

INTO PICKLEBALL

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

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FEATURE STORY

Picklecon 2026 hits
Kansas City!



Meet Dill + Piki

FIVE LIVES LOST

RULES & REGS

TOYS "R" US PPA

\$38 Annual Subscription

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USD225 MILLION

PICKLEBALL INC. CHANGES THE GAME

Pickleball keeps growing, but this latest news feels different.

This is no longer just about new courts, local tournaments, or celebrities trying the sport. Major financial firms are now making serious long-term investments into pickleball, and the numbers are getting hard to ignore.

Pickleball Inc., the parent company behind the Carvana PPA Tour and Major League

Pickleball (MLP), has officially secured a massive \$225 million investment led by Apollo Sports Capital and Tom Dundon's Dundon Capital Partners. The deal reportedly values the company at around \$750 million.

That makes this one of the biggest financial moments pickleball has seen so far.



What Exactly Is Pickleball Inc.?

The company is much bigger than just professional tournaments.

Pickleball Inc. now combines several major parts of the sport into one ecosystem, including:

- Carvana PPA Tour
- Major League Pickleball
- Pickleball Central
- Pickleball.com
- DUPR ratings
- PickleballTV
- Tournament software and infrastructure

The idea is simple: instead of operating separately, everything works together under one growing platform.

That includes professional leagues, amateur tournaments, media coverage, technology, retail, and even court development.



Why Investors Are Paying Attention

The growth numbers behind pickleball are hard to ignore.

According to industry reports, more than 24 million Americans played pickleball in 2025, and participation continues rising every year.

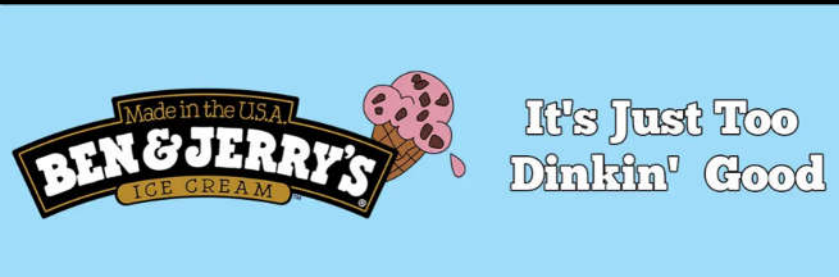
What makes the sport especially attractive to investors is how broad the audience has become.

Pickleball now attracts:

- Former tennis players
- Retired athletes
- Younger competitive players
- Families
- Casual recreational players
- Fitness communities

Courts are appearing everywhere, from parks and apartment complexes to luxury sports clubs and resorts.

That creates opportunities far beyond professional competition.



The Sport Is Becoming More Professional

One important detail from the investment announcement is the focus on scaling media, technology, and infrastructure.

The funding is expected to support areas like:

- Broadcasting
- Streaming and content
- Tournament operations
- Technology platforms
- Fan experiences
- Facility expansion



Pickleball already feels very different compared to only a few years ago. Production quality, livestreams, sponsorships, and professional events continue improving quickly.

This investment could accelerate that even more.

Our Take

Honestly, this feels like one of those moments people may look back on later as a turning point for the sport.

When investment firms like Apollo Sports Capital enter a space at this level, it usually means they believe there is still major long-term growth ahead.

At the same time, one reason people love pickleball is because it still feels social, welcoming, and community-driven. Hopefully, the sport can continue growing without losing that identity.

But one thing is becoming clear:

Pickleball is no longer trying to prove itself.

It is already becoming a serious business.



FIVE LIVES LOST

WHILE TRAVELING TO A PICKLEBALL TOURNAMENT IN TEXAS



What was supposed to be a normal tournament weekend for members of the Amarillo Pickleball Club turned into heartbreaking news for the entire pickleball community.

On the evening of May 1, a Cessna 421C carrying five people crashed in the Texas Hill Country near Wimberley, about 40 miles southwest of Austin. The group had been traveling from Amarillo to New Braunfels to participate in a tournament at Cranky Pickle when the aircraft went down in a wooded area.

Authorities confirmed that all five people on board lost their lives.

The tragedy quickly spread through pickleball communities across Texas and beyond, leaving many players shocked by how suddenly a routine trip could end so devastatingly.

The Investigation Is Ongoing

Federal aviation authorities are currently leading the investigation into what caused the crash.

At this stage, officials have not released a final explanation or confirmed what may have happened in the final moments before the aircraft went down. Investigators are expected to continue examining flight data, weather conditions, aircraft records, and the crash site itself over the coming weeks.

