the start of the 2026 season, a familiar question has returned with renewed urgency: has tennis pushed its players too far?

Despite a marginally longer off-season than in 2025, many believe the damage is already being done. An 11-month calendar, relentless travel, longer matches and escalating physical demands have created a schedule that insiders increasingly describe as unsustainable.



“The demands of tennis are harder than ever before,” says Dr Robby Sikka, medical director of the Professional Tennis Players’ Association (PTPA).

“Players are faster, rallies are longer, the ball is hit harder — and recovery time hasn’t kept pace.”

A SEASON THAT NEVER STOPS

For many players, the 2025 season stretched across 47 weeks, beginning in late December and running deep into November. While the women’s tour finished slightly earlier, the difference was marginal, and insufficient.

The ATP and WTA insist player welfare remains a priority. Yet in March, the PTPA — co-founded by Novak Djokovic, launched legal action against both tours, accusing them of anti-competitive practices and a disregard for player health.

At the heart of the issue lies tennis's fragmented governance. With Grand Slams, tours and federations all pulling in different directions, meaningful calendar reform has proven painfully slow.

Former world number one Andy Roddick has long argued for decisive action.



“The season shouldn’t go past 1 November,” he says.

“Either we buy time back at the end of the year, or we create meaningful breaks within it.”

The ATP has reduced the number of ranking events from 19 to 18 for 2026. The WTA also bases rankings on 18 tournaments, yet top women are still expected to play 20 mandatory events across the season, that contradiction has not gone unnoticed.

THE COST OF NIGHT TENNIS

When Andy Murray staggered off court at 4:05am in Melbourne in 2023, officials promised change. New rules were introduced to prevent matches starting after 11pm, yet marathon finishes persist.

According to PTPA data, players are 25% more likely to be injured during night sessions.

“These moments shouldn’t be romanticised,” insists Dr Sikka. A match doesn’t end when the last point is played, players aren’t asleep until three or four in the morning.” In no other major sport, he argues, is that level of physiological strain mandated.

BALLS, BODIES AND BURNOUT

Beyond fatigue, the sport is grappling with a rise in upper-body injuries — particularly to wrists, shoulders and elbows. Research highlights injury clusters in April, August and October, coinciding with surface changes and heavy travel.

Players have also raised concerns about constant changes in tennis balls between tournaments.

“We want more consistency,” says Britain’s Katie Boulter. “I see more and more wrist and shoulder injuries across the tour.”

Dominic Thiem, forced into early retirement by a wrist injury, believes the solution is obvious.

“One ball per surface. Clay, grass, hard, it’s not complicated, and it would help enormously.”

Full alignment across the tours is now expected by 2027, progress, but slow.

WHAT TENNIS CAN LEARN FROM AMERICA

Sports scientists point to American leagues as models for reform. The NFL, using data-driven analysis, has transformed playing surfaces and safety protocols. Major League Baseball now limits workloads for young pitchers.

“They protect their assets,” says Kitman Labs founder Stephen Smith.
“And the economic model thrives because stars stay healthy.”

Tennis, by contrast, still asks teenagers to grind relentlessly from an early age, a factor Thiem believes contributes to chronic injuries later on.

THE PLAYERS ARE SPEAKING — WILL TENNIS LISTEN?



Leading players are increasingly united in calls for reform.

From Alcaraz and Sabalenka to Taylor Fritz and Emma Raducanu, voices are growing louder. Players want genuine consultation, smarter scheduling and a system built for longevity — not just survival.

Critics point to lucrative exhibitions as hypocrisy. Players counter that earning opportunities shouldn't come at the cost of basic welfare.

“Not everyone can be Djokovic or Nadal,” says Dr Sikka. “Players know that. They just want the chance to be healthy, competitive and human.”

THE TAKEAWAY

Tennis stands at a crossroads. Protecting its athletes is no longer a philosophical debate, it is an economic and moral necessity.

The players have spoken.

The data is there.

Now the sport must decide whether it is willing to change.



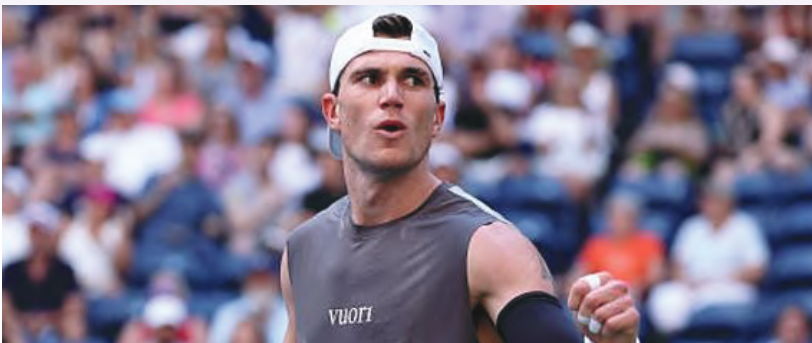
Draper Poised for Davis Cup Return as Britain Head to Oslo

Jack Draper's long road back from injury is set to reach a significant milestone in early February, with the British number one named in Great Britain's squad for their Davis Cup qualifier against Norway in Oslo.

It has been more than five months since Draper last competed regularly on the ATP Tour. A stubborn injury to the upper part of his left arm, the most valuable asset in his explosive game, forced him to shut down his season after withdrawing from the US Open in August. His planned return at the Australian Open never materialised, with Draper pulling out on Boxing Day after concluding the risk was still too great.

Now, all signs point towards a carefully managed comeback.

Ranked world number 10, Draper has played just one singles match since Wimbledon, making his inclusion a calculated gamble rather than a certainty. But Davis Cup captain Leon Smith believes the timing — and the format — work in Britain's favour.



“Having Jack available allows us to name our strongest possible team,” Smith said, underlining the importance of the tie in the wider Davis Cup campaign.

The qualifier will be played over two days on 5 and 6 February, with Draper joined by Cameron Norrie, Jacob Fearnley, and doubles specialists Lloyd Glasspool and Julian Cash. Norway, meanwhile, will lean heavily on their talisman, world number 12 Casper Ruud, a three-time Grand Slam finalist and a formidable presence on home soil.

The stakes are clear: victory in Oslo would earn Great Britain a second-round qualifying clash in September against either Australia or Ecuador

A Comeback Carefully Timed

For Draper, the decision to skip Melbourne was agonising. Writing on X late last month, he described the injury as one of the most “challenging” and “complex” of his career, admitting the choice to withdraw from the Australian Open was “really, really tough”.

