INTO PICKLEBALL

THE PICKLE FIX

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INSIDE THIS ISSUE

- The Race to the Top: MLP 2026 Standings
- Big Dink Energy: Behind the Pod
- 2026 Rulebook Overhaul Explained
- Dinking in Paradise: Top Travel Resorts

CONTRIBUTORS

Publisher – Ziggy Sigmund
Digital Supervisor – Hery Prasetya
Editorial Writer – Angeline Yang
AI Wrangler – Chat GPT
Cartoonist – John Zakour
Secretary – Stephanie Broad-Matts
Marketing – Robert Hall
Executive Advisor – Michael Keane

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CONTENT DIRECTORY

01 The Race to the Top: MLP 2026 Mid-Season Report
02 Dinking in Paradise: The 2026 Travel Guide
03 Bringing Big Dink Energy to the Court
04 2026 Rulebook Overhaul: What You Need to Know
05 The Next Generation of Power: Paddle Tech
06 Eat. Recover. Play Again. Anti-Inflammatory Kitchen
07 PickleToonz: The Adventures of Dill & Pikl

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It's Just Too Dinkin' Good

THE RACE TO THE TOP

Major League Pickleball's 2026 season is heating up. With shifting power dynamics, here is what to watch as the playoffs approach.

BY INTOPICKLEBALL EDITORIAL TEAM



The 2026 Major League Pickleball season is officially past its halfway mark, and the race for the top of the standings is proving to be one of the most fiercely competitive in the sport's history. After an early-season period of adjustment for several newly drafted rosters, the true championship contenders are finally separating themselves from the rest of the pack.

Leading the charge are the New Jersey 5s. After what some considered a slow start in their opening event, the 5s have found an unstoppable rhythm, claiming the top spot in the overall standings with a dominant string of victories. Their success is built on absolute consistency across their lineup and a strategic mastery of mixed doubles that leaves opponents scrambling for answers. They have proven that chemistry and patience can outweigh pure firepower when matches go down to the wire.

However, the top spot is far from secure. Breathing down their necks are the St. Louis Shock, a team that has refused to back down from high-pressure situations. The Shock boast a dynamic, fast-paced style of play that heavily relies on aggressive kitchen line attacks and lighting-fast resets. For fans, watching the Shock is an adrenaline rush; for their opponents, it is an exhausting test of reflexes.

Not to be ignored, the Los Angeles Mad Drops and the Columbus Sliders are currently holding strong in the third and fourth positions, respectively. Both teams have shown flashes of utter brilliance, blending veteran leadership with explosive rookie talent. The Mad Drops, in particular, have built a reputation for turning matches around in the final moments, utilizing strategic timeouts and lineup shifts to break their opponents' momentum.

CURRENT 2026 STANDINGS

RANK	TEAM	POINTS	WIN %
1	New Jersey 5s	118	68.5%
2	St. Louis Shock	111	64.2%
3	Los Angeles Mad Drops	86	58.1%
4	Columbus Sliders	83	56.8%
5	Brooklyn Pickleball Team	79	54.5%



As the final events of the regular season approach, every single match carries immense weight. Teams are no longer just fighting for individual event payouts—they are fighting for critical seeding positioning. The upcoming tournaments will test roster depth, mental fortitude, and the physical endurance of these elite athletes.

DINKING IN PARADISE

From the coast of Italy to the islands of the Maldives, these luxury resorts are making pickleball the ultimate vacation experience in 2026.

BY SARAH JENKINS, TRAVEL EDITOR



Gone are the days when taking a vacation meant leaving your paddle behind. In 2026, the global hospitality industry has fully embraced the pickleball phenomenon. Luxury resorts across the world are no longer just retrofitting old tennis courts; they are building state-of-the-art, dedicated pickleball facilities designed to attract the modern traveler who wants to balance relaxation with a bit of healthy competition.

If you are planning your next getaway and refuse to let your dink game get rusty, the world is quite literally your oyster. Leading the charge in Europe is the breathtaking Centro Vacanze Pra' delle Torri in Caorle, Italy. Nestled along the Adriatic coast, this resort offers pristine dedicated courts paired with world-class Italian cuisine. Imagine finishing a morning round-robin tournament and immediately walking to a seaside terrace for fresh seafood and an espresso.

For those seeking a more tropical escape, the Veligandu Maldives Resort Island has integrated the sport into paradise. It is an incredibly surreal experience to play a high-stakes match while surrounded by crystal-clear turquoise waters and white sand beaches. The ocean breeze adds a unique variable to your lob game, but the post-match ocean plunge makes every missed shot completely worth it.

In the United Kingdom, the historic Foxhills Club & Resort in Ottershaw has proven that traditional country clubs can beautifully adapt to the modern era. Combining classic British elegance with modern, high-contrast pickleball courts, Foxhills has become a sanctuary for players looking to enjoy a prestigious, quiet getaway while still getting their daily hours of court time.