Another plane traveling from Amarillo to the same tournament reportedly landed safely at New Braunfels National Airport that evening.

For many people following the story, that detail made the tragedy even harder to process.

Two groups were heading toward the same event, planning to spend the weekend around the sport they loved, but only one completed the journey.

More Than Just Tournament Players

For people outside the sport, this may sound like a tragic aviation accident involving travelers on their way to a sporting event.

But inside the pickleball community, stories like this feel much more personal.

Pickleball has always been built around friendships, road trips, weekend tournaments, and communities that extend far beyond the court itself. Players often travel together, share hotels, eat meals after

matches, and spend entire weekends around the same group of people.

That is one reason this story has affected so many people so deeply.

Many players immediately saw themselves in the situation because traveling to tournaments is something countless pickleball players do every week across the country.

The Pickleball Community Responds

Since the news broke, messages of support and condolences have continued spreading online from players, clubs, and tournament organizers.

Many people described the victims as passionate members of the pickleball world who genuinely loved the sport and the community around it.

Some remembered seeing them at tournaments. Others shared stories about their kindness, competitiveness, or energy around the courts.

In moments like this, the competitive side of sports quickly fades into the background.

The focus becomes the people.

A Reminder That Life Can Change Quickly

The contrast between the two flights heading toward the same tournament has stayed in many people's minds this week.

One plane arrived safely.

The other never made it.

It is a painful reminder of how fragile life can be, even during ordinary moments that begin like any other weekend trip.

For many players, this tragedy has also become a reminder to appreciate the friendships and time shared through the sport itself.

Remembering Those Lost

The investigation into the crash will continue, but right now the pickleball community is focused on mourning and

supporting the families and friends affected by the loss.

The courts will fill again. Tournaments will continue.

But for many in Amarillo and throughout the pickleball world, this week will not soon be forgotten.

The pickleball community holds the victims, their families, and their loved ones in its thoughts.

They were part of this community, and they will be remembered.





THE TOYS “R” US PPA

FINALS ARE HERE AND THE BRACKETS ARE LOADED

The biggest week of the professional pickleball season has officially arrived.

The Toys “R” Us PPA Finals presented by JOOLA began this week in San Clemente, California, bringing together many of the top players across all five divisions:

- Men’s Singles
- Women’s Singles
- Men’s Doubles
- Women’s Doubles
- Mixed Doubles

And now that the official draw has been released, fans finally know the matchups that could define the week.

The Finals Feels Bigger This Year

The PPA Finals has always been one of the most important events on the calendar, but this year feels different.

Professional pickleball has grown rapidly over the last year, and the Finals now feels more like a true championship event instead of simply another tournament stop. The production is bigger, the attention is larger, and the pressure on players feels much more visible than before.

With the newly unified Pickleball Inc. structure now backing the PPA Tour and Major League Pickleball, the Finals also feels like a showcase of where the professional side of the sport is heading next.

For many players, this is the tournament that can completely change how their season is remembered.

The Draw Immediately Created Storylines

As soon as the brackets were revealed on May 5, fans started circling potential matchups.

Some divisions feel wide open this year, especially after recent changes involving partnerships, withdrawals, and shifting team chemistry late in the season.

One of the biggest talking points entering the Finals has been the absence of Anna Leigh Waters from singles competition due to fitness concerns, opening the door for a new women's singles champion to emerge.

Meanwhile, several doubles pairings also arrive with fresh combinations and unfinished questions about chemistry under pressure.

That unpredictability is part of what makes this year's Finals feel especially interesting.

Instead of clear favorites dominating every conversation, there is a feeling that multiple players and teams have a real chance to make a run.

The Best Players, One Last Tournament

The Finals is where an entire season comes together.

Players spent months collecting points and battling through tournaments just to qualify for this event. For some, simply reaching the Finals is already a major achievement. For others, anything short of a championship may feel disappointing.

And because the tournament includes pool play followed by elimination rounds, every match immediately matters.

There is very little room for a slow start.

Pickleball's Biggest Stage Keeps Growing

Another thing that stands out this year is how much more polished professional pickleball continues to look.

The broadcasts, the crowds, the venue setup, the streaming coverage, everything around the Finals feels more established compared to only a few years ago.

Every match from the tournament is streaming live on PickleballTV, giving fans around the world direct access to the action throughout the week.

And honestly, that says a lot about how quickly the sport has evolved.

