

# INT PICKLEBALL

T H E P I C K L E F I X

Volume 4 | July - Sept. 2026

FEATURE STORY

## FROM TABLE TENNIS TO PICKLEBALL

WALLY GREEN'S  
*NEXT CHAPTER*



A new journey.  
A new challenge.  
A new mission.

“  
**THE MAN  
FROM  
BROOKLYN!**  
”

THIS MAN'S A  
POWERHOUSE

### INSIDE THIS ISSUE



**MLP MID-SEASON  
TOURNAMENT PREVIEW**  
What to watch in Kansas City



**PICKLE MONEY BALL**  
How amateur tournaments  
are changing the game



**PICKLEBALL &  
BRAIN HEALTH**  
Staying active, connected,  
and intentional



**MLP WEEK 4 RECAP**  
Who's leading the pack?  
Latest power rankings

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# Table of Contents

|                                                                                              |           |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|
| <b>The Hero Pickleball Never Saw Coming: Wally Green's Next Chapter .....</b>                | <b>3</b>  |
| <b>Major League Pickleball Mid-Season Tournament Preview .....</b>                           | <b>7</b>  |
| <b>Dill &amp; Piki Adventures .....</b>                                                      | <b>9</b>  |
| <b>MLP Week 4 Power Rankings: Who's Leading the Pack? .....</b>                              | <b>10</b> |
| <b>Pickle Money Ball Is Changing Amateur Pickleball .....</b>                                | <b>13</b> |
| <b>More Than a Game: How Pickleball Helps LauraLee Denler Stay Active and Connected.....</b> | <b>15</b> |
| <b>Better Together: Why Great Partners Make Great Pickleball .....</b>                       | <b>17</b> |
| <b>IntoPickleball Magazine   Feature Story .....</b>                                         | <b>20</b> |

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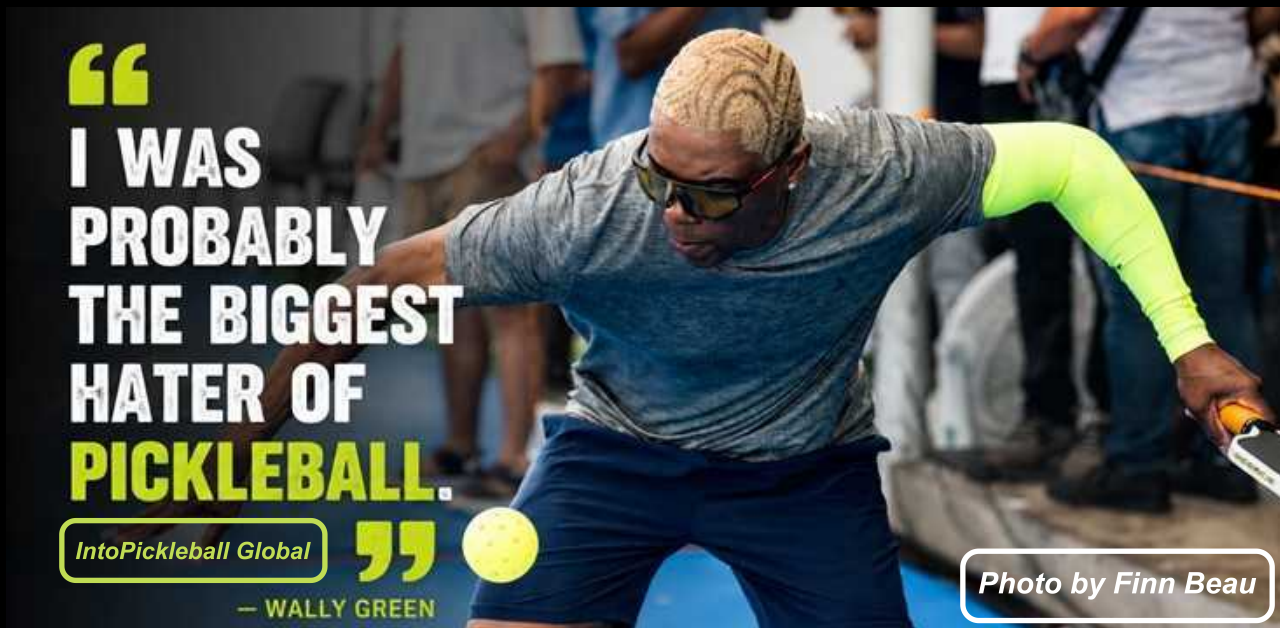
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# From Pickleball Critic to Pickleball Challenger:

## Wally Green's Unexpected Next Chapter



**W**ally Green never expected to become a pickleball player.

Actually, he was once one of the sport's biggest critics.