Yet the Davis Cup presents a more forgiving pathway back. Singles matches in Oslo will be best-of-three sets, reducing physical strain, while the pressures of five-set tennis will not return until the French Open in late May.

In a video update posted on 26 December, Draper said he was in the “very, very end stages” of his recovery — language that offered optimism without promising too much.



Smith, for his part, has little to lose by naming him now. Davis Cup rules allow captains to make up to three changes on the eve of the tie, meaning Draper’s fitness can be assessed right up to the last moment.

From Breakthrough to Breakdown — and Back Again

That this return comes so soon after Draper’s breakthrough season only sharpens the sense of unfinished business. The first half of the year marked his full arrival among the sport’s elite.

In March, he claimed his maiden Masters 1000 title at Indian Wells, announcing himself as a genuine contender at the highest level. By June, he had climbed to a career-high ranking of world number four — the highest achieved by a British man since Andy Murray.

Then came the injury. Progress stalled. Momentum vanished.

Now, Davis Cup offers a chance to reset — not with grand expectations, but with purpose.

Did You Know?

Jack Draper’s Indian Wells triumph made him only the fifth British man in the Open Era to win a Masters 1000 title — joining Murray, Tim Henman and Greg Rusedski on an exclusive list.

Analysis: Smith’s Calculated Call

Leon Smith’s approach contrasts sharply with some of the selections seen elsewhere in the competition. While Great Britain can potentially field a top-10 singles player and an experienced doubles pairing, the United States have named Ethan Quinn and Emilio Nava for their away tie in Hungary — despite having a dozen higher-ranked players available.

If Draper is fit, Britain’s squad suddenly looks formidable. If not, Smith retains flexibility.

Either way, the message is clear: Great Britain are aiming high — and Jack Draper remains central to that ambition.

ITF to Review Wildcard Policy After Nairobi Match Sparks Global Debate

The International Tennis Federation (ITF) has confirmed it will review its wildcard allocation procedures following a first-round match in Nairobi that ignited widespread discussion across social media and the tennis world.

At an ITF W35 event in the Kenyan capital on Wednesday, Egyptian player Hajar Abdelkader was defeated 6-0, 6-0 in just 37 minutes by Germany's Lorena Schaezel, ranked 1,026 in the world. The match quickly went viral, not for its competitiveness, but for the stark disparity in standard.

Abdelkader, 21, served 20 double faults and won only three points during her professional debut. Throughout the match she appeared to struggle with fundamental aspects of the game, prompting questions about how she was deemed eligible to compete at World Tennis Tour level.



In a statement, an ITF spokesperson said the governing body would reassess how wildcards are awarded after acknowledging that the situation “was unacceptable for a World Tennis Tour event”.

“Tennis Kenya understood the player was of an appropriate standard to compete,” the spokesperson said. “The outcome showed this was clearly not the case and was unfortunate for the player involved. Proportionate measures must be taken to prevent this happening again.”

John Isner

No Record in Egypt

Further complicating matters, the Egyptian Tennis Federation confirmed it has no record of Abdelkader as a registered or affiliated player, stating that she has never represented the federation in any official capacity.

A Wider Conversation

While the episode has raised eyebrows, it has also sparked a broader conversation about access, opportunity and protection within professional tennis. Wildcards remain an essential development tool, particularly in emerging tennis nations, but the Nairobi match has highlighted the fine line between inclusion and exposure.

As the ITF reviews its procedures, the challenge will be finding a system that preserves opportunity without placing players, or tournaments, in untenable situations.

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1

Australian Open 🇦🇺

Ivo Karlović — 75 aces (vs Horacio Zeballos, 2017)

Reilly Opelka — 67 aces (vs Thomas Fabbiano, 2019)

Ivo Karlović — 59 aces (vs Kei Nishikori, 2019)

2

French Open 🇫🇷

Ivo Karlović — 55 aces (vs Lleyton Hewitt, 2009)

Ivo Karlović — 41 aces (2016; noted as his second-most there)

Andy Roddick — 37 aces (record before Karlović broke it; 2001)

3

Wimbledon 🇬🇧

John Isner — 113 aces (vs Nicolas Mahut, 2010)

Nicolas Mahut — 103 aces (vs John Isner, 2010)

John Isner — 64 aces (vs Ruben Bemelmans, 2018)

4

US Open 🇺🇸

Ivo Karlović — 61 aces (vs Lu Yen-hsun, 2016)

John Isner — 52 aces (vs Steve Johnson, 2020)

49 aces (tie) — Richard Krajicek (vs Yevgeny Kafelnikov, 1999) and Kevin Anderson (vs Jiří Veselý, 2021)



Compression Socks & Stringer Comfort

Last month we looked at compression mats and their importance as a part of the stringers hardware that shouldn't be overlooked and often is.

This month let's look at another often overlooked product, the compression sock.

The hardest part of tournament stringing is being on your feet for anywhere up to 17 hours a day. In a GS stringing room, this is almost a guaranteed occurrence with numbers now topping 7000 rackets for a single GS event. Swollen ankles and feet, are no one's friend.

By looking after your feet and using compression socks from the start of the event, your feet, ankles and legs will thank you.

Why is it so important? Because it has a direct effect on stringer fatigue. Unless the stringer is a seasoned veteran from many Grand Slam events and has reached the point where even with extreme fatigue, the rackets still come out perfectly strung, fatigue can affect the outcome 99% of the time.

If you don't have compression socks, look into purchasing them, they are not expensive and well worth investing in.

Remember – The difference is in the small details.

Alejandro Davidovich Fokina's five-set triumph at the Australian Open came with plenty of drama, and not all of it was confined to the baseline.

The Spaniard, seeded 14th in Melbourne, clashed with a noisy section of the crowd during his marathon victory over American giant Reilly Opelka, a match that tested both his legs and his patience.

With the contest finely poised and Davidovich Fokina trailing two sets to one, tensions boiled over midway through the fourth set on Kia Arena. After repeated disruptions from the stands, the 24-year-old marched to the front row, angrily waving his finger and shouting at a group of spectators.

The confrontation prompted swift intervention. The chair umpire climbed down from his chair, ushered Davidovich Fokina away and addressed the fans directly, restoring order before play resumed.

After the match, the Spaniard did not mince his words.

“It can happen here, it can happen anywhere in the world,” he said. “There were four ignorant drunks, and there’s nothing I can do about that.”



Davidovich Fokina eventually sealed a pulsating 6-3, 7-6 (7-3), 5-7, 4-6, 6-4 win, unleashing his emotions at full-time. He roared skyward, hurled his cap onto the court and pumped his fist towards his support team, a release that felt as much about surviving the atmosphere as winning the match itself.