Not long ago, it was difficult to even find consistent coverage of professional pickleball events. Now entire championship weeks are being streamed live with growing audiences following every result.

Why This Week Matters

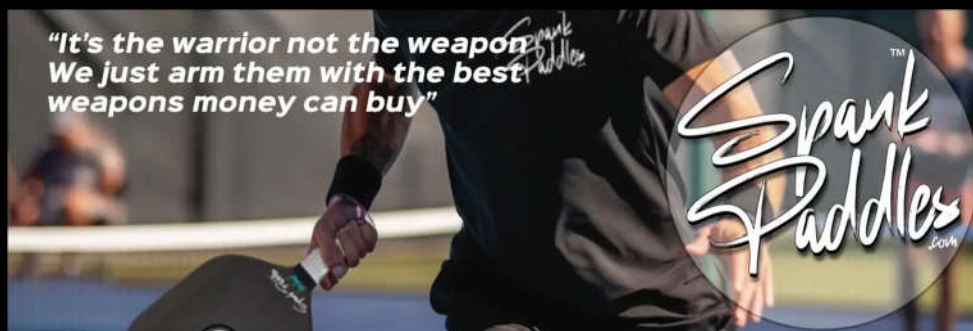
The PPA Finals is more than just another stop on tour.

For many fans, this event is becoming the tournament that defines the season itself.

Legacies shift here. Rankings change here. Rivalries become bigger here.

And because so many divisions feel open entering the week, there is a real sense that unexpected stories could emerge at any moment.

Whether you are watching from courtside in San Clemente or following from home, this is probably the best week of the year to pay attention to professional pickleball.





PICKLEBALL IS NO LONGER JUST GROWING IN AMERICA

For years, most of the conversation around pickleball growth focused almost entirely on the United States.

More courts. More tournaments. More players. More celebrities getting involved.

But lately, something bigger has started happening.

Pickleball is beginning to expand internationally in a much more serious and organized way, and it no longer feels experimental. It feels intentional.

That became even clearer after the PPA Tour announced parts of its 2026-2027 international schedule, which includes a growing number of events outside the United States. For a sport that only recently began building a stable professional structure, that is a major step forward.

And it is not happening alone.

Professional Pickleball Is Expanding Beyond the U.S.

One of the more interesting developments this year has been the launch of TOPSERIES Pickleball's international circuit

focused on the EMEA region, covering Europe, the Middle East, and Africa.

For many players outside North America, this is important news.

Until recently, international players often had limited access to structured high-level competition unless they traveled to the United States. Now professional tours and organizers are starting to build more regional opportunities closer to home.

That changes things.

It means players in countries where pickleball is still developing can now see a clearer pathway into competitive play without needing to relocate entirely to the U.S.

And honestly, that may become one of the biggest factors in global growth over the next few years.

Brands Are Investing in Global Expansion

The business side of pickleball is also starting to move internationally.

Earlier this year, Selkirk Sport secured a reported \$30 million investment aimed largely at expanding the brand globally. Company leadership has openly described international markets as the next major growth phase for the sport.

That matters because companies usually do not make investments at that level unless they believe demand already exists.

And in many places, it clearly does.

Pickleball courts are beginning to appear across Europe, Asia, the Middle East, and parts of Africa. In some countries, the sport is still small but growing quickly through local clubs and social communities. In others, organized tournaments are already starting to attract serious participation.

The momentum is spreading far beyond North America now.

Why International Growth Could Change the Sport

One interesting thing about pickleball's global expansion is that every region may shape the sport a little differently.

Some countries are leaning more recreational and community-focused. Others are pushing quickly into professional competition and club development.

That mix could eventually create very different playing styles, tournament cultures, and fan communities around the world.

And for players, the international side of pickleball opens up something else too:

Travel.

Not just vacations built around beaches or cities, but actual pickleball travel experiences where people connect through tournaments, clinics, and local communities in different countries.

That side of the sport still feels early, but it is easy to imagine where it could go.

The Sport Feels Like It Is Entering a Different Phase

For a long time, pickleball's growth story was about proving the sport was real.

Now the conversation feels different.

The infrastructure is improving. International tours are forming. Investment money is increasing. Professional leagues are becoming more organized. And global markets are starting to take the sport seriously.

It does not mean every country will suddenly become a pickleball hotspot overnight.

But it does feel like the sport has officially moved beyond being only an American phenomenon.

And honestly, that may end up being one of the biggest changes pickleball experiences over the next decade.