Known around the world for his energy and unique journey through professional table tennis, Green spent more than 15 years competing internationally and representing the United States. Table tennis was more than a sport for him. It was the thing that changed the direction of his life.

But pickleball? That was a different story.

***"I was probably the biggest hater of pickleball,"*** Green admitted.

Coming from the fast-paced worlds of table tennis and paddle tennis, Green initially did not understand the excitement surrounding the rapidly growing sport. As pickleball exploded in popularity, he watched from the outside, questioning whether the game deserved the attention it was receiving.

Then something unexpected happened.

While recovering from hip surgery, Green was riding to physical therapy when he noticed a group of people playing pickleball. Curious, he stopped to watch.

At first, he was simply trying to understand what everyone loved about it. But the longer he watched, the more his perspective began to change.

He noticed something different...

Unlike many competitive sports with steep learning curves, pickleball allowed people to step onto the court and experience success quickly. The lighter paddle, slower ball, and approachable style gave players a chance to enjoy the game almost immediately.

For Green, that accessibility became the key.

Pickleball was not just about creating elite athletes. It was creating opportunities for people of all backgrounds and skill levels to move, compete, connect, and have fun.

The sport he once criticized started to make sense.

## Starting Over After Becoming an Expert

For many athletes, reaching the highest level of one sport is the final goal.

For Wally Green, it became the beginning of a new challenge.

After spending over 15 years building his table tennis career, entering pickleball meant becoming a student again. But Green quickly discovered that his years of experience gave him a unique perspective.

The quick reactions, hand speed, spin control, and ability to read opponents developed through table tennis translated naturally onto the pickleball court.

***“Table tennis is so fast that you learn to recognize patterns,”*** Green explained.

At the highest level, success is not just about reacting. It is about anticipation.

Green believes that players can improve by learning to understand body positioning, recognize patterns, and prepare before the ball even reaches them.

Those lessons now shape the way he approaches pickleball.



## Bringing a Different Energy to the Court

Green has never been a traditional athlete.

Throughout his table tennis career, he became known not only for his skills but also for the personality and energy he brought into the sport.

Now, he wants to bring that same energy into pickleball.

However, his motivation goes beyond competition.

When Green first entered higher-level pickleball spaces, he noticed something that bothered him: ego.

Some players were quick to judge. Some underestimated others before seeing them play.

For Green, that became fuel.

He wanted to compete. He wanted to improve. He wanted to prove himself.

But more importantly, he wanted to prove something bigger:

Great players can still be humble.

Competition does not have to come at the cost of kindness.

***“I just want everyone to be nice,”*** Green said.

That belief comes from a lifetime of experiences far beyond sports.



## More Than a Game

Before becoming an international athlete, Green faced challenges that shaped his entire outlook on life.

***“Growing up in Brooklyn, I experienced a lot of violence, instability, and difficult circumstances at a young age. Sports became my escape; it gave me structure, discipline, and a place to direct my energy.”***

Table tennis eventually changed everything.

A sport he never expected to love took him around the world, introduced him to new cultures, and gave him opportunities he never imagined.

It even brought him to North Korea, where he used table tennis as a way to connect with people beyond political and cultural differences.

For Green, sports have always represented something bigger than winning.

They represent connection.

They represent second chances.

They represent the possibility of change.

## Finding Your Own Game

As a coach, Green brings that same philosophy to helping others improve.

He does not believe there is one perfect way to play pickleball.

Whether discussing paddle grip, technique, or strategy, Green believes players need to find what works for their own goals and abilities.

A method that works for one person may not work for another.

“Everyone is different,” he explained.

That is why his coaching approach focuses on understanding the player first rather than forcing everyone into the same system.

For beginners, his message is simple:

Enjoy the process.

Ignore unnecessary criticism.

Find your own way to play.

## The Next Chapter

Today, after only a year and a half in pickleball, Green is still just getting started.

His goals include competing at the professional level through organizations like PPA and Major League Pickleball, creating meaningful charity events, and bringing more diversity, personality, and energy into the sport.

After everything he has experienced, Green is still chasing new challenges.

The sport he once criticized has become another opportunity to grow.

Another opportunity to compete.

Another opportunity to connect.