He is far from alone. Crowd behaviour has been a recurring talking point at this year's Australian Open, with several players expressing frustration at ill-timed noise and interruptions.

Russia's Anastasia Potapova confronted a spectator during her win over Emma Raducanu after someone shouted mid-point, earning a stern reminder from the umpire that silence during play is non-negotiable. Spain's Jaume Munar also lost his composure when chanting broke out just as he prepared to serve in his five-set victory over Dalibor Švrčina.

Melbourne's occasionally raucous crowds are nothing new. Last year, Britain's Harriet Dart likened the atmosphere to "a football match" and called for greater respect from fans. Danielle Collins, by contrast, leaned into the chaos, blowing kisses to a hostile home crowd as she defeated Australia's Destanee Aiava, later admitting she "loved" the intensity.

Davidovich Fokina himself has history with the issue. His match against Felix Auger-Aliassime at last year's tournament was moved from Court 8 after both players complained about excessive noise drifting in from neighbouring courts.

For all the colour and character that make the Australian Open unique, this year's tournament has once again highlighted the fine line between passion and disruption, and how quickly that line can be crossed when the stakes, and emotions, are high.

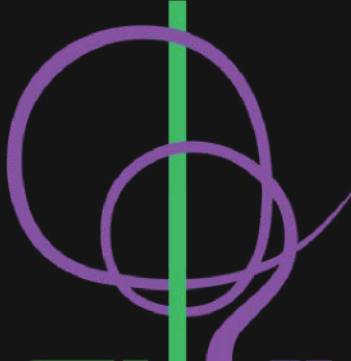


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From 16th to 18th January 2026, the Global Racquet Stringers Association (GRSA) concluded a high-level three-day training event in Shenzhen, China, focusing on elite tour-level racket stringing and a pro stringer workshop.

Workshop Structure

The event was divided into two distinct sessions to cater to different skill levels:

1-Day Tour Masterclass: Led by GRSA Grand Master Stringer Richard Parnell, this session focused on advanced "Grand Slam" techniques, including specialized knots (e.g., the Richard Parnell knot) and tour-specific frame preparation.

2-Day Certifying Workshop: Facilitated by Kenneth Leong (GRSA Chief Instructor for Asia & owner of K'1 Pro Racket Service) and Jia Chen Ren, both GRSA Tour stringers who lead GRSA China operations. This intensive session concluded with certification exams for all participants.

Key Curriculum & Skills

Participants were trained and assessed on several professional standards required for GRSA Certifications.

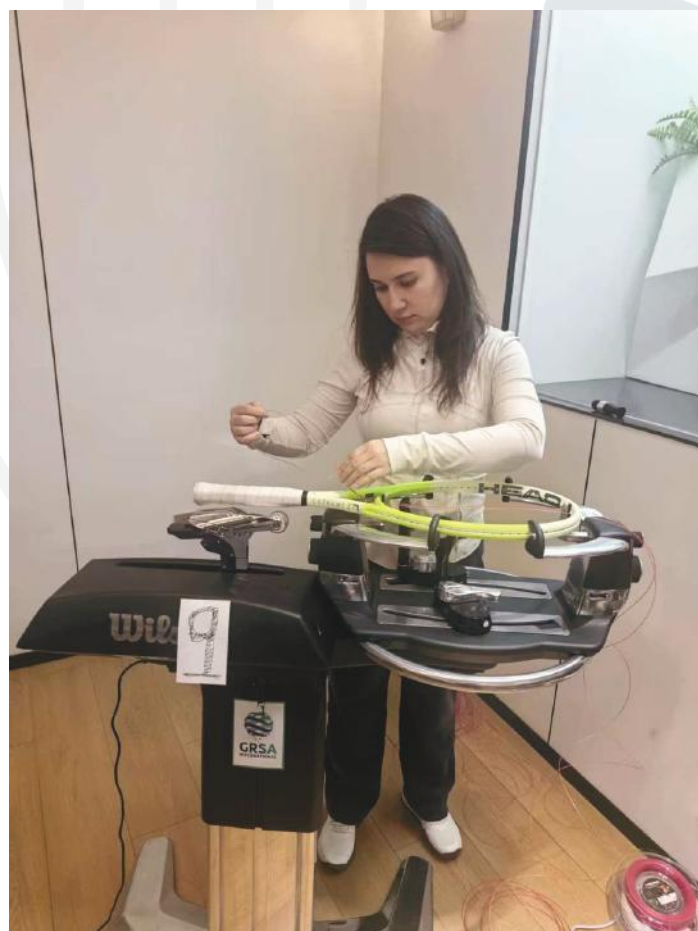
Elite Speed & Consistency: Candidates for the Certified Tour Stringer (CTS) level must string three identical rackets in 55 minutes, ensuring all three are within 1 DT (Dynamic Tension) of each other.

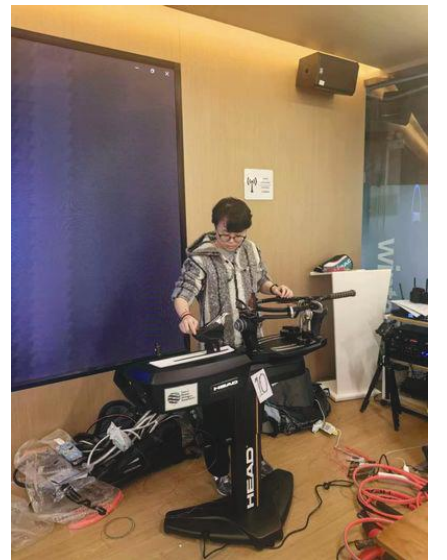
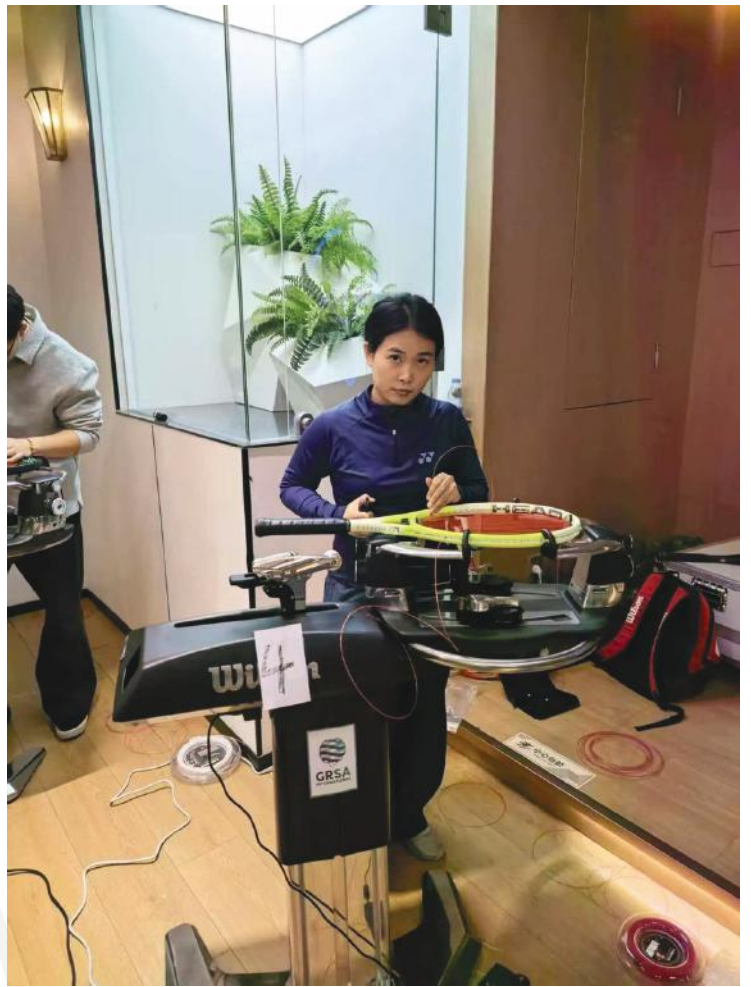
Specialized Stringing: Mastery of Natural Gut stringing within a 30-minute window using authorized Around-The-World (ATW) patterns.