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For years, tennis was considered one of the best lifelong sports you could play. Now pickleball is entering that conversation in a very serious way.

A recent comparison published by The New York Times looked at which sport may be the better fit for long-term health and active aging, especially for adults over 45. And while tennis still offers major physical benefits, the article pointed toward pickleball as the more sustainable option for many players because of its lower injury risk, strong cardiovascular benefits, and highly social nature.

Honestly, that probably will not surprise most people already playing pickleball.

Why So Many Adults Are Switching to Pickleball

One reason pickleball keeps growing so quickly is because the sport feels accessible almost immediately.

New players can usually rally within their first session. The court is smaller, the movement is less physically punishing compared to tennis, and the learning curve feels less intimidating.

That combination matters, especially for adults who still want competition and exercise without putting as much stress on their bodies.

Tennis can absolutely provide a great workout, but it also demands:

- More court coverage
- More explosive movement
- Longer sprinting
- Greater shoulder strain
- Higher physical impact overall

Pickleball still keeps players moving constantly, but in a way that many people find easier to sustain consistently over time.

And consistency is often what matters most for long-term health.

The Workout Is More Real Than Some People Think

People who have never played pickleball sometimes assume it is physically easy because of the smaller court.

Then they try playing for two hours.

Pickleball involves constant movement, fast reactions, quick directional changes, balance, coordination, and repeated short bursts of effort. Doubles play especially creates long rallies that keep players active

without requiring the same level of full-court sprinting seen in tennis.

That balance is probably one reason so many players stay hooked on it.

You leave the court feeling like you exercised hard without necessarily feeling completely exhausted or beaten up afterward.

The Social Side May Be the Biggest Advantage

One thing that rarely gets enough attention is how social pickleball naturally becomes.

Open play formats, mixed skill groups, short games, and community courts make it very easy for players to meet people quickly. For many adults, especially after retirement or lifestyle changes, that social connection becomes just as important as the exercise itself.

And honestly, that may be one of pickleball's biggest strengths compared to many other sports.

People are not only showing up to compete.

They are showing up because they genuinely enjoy the community around it.

Pickleball Is Becoming Part of a Wellness Lifestyle

The conversation around pickleball has also changed over the last few years.

It is no longer viewed only as a recreational hobby.

Now the sport is increasingly connected to ideas around:

- Healthy aging
- Mental wellness
- Social connection
- Active lifestyles
- Long-term mobility
- Community health

And the more research that comes out, the more those ideas seem supported by what players already experience themselves.

Our Take

Tennis is still an incredible sport and probably always will be.

But pickleball feels uniquely positioned for the way many adults want to stay active today. It combines movement, strategy, competition, and social connection without demanding the same physical toll that some other sports require over time.

That balance is difficult to find.

And maybe that is one reason so many people who try pickleball end up sticking with it.

Sometimes the best workout is simply the one people genuinely want to keep doing every week.



THE PPA TOUR

TAKING A HARDER STANCE ON CHEATING AND PLAYER CONDUCT



Professional pickleball has had growing conversations around line calls and player conduct for a while now.

Fans talk about it online after matches. Players react to controversial moments during tournaments. Clips of questionable calls spread quickly across social media whenever a big point changes momentum.

Now the PPA Tour is responding with a much more serious approach.

Under the updated enforcement framework, repeat offenders can face escalating penalties for repeated bad line calls, unsportsmanlike conduct, and ongoing behavior violations. The goal is clear: professional pickleball wants stronger standards as the sport continues growing.

And honestly, this shift feels inevitable.

The Stakes Around the Sport Are Much Bigger Now

A few years ago, professional pickleball still felt relatively small and informal.

Now the sport has:

- National television coverage
- Major sponsorship deals
- Growing international audiences
- Packed tournament venues
- Millions in annual prize money

At that level, credibility matters.

The PPA clearly understands that if professional pickleball wants to keep growing into a mainstream sport, the product on court needs to look professional too.

That includes:

- Accurate line calls
- Respectful conduct
- Consistent officiating
- Accountability for repeat behavior

Because once sports start reaching larger audiences, controversies can quickly become bigger than the matches themselves.

Repeat Offenders Are the Main Focus

One important detail in the updated policy is that the focus is not simply on isolated emotional moments.

The league appears much more concerned about repeated patterns of behavior over time.

Warnings, fines, suspensions, and additional penalties may now increase for players who continue violating conduct standards after previous disciplinary action.

That distinction matters.