For Wally Green, pickleball is not just about winning the next point.

It is about what happens after the rally ends.

The conversations.

The community.

The people.

Because after a lifetime of seeing what sports can do, Green is not just trying to become another great pickleball player.

He hopes to become a different kind of champion — someone who helps grow the game, opens doors for new players, and reminds people why they fell in love with sports in the first place.



**It's Just Too  
Dinkin' Good**

# The Race Heats Up: 2026 Edward Jones MLP Mid-Season Tournament Comes to Grand Rapids



## A Global Stage for the Sport

This year's event is also highlighting pickleball's growing international reach.

Along with the 20 MLP teams, four additional teams will join the competition: the Collegiate All-Stars, Team Australia, Team Canada, and Team Europe.

These teams represent the next generation of talent and show how quickly pickleball is expanding beyond its original borders.

### Collegiate All-Stars

- Kallan Arledge (Ohio State)
- Lauren Mercado (Utah Tech)
- Mary Monson (Utah Tech)
- Ryan Morneau (James Madison)

### Team Australia

- Sarah Burr
- Zach Grabovic
- Mitch Hargreaves
- Talia Saunders



Team Canada 

- Mackonner Dy
- Kyle Hermetz
- Rosie Johanson
- Kim Layton
- Ryan Torresin



Jordann VignaTeam Europe 

- Raquel Amaro (Spain)
- Pep Canyadell (Spain)
- Ben Cawston (United Kingdom)
- JM Medina (Spain)
- Kate Morris (United Kingdom)
- Karolina Owczarek (Germany)

The road to the 2026 Major League Pickleball postseason is heating up, and this July, all eyes will be on Grand Rapids.

From July 8–12, the Edward Jones MLP Mid-Season Tournament will bring together the biggest names in professional pickleball for five days of elite competition, rising talent, and high-stakes matchups.

Hosted alongside the iconic Beer City Open, the tournament will feature all 20 Major League Pickleball teams competing for valuable standings points, prize money, and momentum heading into the second half of the season.

For fans, it is more than another stop on the calendar. It is a chance to see where the future of pickleball is headed.

#### Why the Mid-Season Tournament Matters

As pickleball continues its rapid rise, team competition has become one of the most exciting parts of the professional game.

Every match at the Edward Jones MLP Mid-Season Tournament carries weight. Teams will not only be competing for a title, but also fighting for positioning as the 2026 postseason race begins to take shape.

With every point, partnership, and strategic adjustment, fans will get a closer look at the athletes and teams defining the next era of professional pickleball.

### The Bigger Picture

The growth of events like the Edward Jones MLP Mid-Season Tournament reflects how far pickleball has come.