Racket Customization: Matching two frames for weight, balance, and swing-weight within 60 minutes.

Grip & Grommet Maintenance: Skills included installing new grommet sets and increasing grip sizes using heat-shrink sleeves.





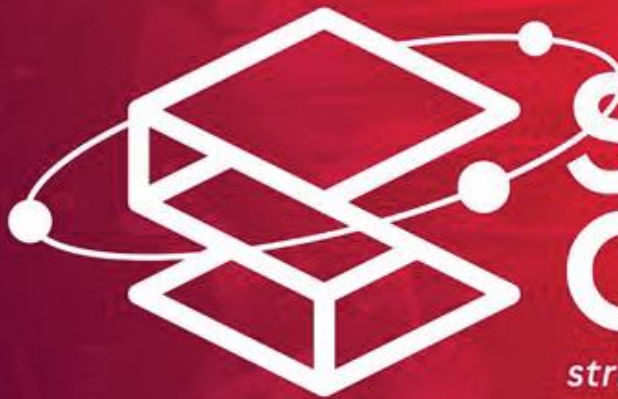






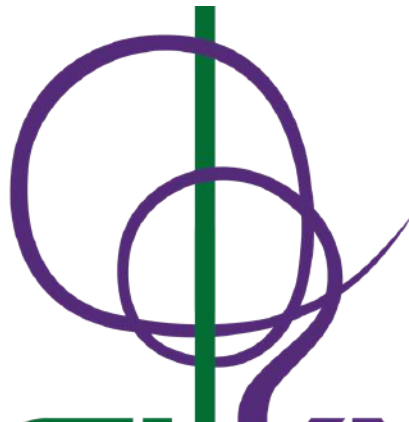
Upcoming Opportunities

Due to the success of the Shenzhen event, GRSA has announced plans for further regional training, including a possible workshop in Hong Kong that will feature an additional day of instruction. Our next workshop is scheduled for March in Shanghai, China.



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GRSA × Tennispro.fr: A Partnership Delivering Power Across Europe

Now in its second month, the collaboration between GRSA International and Tennispro.fr continues to give members meaningful value — including 10% off across Tennispro.fr on rackets, strings, grips, apparel and accessories from one of Europe's most established racket-sport retailers.

For GRSA, the partnership reinforces its global mission: to educate, connect and elevate the stringing and racket-sport community. Members already benefit from the monthly GRSA ATW Magazine, the GRSA A-Z of Stringing Guide, certification pathways, partner discounts and access to the annual conference — all through a sustainable, digital-first membership model.

Trusted Retail. Specialist Support.

With roots dating back to 1981, Tennispro.fr has earned its place as a major force in European racket-sport retail. Its combination of deep online stock and a strong in-store presence makes it a natural fit for GRSA's network of stringers, coaches and dedicated players seeking choice, speed and sharp pricing.

Hands-On Learning in France

Beyond savings, the partnership is set to bring GRSA-powered workshops to France. Delivered by GRSA-certified instructors working with TennisPro, these sessions will focus on advanced stringing techniques, player-specific customisation and emerging trends across tennis, padel and other racket sports. It's practical education — brought straight to local communities.

Why It Matters

Behind every confident player is a skilled stringer. Precision setup reduces injury risk, boosts performance and keeps pro shops and clubs thriving. GRSA helps members grow through structured learning; Tennispro provides the tools, machines and products that turn that knowledge into daily excellence.

Make the Most of Your Membership

Your 10% discount at Tennispro.fr is live — and workshops are coming soon.