Every competitive sport has frustration, pressure, and close calls. But the PPA seems determined to separate occasional mistakes from behavior that repeatedly damages the integrity of competition.

The New Rules Go Beyond Line Calls

The updated conduct framework also addresses several other areas involving player behavior.

That includes:

- Excessive arguing
- Paddle throwing
- Delay tactics
- Repeated profanity
- Unsportsmanlike conduct toward officials or opponents

As professional pickleball becomes more visible, the league appears focused on building an environment that looks more

structured and professional to both fans and broadcasters.

Some players will probably feel the rules are becoming too strict.

Others will likely feel the changes are overdue.

Why This Matters Beyond the Professional Tour

Even though these rules apply at the professional level, the impact extends far beyond pro players.

Pickleball culture has always been one of the sport's biggest strengths. For years, the game became known for being welcoming, fair, and social even during competitive matches.

That culture helped the sport grow rapidly.

And whether people realize it or not, recreational players often take cues from what they see professionals doing during major events.

That is one reason many people inside the community support stronger enforcement.

The league is trying to protect the image of the sport before bad habits become normalized at larger levels of competition.

The Sport Is Entering a Different Phase

The updated enforcement framework feels like another sign that professional pickleball is entering a new stage.

The sport is no longer operating like a small niche community trying to gain attention.

Now there are major business partnerships, television expectations, sponsorship pressure, and growing mainstream visibility attached to every tournament.

With that growth comes higher expectations.

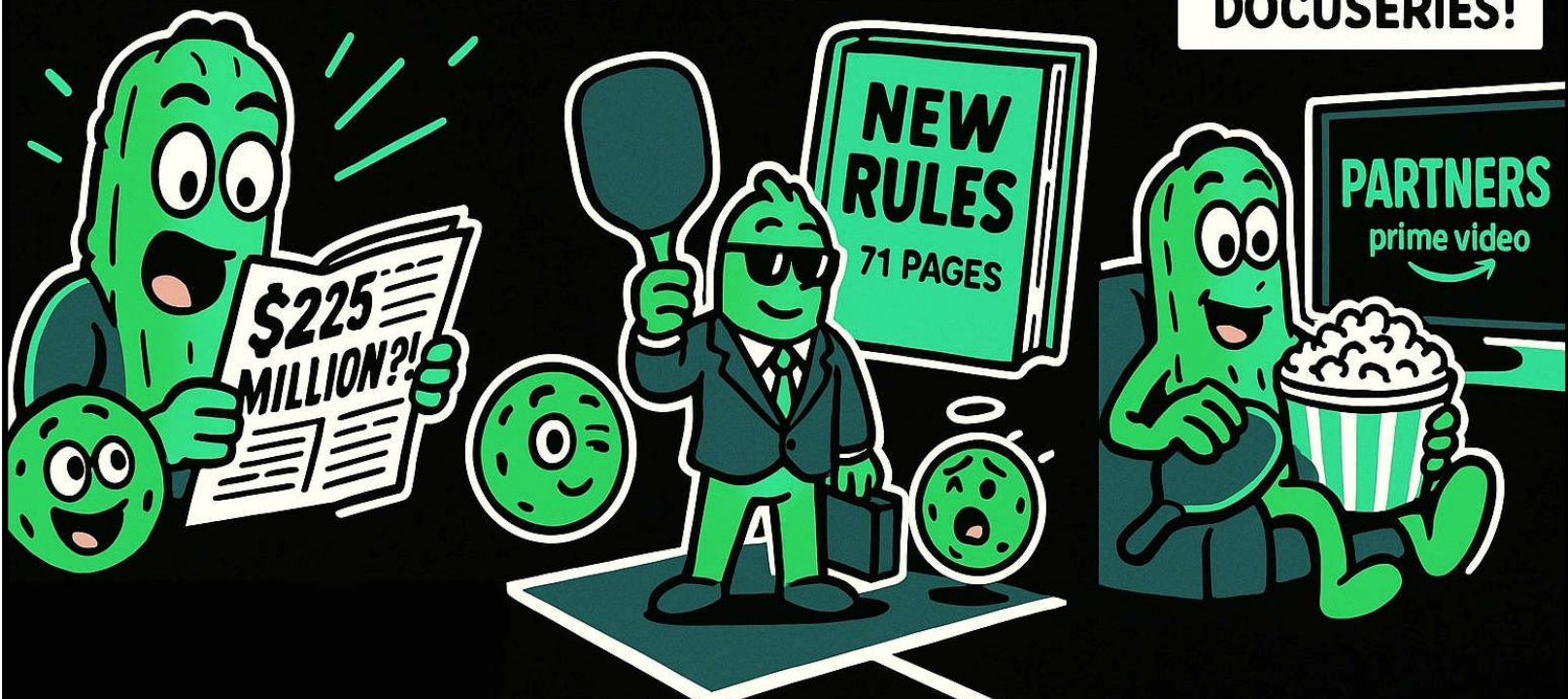
And the PPA seems ready to make it clear that professional pickleball is expected to act like a professional sport.