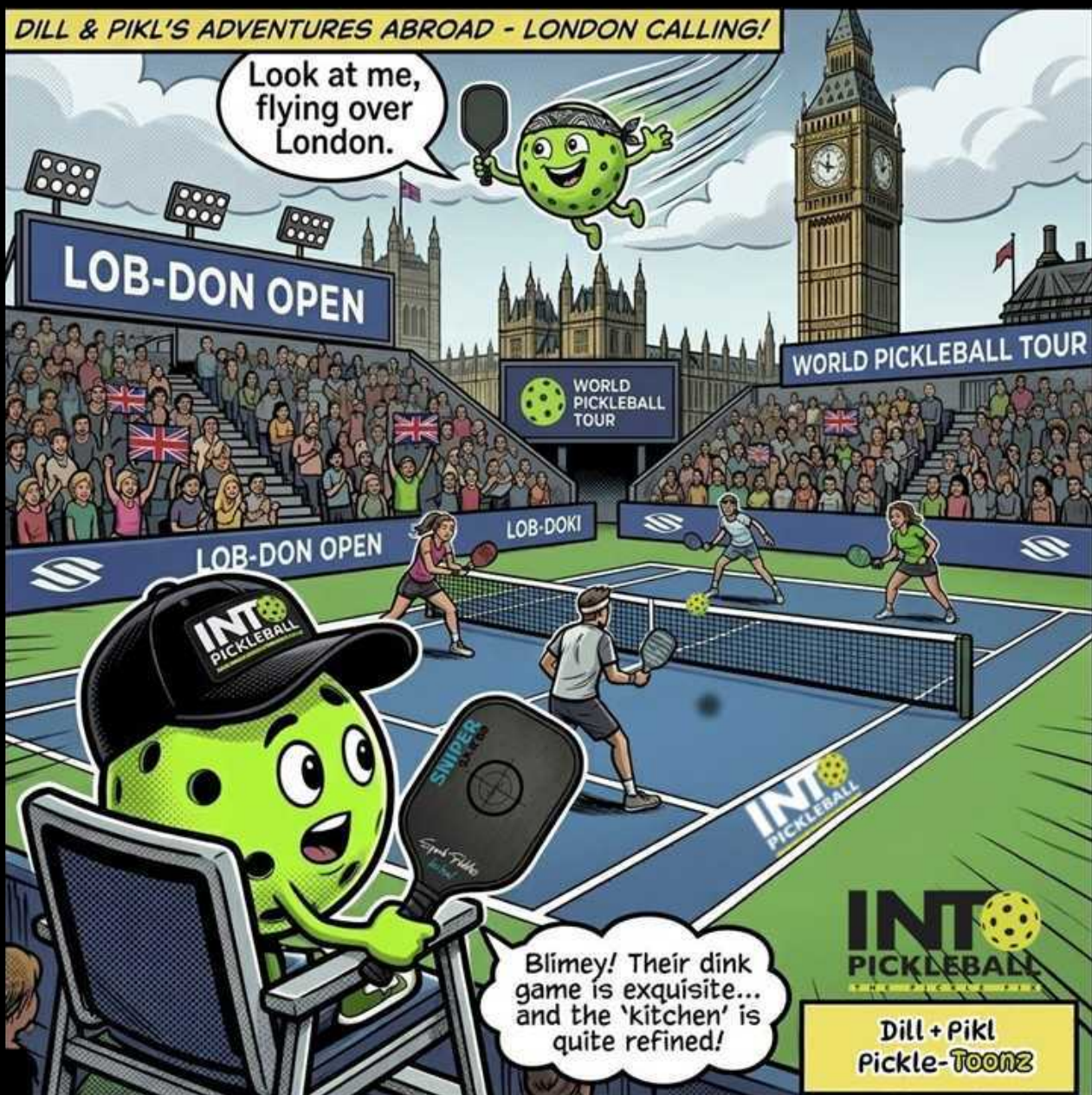
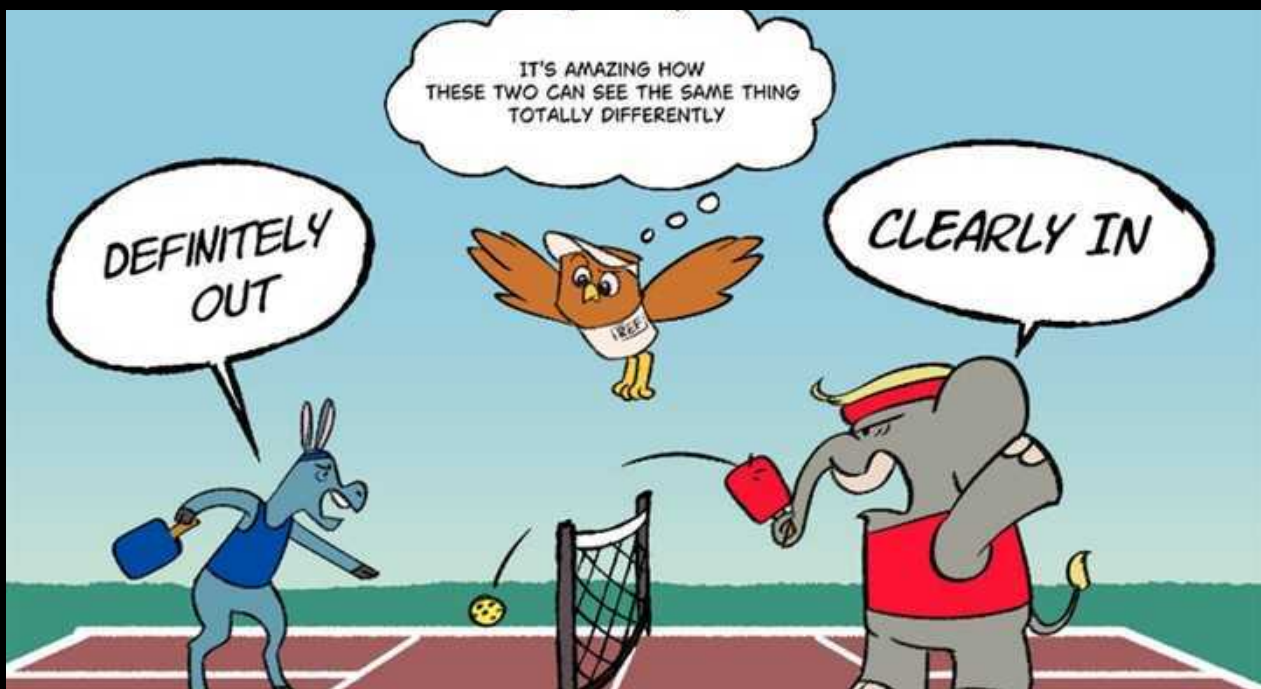
What started as a recreational game has evolved into a professional sport with elite athletes, international competition, passionate communities, and a rapidly expanding fan base.