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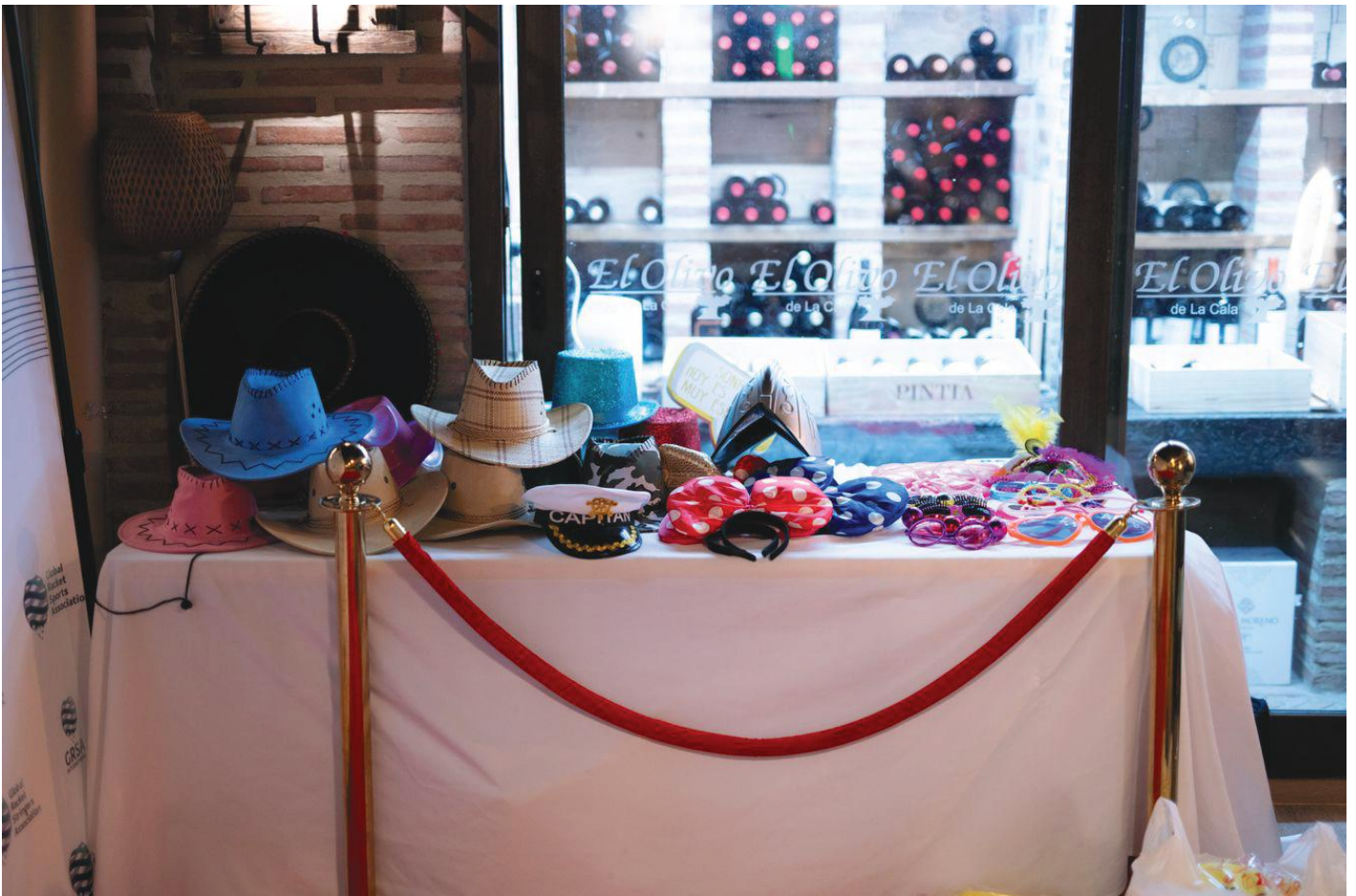












































NICK DOWN

talks about the

Pro Kennex Wrap Around Bridge



The Pro Kennex wrap around bridge has been used on a number of models in the past, especially the Twister and Booster and I'm pretty sure that I've seen lite versions of both. Although, not current models available from Pro Kennex anymore, they're occasionally on sale, new (old stock), from third party sellers.

They made it onto the list of non-standard rackets because of the unusual arrangement at the throat; these rackets have a wrap around bridge and no grommets for the centre ten main strings. I have used a Twister titanium in my example, with 20 crosses and 16 mains starting and finishing at the throat; quite a tight pattern despite having a large head.

Apart from the nature of the bridge, there's nothing else unusual about it.

There are enough knot-holes for two-piece stringing. If using one piece, a suitable around the world (ATW) method should be chosen. In this example, a two-piece method has been chosen and this is reflected in these instructions:-



Nick's Nugget

When using a constant pull machine, straighten the cross strings whilst they are under the machine's tension, that will help not losing tension on the overall string job.

(Only actual holes are numbered).

Mains

Start at throat (in centre)