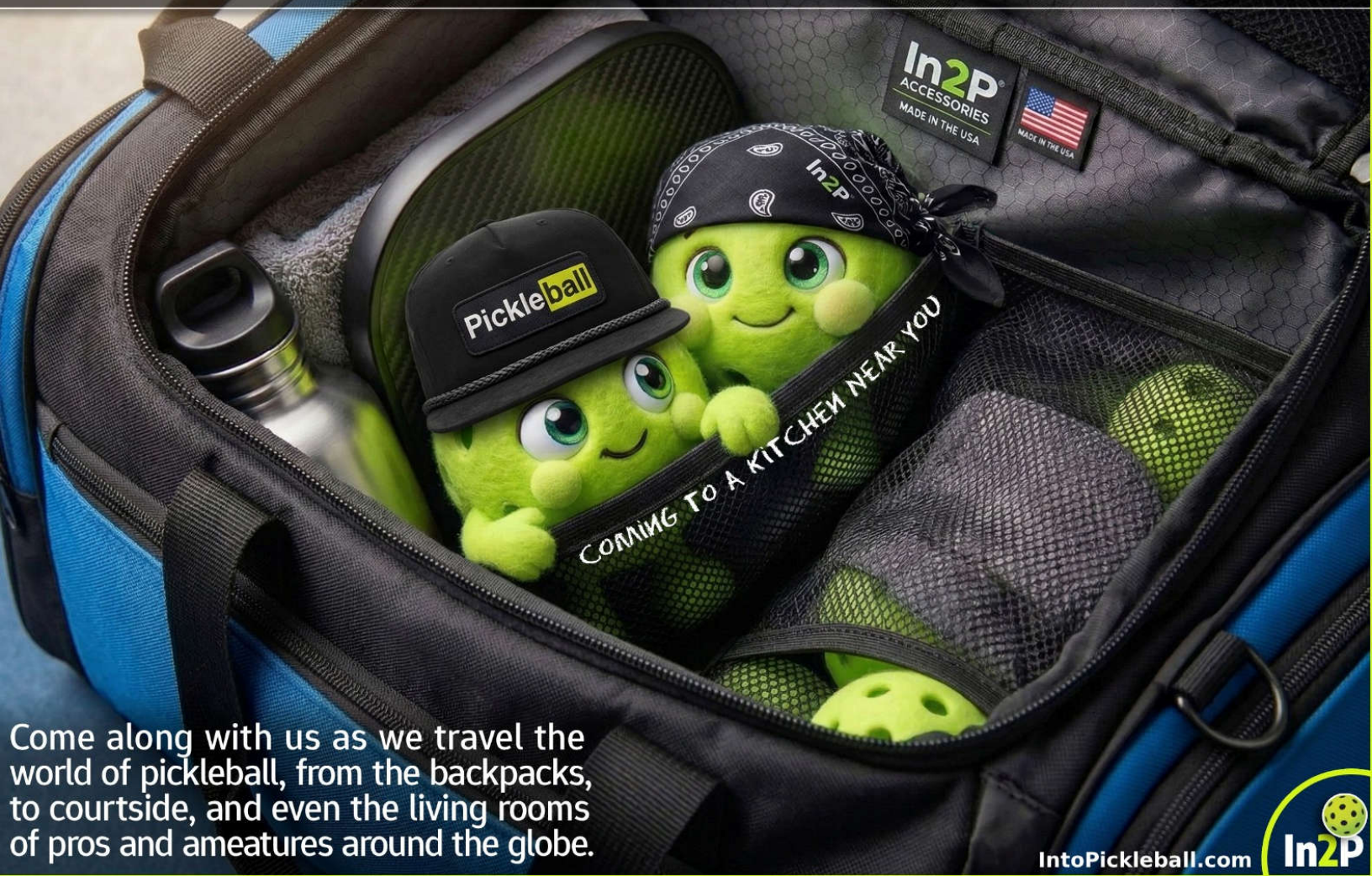
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