This July in Grand Rapids, fans will see more than championship-level matches.

They will see the future of pickleball taking shape.

[www.intoPickleball.com](http://www.intoPickleball.com)

Source: Major League Pickleball.  
Edward Jones Mid-Season Tournament Updates.



# Beyond Medals: How Pickle Money Ball Is Changing Amateur Pickleball Competition



*IntoPickleball Global*

For years, amateur pickleball players have stepped onto tournament courts chasing competition, improvement, and the excitement of the game.

The reward at the end was usually familiar: a medal, a memory, and another tournament experience.

But as pickleball continues to grow, the amateur side of the sport is evolving too.

Pickle Money Ball is introducing a new idea to competitive pickleball: giving everyday players the opportunity to compete for real prize money.

The goal is simple — create more opportunities, raise the level of competition, and give amateur athletes something bigger to chase.

## A New Era for Amateur Players

Professional pickleball has grown rapidly in recent years, with bigger events, increased investment, and expanding audiences.

Now, amateur players are looking for new ways to challenge themselves as well.

Pickle Money Ball events are designed for competitive players across multiple skill levels, including 3.5 to 5.0+ divisions. Instead of only competing for medals, players have the chance to earn cash prizes based on their tournament performance.

For players who dedicate hours to practicing, improving, and traveling for events, the format adds a new level of excitement.

It gives competitors a goal beyond simply showing up.



## Creating a Path Forward

One unique part of Pickle Money Ball's approach is building a larger competitive pathway.

Players can nominate competitive matches and events to earn ranking points, including league matches, tournaments, and other organized play opportunities.

Those points contribute toward player rankings, future event seeding, and qualification opportunities for larger competitions.

The system creates something many amateur athletes look for:

A journey.

Every match becomes part of something bigger.

## More Than Prize Money

While the payouts receive attention, the bigger impact may be what this format does for player motivation.

Having meaningful goals encourages athletes to train, improve, and stay connected to the sport.

It also creates opportunities for local clubs, coaches, and pickleball communities as more players look for ways to develop their game.

As the sport continues growing, competitive opportunities are expanding beyond only professional athletes.

Pickleball's future may not just belong to the players on major championship courts.

It also belongs to the passionate everyday competitors who keep showing up, improving, and pushing the game forward.

## The Future of Amateur Competition

Pickle Money Ball represents another sign of pickleball's evolution.

The sport is moving beyond casual recreation and becoming a space where players of all backgrounds can set goals, test themselves, and experience competition in new ways.

For some players, pickleball is about friendship and fun.

For others, it is about chasing the next challenge.

And now, that next challenge might come with something more than a medal.



# MLP Week 4 Recap: New Jersey 5s Rise as the Playoff Race Gets More Competitive

IntoPickleball Global

The 2026 Major League Pickleball season is heating up, and Week 4 proved one thing: the race for the top is far from settled.

After an early-season setback, the New Jersey 5s have found their rhythm and climbed back to the top of the league conversation. With dominant performances, strong partnerships, and growing momentum, the team has quickly become one of the biggest stories of the season.

As teams continue fighting for standings points and postseason positioning, every matchup is becoming more important.



## New Jersey 5s Find Their Winning Formula

The New Jersey 5s did not have a perfect start to the season, but their response has been impressive.

After finishing fourth in their opening event, the team went on a dominant run, winning 12 straight matches across their next two events.

Their success has been driven by consistency across the lineup, especially from Anna Leigh Waters and Jorja Johnson, who have remained a powerful force in women's doubles.

Even in areas where the team is still improving, the 5s have shown their ability to adjust, support each other, and find ways to win.

That balance has helped push them back into championship conversations.

## A Tight Race at the Top

While New Jersey currently has momentum, several teams remain serious contenders.