Above bridge to 1LH

Below bridge to 1RH

1RH to 2RH

2RH to above bridge

Below bridge to 3RH

1LH to 2LH

2LH to below bridge

Above bridge to 3LH

3LH to 4LH

4LH to below bridge

Above bridge to 5LH

5LH to 6LH

6LH to 1LT

1LT to 2LT

2LT to 7LH

3RH to 4RH

4RH to above bridge

Below bridge to 5RH

5RH to 6RH

6RH to 1RT

1RT to 2RT

2RT to 7RH

7RH to 9RH

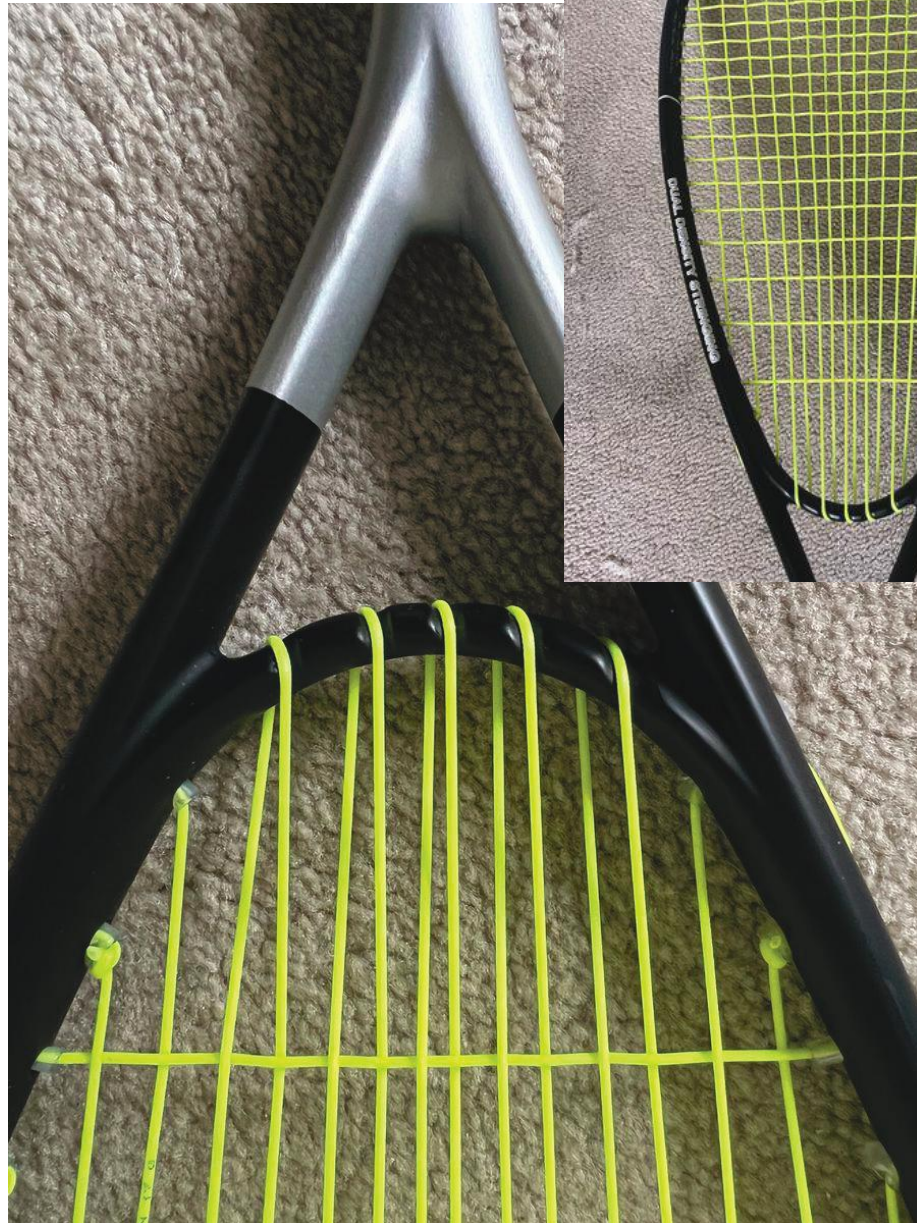
9RH to 3RT

Tie off at 2RT

7LH to 9LH

9LH to 3LT

Tie off at LT2



Crosses

There are 20 cross strings.

The top two and the fourth have shared holes at the Head with main strings. Tie-off at 5H and 4T. The first cross is at 6H, which is shared with a main.

The last cross is at 3T.



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[SQUASH]



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PSA Commercial Arm Partners with Two Circles to Drive Global Growth Ahead of LA28

Squash Media and Marketing (SMM), the commercial arm of the Professional Squash Association (PSA), has entered a five-year partnership with UK-based sports marketing agency Two Circles as the sport builds momentum towards its Olympic debut at Los Angeles 2028.

The agreement will focus on growing SMM's digital platforms and global audiences, with particular emphasis on SquashTV, while also expanding the reach and commercial value of the PSA Squash Tour through new media rights opportunities.

Two Circles will deliver media rights strategy and distribution, supported by data and marketing expertise designed to attract new audiences, deepen fan engagement and unlock additional revenue streams. The agency will also provide insight into audience behaviour, priority markets and long-term growth opportunities.

PSA Chief Executive Alex Gough said the partnership comes at a pivotal time.



“With squash on the path to its Olympic debut at LA28, our focus is on engaging and growing audiences globally. Two Circles’ expertise will help expand distribution, accelerate SquashTV growth and build lasting momentum for the sport.”

Squash was confirmed as part of the LA28 Olympic programme in October 2023. Since then, the PSA has accelerated its commercial strategy, including the appointment of former World Table Tennis executive Melissa Soobraty as Head of Media and Marketing.

SMM has attracted significant investment, with American billionaire Mark Walter acquiring a stake in the business to support tour optimisation, event growth, improved fan experience and increased player compensation. Infront, which invested in SMM in 2021, remains a strategic partner and continues to sell PSA media, digital, sponsorship and betting streaming rights.

The PSA Tour was rebranded ahead of the 2024–25 season with a new four-division structure, while broadcast expansion continues, including an extended rights deal with Sport en France covering ten major events during the 2025–26 season.

With Olympic inclusion secured, the PSA's partnership with Two Circles marks another key step in positioning squash for global growth beyond LA28.

Coll and Weaver Rule the Land as Cleveland Delivers a Perfect Season Opener

Paul Coll and Olivia Weaver underlined their status as two of the sport's most formidable performers by claiming the 2026 Squash in the Land presented by Porsche Beachwood titles in Cleveland, capping a memorable PSA Silver event at the UH Drusinsky Sports Medicine Institute.

For Weaver, it was a week of near-flawless execution. The US No.1 swept aside compatriot Sabrina Sobhy in the women's final, never dropping a game all tournament as she lifted the 12th PSA Tour title of her career.

Having never progressed beyond the semi-finals in previous Cleveland appearances, Weaver controlled the centre of the court throughout, dictating pace and direction to secure an emphatic 11-5, 11-2, 11-2 victory in just 24 minutes.



“I’m feeling great, it’s the perfect way to start off the New Year,” Weaver said afterwards.

“I always enjoy playing here in Cleveland. It’s one of those tournaments that all of the players love.”

In the men’s final, Paul Coll marked his Cleveland debut in style, defeating Leonel Cárdenas in straight games to claim his 30th PSA Tour title — and his third of the season.

While the scoreline suggested control, the contest was physically demanding. Cárdenas, the 2024 champion, pushed Coll hard in two opening games that both exceeded 20 minutes before the world No.2 pulled clear to win 11-7, 14-12, 11-4.

“To see this event grow into a Silver with a full glass court is awesome,” Coll said.

“I’ve had a great week in Cleveland.”

Rolex Officially Enters Padel by Sponsoring Arturo Coello

Rolex has taken a major step into the world of padel by signing a sponsorship agreement with Arturo Coello, the current world No. 1 in padel. This marks the first time the Swiss luxury watchmaker has partnered with a padel player, signalling the sport's rapid global commercial growth and rising appeal to top luxury brands.

What This Partnership Means

- **Brand Significance:** Rolex is one of the most prestigious sports sponsors globally, with a history of working with elite athletes like Roger Federer, Carlos Alcaraz and Tiger Woods. Coello joining Rolex places him in that exclusive roster and highlights his status beyond just sport.
- **Sport Validation:** The deal is seen as a symbolic milestone for padel, indicating that it's no longer just an emerging sport but one with mainstream, global commercial significance.
- **Coello's Reaction:** Arturo Coello has publicly expressed his pride and excitement about joining the "Rolex family," calling it a dream come true and thanking the brand for its confidence and shared passion for excellence.

Broader Padel Impact

This partnership, following Coello's recent deal with Swiss sports brand On, underscores how top-tier players in padel are attracting major international brands. It also reflects how commercial interest in the sport, from luxury to lifestyle sponsors, is increasing as the audience and professional circuits grow globally.



Pro Padel League (PPL) 2026 Schedule & Venues

The Pro Padel League 2026 will feature five events across North America, highlighting continued growth of team padel outside Europe.

♦ **1** July 9–12 – PPL New York (USA)

The season kicks off in one of the League's strongest markets.

♦ **2** August 13–16 – PPL Los Angeles (USA)

Historic debut in Los Angeles, marking the first PPL event there.

♦ **3** September 24–27 – PPL Playa del Carmen (Mexico)

Continues expansion into padel-growing regions.

♦ **4** November 19–22 – PPL Guadalajara (Mexico)

The League returns to a city with strong fan support.