The St. Louis Shock continue to prove they belong among the league's strongest teams, showing strong chemistry and high-level performances throughout the season.

The Los Angeles Mad Drops also remain one of the teams to watch. With elite talent and championship potential, they continue to be a major threat as the season progresses.

Meanwhile, the Columbus Sliders have stayed competitive despite challenges, making strategic moves and positioning themselves as another team capable of making a deep run.

## The Importance of Every Match

As Major League Pickleball grows, the team format has added a new layer of excitement to professional pickleball.

It is no longer only about individual stars.

Success depends on chemistry, partnerships, strategy, and how well players adapt under pressure.

With the postseason race approaching, every point and every matchup matters.

Teams are not just competing for wins today — they are building momentum for the biggest moments of the season.

## What Comes Next

The first half of the 2026 MLP season has already delivered surprises, breakout performances, and shifting rankings.

The question now is who can maintain their momentum.

Can the New Jersey 5s continue their winning streak?

Will another contender rise at the right moment?

One thing is clear: the competition is only getting stronger, and the road to the championship is just getting started.



# More Than a Game: How Pickleball Helps LauraLee Denler Stay Active and Connected

**IntoPickleball Global**

For LauraLee Denler, movement has always been part of life.

Long before stepping onto a pickleball court, she was already drawn to racquet sports. At 13 years old, she delivered newspapers to save money for her first tennis racquet. Later, she picked up racquetball in college, continuing a lifelong connection with competition, activity, and community.

Two years ago, another sport entered her life: pickleball.

But this new chapter began during an unexpected time.

After being diagnosed with young onset Alzheimer's, Denler continued searching for ways to stay active, engaged, and connected with the people around her.

Pickleball became one of those ways.

## Finding Community on the Court

For Denler, pickleball is part of a larger active lifestyle that also includes cycling, hot yoga, kayaking, hiking, and other outdoor activities.

But one thing that makes pickleball special is the community surrounding it.

Unlike many sports that can feel intimidating for beginners, pickleball creates an environment where players of different backgrounds and experience levels can step onto the court together.

The game provides more than exercise.

It creates conversations.

It builds friendships.

It gives people a reason to keep showing up.

That sense of belonging is one of the reasons so many players connect deeply with the sport.

## Staying Active, Staying Connected

Physical activity and social connection can play an important role in overall wellness, and pickleball brings both together.

The sport encourages movement, quick thinking, coordination, and interaction with others.

For many players, the benefits extend beyond the final score.

A match can become a routine.

A court can become a community.

A game can become a source of joy.

Denler's story highlights an important message: a diagnosis does not define the entirety of someone's life.

People are more than the challenges they face.

They are their passions, relationships, experiences, and the moments they continue creating.



## Living With Purpose

Denler shared her journey through This is ALZ, a campaign created to highlight stories of people living with early-stage Alzheimer's and show that the disease represents only one part of a person's identity.

The message behind the campaign is simple:

Knowing early. Living intentionally.

For Denler, that means continuing to embrace the activities she loves, staying connected to others, and finding new experiences along the way.

Pickleball may be played with a paddle, a ball, and a court.

But stories like Denler's show that its biggest impact often reaches far beyond the game itself.

Sometimes, the greatest wins are not measured by points.

They are measured by connection, purpose, and the ability to keep moving forward.



Source: Stephen Hunt, USA Pickleball  
"Pickleball Is One Of Many Activities Helping LauraLee Denler With Early-Stage Alzheimer's."

[www.intoPickleball.com](http://www.intoPickleball.com)

# Better Together: Why Great Partners Make Great Pickleball

By IntoPickleball Editorial Team | Produced by Shutterstock



One of the biggest reasons people fall in love with pickleball is simple: you rarely play alone.

Whether you're stepping onto the court with a lifelong friend, a spouse, or someone you just met five minutes ago, doubles is where the game truly comes alive.

Great pickleball isn't just about powerful drives or perfect dinks.

It's about communication.

It's about trust.

It's about learning to move as one.

## More Than Just a Teammate

The best partnerships aren't always built on having the strongest players.

They're built on understanding.

Great partners know when to encourage each other after a missed shot, when to take control of the point, and when to simply stay calm under pressure.

Sometimes the biggest momentum shift doesn't come from a spectacular winner.

It comes from a simple, "We've got this."

## **Communication Wins Points**

Every successful doubles team shares one common skill: communication.

Calling the ball.

Covering the middle.

Planning serves and returns.

Adjusting strategy between rallies.

The more teammates communicate, the more confidently they play.

Even at the professional level, the strongest partnerships rely on constant conversation—not just athletic ability.

## **Chemistry Can't Be Measured**

Some partnerships click immediately.

Others take months of practice.

There isn't one formula for great chemistry because every player brings different strengths, personalities, and playing styles.

The best partners learn to adapt.

Instead of trying to change each other, they discover how to complement one another.

That flexibility often becomes their biggest competitive advantage.

## **Every Match Builds Something**

Winning tournaments is exciting.

But many players remember something else long after the medals are gone.

The friendships.

The laughs after impossible rallies.

The road trips.

The shared victories—and even the tough losses.

Those experiences are what keep people coming back to the court.

## Watch Our Partner Series

Want to become a better doubles partner?

IntoPickleball's Partners Series features strategy tips, communication advice, and real conversations that help players build stronger chemistry on and off the court.

Watch the full series by scanning the QR code or visiting IntoPickleball.com.

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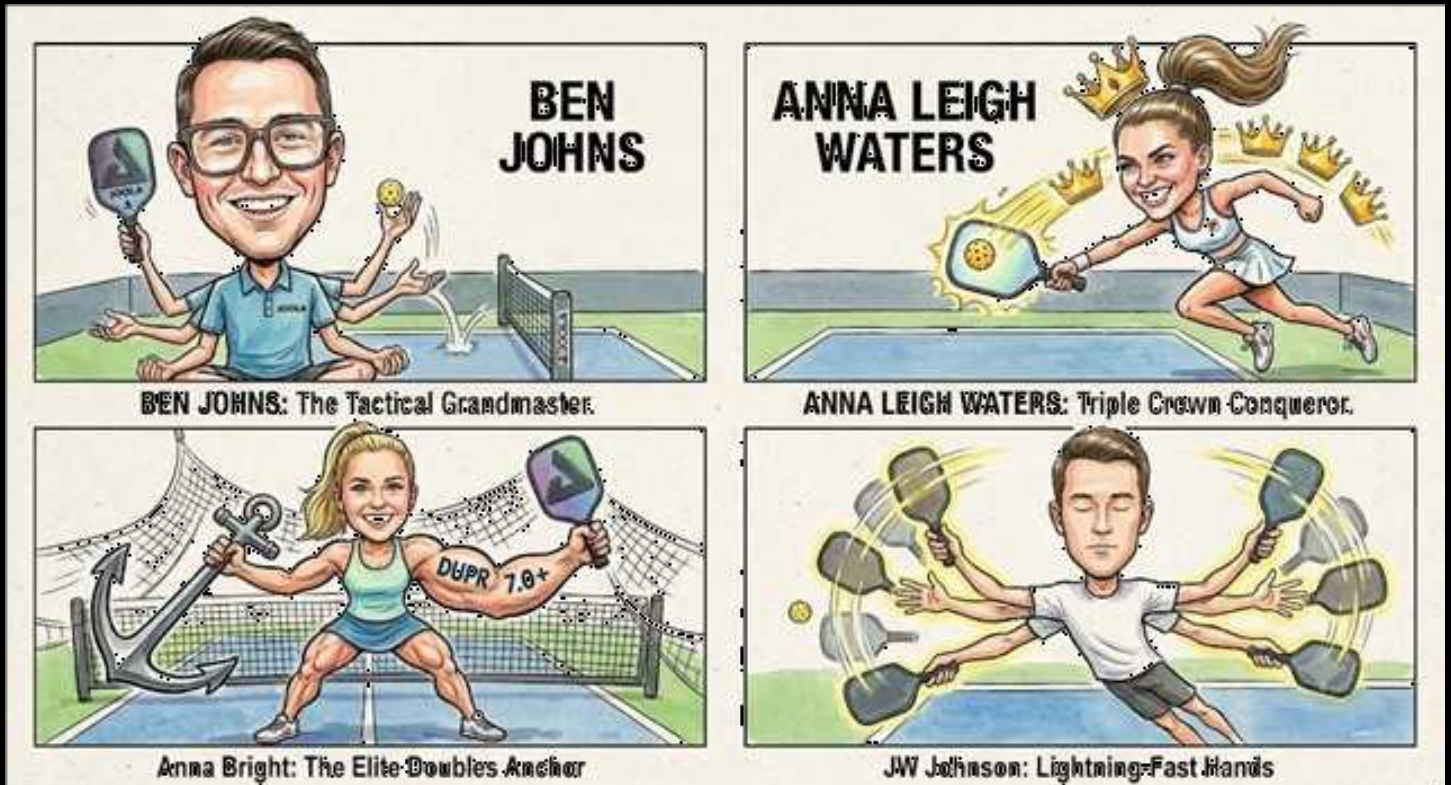
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# IntoPickleball Magazine | Feature Story