♦ **5** December 3–6 – PPL The City's Cup Finals (Miami, USA)

Season concludes with the championship finals being held in Miami for the first time.

Key Notes

All five events are in North America (USA & Mexico), reflecting the PPL's strategic regional focus for 2026.

No events in Europe or Spain this year, unlike some previous seasons.

The finals in Miami emphasize the city's rise as a padel hub in the U.S.



Whether you're a seasoned player or just picking up a paddle for the first time, discovering where you can join open competitions is part of the fun in this ever-growing sport. Here are some upcoming dates – and for full details, head over to the Pickleball Global website.

DUPR ROME OPEN CHAMPIONSHIP 6TH ED.**EID:** 2209 EUR 40**Organizer:** Marco Maurizi**EVENT - TOURNAMENT****Starting:** March 13, 2026 to March 15, 2026**City:****Tournament Venue:** Standout Pickleball Arena**Registration Deadline:** March 01, 2026 (OPEN)**Tier Level:** 3**WPC SERIES - ITALY 2026****EID:** 2240 EUR 40**Organizer:** Marco Maurizi**EVENT - TOURNAMENT****Starting:** May 08, 2026 to May 10, 2026**City:****Tournament Venue:** Standout Pickleball Arena**Registration Deadline:** April 30, 2026 (OPEN)**Tier Level:** 3**Skechers Pickleball Paris Open 2026****EID:** 2280 FREE**Organizer:** Pickleball Paris**EVENT - TOURNAMENT****Starting:** May 22, 2026 to May 24, 2026**City:** Montreuil, France**Tournament Venue:** Pickleball Paris**Registration Deadline:** May 10, 2026 (OPEN)**Tier Level:** 1**MORE
INFO**

Selkirk Sport Secures \$30 Million Investment to Fuel Global Pickleball Growth

In a landmark moment for the booming world of pickleball, leading equipment manufacturer Selkirk Sport has secured a USD 30 million growth equity investment from New York-based Bluestone Equity Partners, marking the company's first infusion of outside capital since its founding. The deal, announced on 20 January 2026, values the Hayden, Idaho-based brand at about USD 200 million and signals a strategic push into international markets and innovation.

Founded in 2014 by brothers Mike and Rob Barnes alongside their father Jim, Selkirk has transformed from a small family enterprise into a vertically integrated leader in the sport. The brand's evolution mirrors the explosive rise of pickleball itself: revenues have jumped a staggering 1,900 % since 2019, and the company projects at least USD 100 million in revenue in 2026 — reflective of pickleball's status as one of the United States' fastest-growing sports.

Selkirk's success stems from a singular focus on quality and performance. Known for premium paddles, balls, apparel and accessories, the company has built a reputation among players at all levels. Its advanced development lab in Idaho drives cutting-edge paddle tech and product refinement — part of what has made Selkirk a trusted name as participation numbers swell worldwide.



At the heart of this investment is global expansion. Selkirk plans to use the new capital to grow in Asia, targeting emerging markets like India, Malaysia, Vietnam and the Philippines, where pickup in court construction and player interest is gaining traction. Beyond geographic reach, significant funds will also be directed toward product innovation — including next-generation paddles, a new line of “quiet” pickleballs designed for residential play, and enhanced footwear offerings tailored for the sport's distinct movement demands. Selkirk also intends to bolster its content and media presence, scaling up Selkirk Pickleball TV to better engage its global community of fans and ambassadors.

Bluestone Equity Partner Bobby Sharma, an experienced NBA executive who will join Selkirk's board, emphasised the brand's leadership position amid a rapidly expanding category, backing both organic growth and opportunistic acquisitions as part of its broader strategy. Despite the influx of outside capital, the Barnes family will remain at the helm, ensuring the company's identity — rooted in family values and player-centric design — endures as it scales.

As pickleball continues its ascent from a niche pastime to a global sporting phenomenon, Selkirk's landmark investment underscores both the sport's commercial momentum and the growing appetite for premium equipment committed to performance and innovation.

Rapid-Fire Pickleball: 3 Quick Strategic Tweaks That Transform Your Game

Pickleball may be America's fastest-growing sport, but many players hit a plateau trying to improve, especially when they don't have hours a day to devote to drills. Fortunately, you don't need endless court time to upgrade your performance. Recent insights from The Dink Pickleball highlight three strategic shifts that can help players see results instantly, not over months of practice.

Here's how small adjustments in movement, mindset, and shot selection can make you a smarter, more competitive player.

1. Stop Chasing, Start Cutting: Efficient Footwork Wins More Points

When the ball is fired at you with pace — especially sharp dinks or quick cross-court exchanges — your instinct may be to chase desperately after it. But that's inefficient and often leads to late, off-balance shots.

Instead, use cross-stepping — a technique where you lead with your inside foot to cut off the ball's angle early. This gets you into position quicker while conserving energy and helping you stay balanced for the next shot.

Why This Works

Efficiency in movement isn't just about speed; it's about position. Good footwork sets up stronger shots, reduces unforced errors, and allows you to maintain control in long rallies. Think of the court as a grid you want to cover with minimal steps — every wasted shuffle invites your opponent to exploit open spaces.

How to Practice It

- Stand at the non-volley line with a partner feeding balls cross-court to you.
- On each feed, lead with your inside foot to intercept the angle early.
- Focus on staying low and balanced, then return to your ready position quickly.
- This isn't just a tactical tweak — it's a mental upgrade that helps you play cleaner, smarter pickleball.

2. Apply Physical Presence: Command the Kitchen Line

Your third shot in a point isn't just about getting the ball in play, it's about establishing control.

Once you produce a strong shot that pushes your opponent back or forces a weak reply, don't hang back: step forward and lean into the kitchen line to take the space.

The Psychology of Presence

When you advance into the kitchen aggressively, you do two things:

Physically limit your opponent's options by shrinking the space they can hit into.

Signal confidence, which often pressures the opponent into errors or timid replies.

Even if your paddle doesn't produce a winner every time from that position, simply owning the non-volley zone changes the calculus of the point in your favour.

Training Tip

Practice advancing into the non-volley zone immediately after your third shot, even if you can't hit a put-away. Work with a partner to simulate weak replies and focus on placement over power once you're up at the kitchen.

3. Wait for the Green Light: Pickleball Is a Timing Game

One of the most common mistakes intermediate players make is forcing shots before they're ready.

When NOT to Attack

Balls low at or below net height, deep rallies where the opponent is balanced and ready, situations where you have to over-reach or gamble, these premature attacks usually lead to net tapes or easy counter-attacks from opponents.