## Titans of the Kitchen: The Four Forces Shaping Modern Pickleball



**BEN JOHNS:** The Tactical Grandmaster.

**ANNA LEIGH WATERS:** Triple Crown Conqueror.

**Anna Bright:** The Elite Doubles Anchor

**JW Johnson:** Lightning-Fast Hands

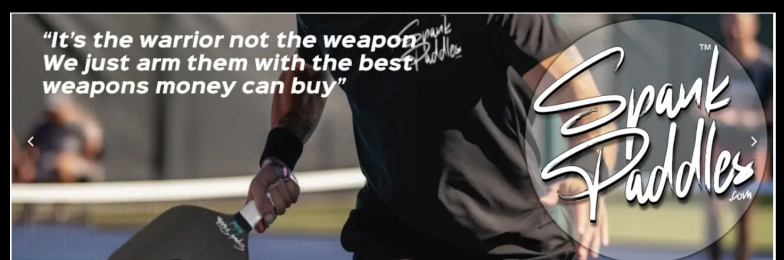
There was a time when pickleball was a quiet weekend escape played in neighborhood cul-de-sacs. Not anymore. Today, the PPA Tour and DUPR rankings outline a fiercely competitive landscape where the margins are razor-thin, the dinks are precise, and the hand speeds are blindingly fast.

At the absolute summit of this exploding sport stand four athletes. They aren't just winning tournaments; they are rewriting the playbook and defining what it means to be a professional pickleball player.

### The Blueprint of Greatness: Ben Johns

If you were to build the perfect pickleball player in a lab, they would probably look and play a lot like Ben Johns. Widely considered the "GOAT" of pickleball, Johns has held the No. 1 men's ranking longer than anyone and completely dominates in men's singles, doubles, and mixed doubles.

What makes Johns so devastating to opponents isn't just his raw power—it is his mind. Watching him play is like watching a grandmaster playing chess on a 20-by-44-foot court. He sets traps three shots in advance, turning standard dink rallies into tactical masterclasses. His dominance has set the standard that every rising player in the men's division is desperately trying to reach.



## The Crown Jewel: Anna Leigh Waters

While Johns rules the men's side, Anna Leigh Waters holds an iron grip on the women's division. She is the undisputed No. 1 in women's pickleball, playing with a level of ferocity and poise that completely dominates the tour.

Waters doesn't just win; she conquers. She holds more PPA Tour triple crowns—winning singles, doubles, and mixed doubles in the same event—than any other player in history. When she steps onto the court, her aggressive baseline game and punishing drives ensure that she remains the gold standard of the sport.

## The Elite Anchor: Anna Bright

Pickleball doubles is a game of trust, positioning, and high-speed execution, and few people anchor a partnership quite like Anna Bright. A consistent powerhouse in the women's and mixed doubles divisions, Bright holds one of the highest elite DUPR ratings in the world.

Bright brings an intense, infectious energy to the court, combined with world-class athletic defense. She can reset a terrifyingly fast attack into the kitchen with ease, only to flip the switch and unleash a devastating counter-attack the second an opponent leaves a ball high. She is the partner everyone wants, and the opponent everyone fears.

## The Silent Assassin: JW Johnson

If Anna Bright brings the lightning, JW Johnson brings the calm before the storm. Renowned for his absolute stone-faced composure, Johnson never lets his opponents see him sweat. No matter how high the stakes or how loud the crowd, his court composure remains entirely unshakeable.

But don't let the quiet demeanor fool you. Johnson possesses what many players consider the fastest, most lethal hands in the entire sport. Renowned for his lightning-fast hands, he is a formidable threat in both men's and mixed doubles, ready to counter balls that look completely un-returnable.

**The Takeaway:** As the sport continues to evolve at a breakneck pace, these four athletes remain the benchmarks of excellence. Whether it's through tactical brilliance, historical dominance, elite rating consistency, or lightning-fast reflexes, they are the titans keeping all of us completely hooked on the game.