When You Should Attack?

The "green light" comes when: your opponent's shot sits high or slow, your footwork has given you perfect balance, you've established court control at the kitchen line.

Practising this strategic patience yields fewer errors and more opportunities to dictate play rather than react to it.

Strategy Over Power: The Modern Pickleball Meta

These three tips don't centre on raw strength or hitting harder, they're about tactical precision. As pickleball evolves, so does its strategic depth. A well-placed dink, a smart footwork choice, and timing your attack effectively often beat sheer power.

For example, mastering the dink rally, the slow, soft exchange near the non-volley line, is about control and patience, not speed. Getting this right forces opponents into mistakes, sets up high-percentage opportunities, and lowers your unforced errors.

Want More? Expand Your Game Smartly

If you're serious about climbing the pickleball ladder, consider these complementary strategies:

Deep Dink Drills

Drills that focus on footwork and precision, such as triangle or random target drills, help turn soft shots into consistent advantages.

Fast Hands Work

Quick hand drills sharpen reflexes at the net, crucial when the pace picks up.

Third Shot Drop Mastery

Understanding and controlling this foundational shot gives you tactical leverage to approach the kitchen on your terms.

Final Takeaway: Pickleball Is as Much a Thinking Game as a Physical One

Improvement isn't just about hours on court, it's about making smarter decisions once you're there. By refining your footwork, asserting presence at the net, and waiting for the right opportunities to strike, your game will climb quickly and sustainably.

Want to practice these tips next time you hit the court? Play with intention, measure your progress, and watch your opponents struggle to keep up.



Saina Nehwal's Transformative Impact on Indian Badminton

End of an Era — Retirement & Legacy

Saina Nehwal officially announced her retirement from competitive badminton in January 2026, ending a remarkable 21-year international career largely halted by persistent knee injuries and degeneration that prevented top-level training and competition. Her last professional appearance was at the 2023 Singapore Open.



Trailblazer With Many “Firsts”

Nehwal's rise wasn't just about personal success — she broke numerous barriers and set historic milestones for Indian badminton:

- First Indian woman to win the BWF World Junior Championships — a breakthrough moment in 2008.

- Reached Olympic quarterfinals in 2008, a first for India.
- First Indian woman to win a BWF Super Series title (Indonesia Open, 2009).
- Olympic bronze medalist at London 2012, India's first Olympic medal in badminton.
- World No. 1 ranking in 2015, making her the first Indian woman and only the second Indian overall to do so.
- Two Commonwealth Games singles gold medals (2010 and 2018).

Changing the Sport's Landscape in India

Her success ignited a surge of interest in badminton across India:

Boom in viewership and participation — with badminton gaining a much larger audience and grassroots following.

Academies and training centres expanded nationwide, cultivating future stars like PV Sindhu and Lakshya Sen.

She became a symbol of women's empowerment, challenging social norms and inspiring countless young athletes to pursue competitive sports.

Accolades & Recognition

Her excellence earned India's top sporting and civilian honours, including the Arjuna Award, Major Dhyan Chand Khel Ratna, Padma Shri and Padma Bhushan — testament to both her on-court success and her influential legacy.

First staged in 2010, the Indonesia Masters has been a Super 500 event on the HSBC BWF World Tour, apart from 2021, when COVID-19 calendar reshuffling saw it temporarily upgraded to Super 750.

Here are some standout facts from the tournament's history:

- Home dominance has been a defining theme. Indonesian players have captured 29 of 75 titles across 15 editions – 39 per cent of all winners' medals.
- Indonesia are the only nation to feature in at least one final every year, failing to top the podium in any category only in 2021 and 2025.
- Their longest drought is in women's singles, where Adriyanti Firdasari's 2014 win remains their sole title. Second seed Putri Kusuma Wardani carries local hopes in 2026.
- Men's doubles has been Indonesia's stronghold, missing out on the title only in 2012, 2021 and 2025.
- Mixed doubles honours have largely been shared between Indonesia, China, Thailand and Japan.
- Ratchanok Intanon is the only champion from the inaugural edition still competing. Just 15 when she won in 2010, the Thai icon has appeared at every edition since 2018 and owns a record three women's singles titles.
- Chen Yu Fei is the only top seed with previous success, having lifted the title in 2022, defeating Intanon in the final.
- Denmark stand alone as Europe's sole champions, claiming three men's singles titles, two courtesy of this year's second seed Anders Antonsen.
- Antonsen has reached the final four times in the last seven editions. Victory would make the 28-year-old the first three-time men's singles champion.

Standout Stat: Women's doubles finals are the most competitive, going to three games on several occasions.



An Se Young Still Chasing the Perfect Match

Only An Se Young can dominate a tournament — and still leave believing she has more to give.

After dismantling former world champion Ratchanok Intanon 21-11, 21-7 to reach the final of the YONEX-SUNRISE India Open 2026, the reigning Olympic champion spoke not of excellence, but of something more elusive: perfection.



“For me, a perfect match would be winning 21-0,” An said with a smile that barely concealed her seriousness. “I want to do that. It feels like it will take a long time, and it might not even happen.”

If that standard seems unrealistic, her performance in New Delhi suggested otherwise. At the Indira Gandhi Sports Complex, An punished even the smallest lapse from her opponent, dictating rallies with ruthless clarity and leaving little room for resistance.

That precision, she revealed, is shaped long before she steps onto court.

“When I go to sleep, I try not to think about anything,” she said. “But I always end up replaying the match in my head, the situations, the moments when you need to be ready. I keep thinking about those ‘ready-to-play’ moments.”

It is a habit that appears to sharpen her instincts rather than exhaust them, a mental rehearsal that turns preparation into execution.

On the receiving end, Intanon offered a candid assessment of the challenge An presents.

“I tried to find my balance today, but I felt I was always one step behind her,” the Thai star admitted. “She manages everything so well on court. When I watch her play others, she uses one style — but against me, she changes. She pushes directly at my weaknesses.”

It is that adaptability — the ability to shift gears mid-match, that increasingly separates An from the rest of the field.

Standing between her and another title is Wang Zhi Yi, who advanced to the final after edging compatriot and Tokyo 2020 champion Chen Yu Fei 21-15, 23-21. Remarkably, it was only Wang’s second win in 12 meetings with Chen — a breakthrough that sets up a compelling finale.

For An Se Young, though, the opponent almost feels secondary. Victories are expected. Titles are routine. What she is truly chasing remains far more demanding, a flawless match that exists, for now, only in her imagination.

And perhaps that relentless pursuit is what makes her the most formidable player in the women’s game today.



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