Closer to home, properties across the United States and Mexico continue to raise the bar. The Montage Los Cabos seamlessly blends intense, pro-level clinics with luxury spa recovery treatments. You can spend the morning drilling transition zone shots with a certified professional and the afternoon receiving a deep tissue massage specifically tailored for paddle-sport athletes.

Ultimately, the rise of the "Pickleball Vacation" proves that this sport is much more than a backyard game—it is a lifestyle. It connects people, encourages activity, and now, it dictates where we choose to spend our most precious commodity: our free time. Pack your bags, but most importantly, do not forget your paddle.

BRINGING BIG DINK ENERGY



Half insight, half nonsense, and 100% entertainment. Meet the voices behind the sport's most relatable and rapidly growing podcast.

BY INTOPICKLEBALL EDITORIAL TEAM

If you are exhausted by hyper-technical breakdowns of grip tape and endless debates over paddle core thickness, there is a new conversation happening off the court that you need to hear. Enter *Big Dink Energy*, the podcast that perfectly captures the culture, the friendships, and the everyday chaos of being a pickleball player.



Hosted by Stephanie and Guy Beveridge, alongside their longtime friend Stefanie (affectionately known as "Paddle Princess"), the show has struck a massive chord with the over-40 demographic. It is a casual, unfiltered conversation about pickleball and life, blending the sport we love with the realities of navigating adulthood.

What sets *Big Dink Energy* apart is its sheer relatability. You do not need to be a 5.0 player to understand their banter. In fact, you barely need to know the rules. The hosts dive into everything from the absurdities of making friends after 40, to the sudden influx of hyper-competitive egos at local open play, to the universal struggle of dealing with a body that stays stiff for three days after a tournament weekend.

> *"We're diving into the things people do in public that turn us into spectators against our will, and the petty things we're absolutely NOT fine with... even though we pretend we are."*

Recent episodes have tackled hilarious and grounded topics. They've discussed the dangers of making your DUPR rating your entire personality, the ridiculousness of buying a $497 "framework" just to improve your dink, and why simply stepping onto a court sometimes feels like walking into a high school cafeteria.

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Whether they are interviewing sports psychologists, chatting with everyday players, or just venting about the quirks of the pickleball community, Stephanie, Guy, and Stefanie deliver an experience that feels exactly like hanging out with your favorite doubles partners after a long night of rec play. *Big Dink Energy* is available now on all major podcast platforms and is proudly featured on IntoPickleball.com.

2026 RULEBOOK OVERHAUL



The latest updates are here. USA Pickleball is cracking down on serve mechanics and paddle compliance to eliminate the gray areas.

BY MARCUS REED, RULES & OFFICIATING ANALYST



Every year, the sport of pickleball evolves, and with that evolution comes the necessary tightening of the rules that govern competitive play. For the 2026 season, the governing bodies have released a rulebook update that is less about changing the fundamental nature of the game, and more about eliminating the ambiguous "gray areas" that have led to endless on-court arguments and referee interventions over the past few years.

The most significant and heavily scrutinized update involves serve mechanics. For years, the volley serve has been a point of contention, with players constantly pushing the limits of what constitutes an illegal "upward arc" or a contact point "below the waist." The 2026 rulebook attacks this ambiguity directly by inserting the word "clearly" throughout the legal requirements.

Moving forward, your paddle must *clearly* move in an upward arc. The ball contact must *clearly* occur below your waist, and the paddle head must definitively stay below your wrist at the point of contact. This deliberate shift in language is designed to empower referees. They now have the explicit authority to call a fault on questionable serves without needing to prove absolute certainty; if the legality of the serve is not "clear," it is a fault. Players who rely on deceptive, borderline-illegal side-arm serves will need to completely retool their mechanics.

The second major overhaul targets equipment compliance, an issue that has plagued the professional and amateur circuits alike as paddle technology rapidly advances. Paddle verification has officially moved from a casual, honorable-mention check-in to a mandatory, strictly enforced pre-match inspection at all sanctioned events.

The 2026 rulebook now explicitly requires all paddles to display permanent, legible "USA Pickleball Approved" markings directly on the face or edge guard. Furthermore, the paddle must match the exact specifications listed on the official approved equipment database. Any tournament player caught utilizing non-compliant or altered equipment during a match will face immediate forfeiture.

These rule changes mark a clear maturation of the sport. As the stakes get higher, the prize pools get larger, and the competition grows fiercer, the foundation of fair play must be rock solid. Before you step up to the baseline for your next tournament, make sure your serve is clean and your paddle is legal.

THE NEXT GENERATION OF POWER

From Gen 3+ hybrid cores to aerospace-grade carbon, here are the paddles completely dominating the 2026 market.

BY TECH & GEAR REVIEW TEAM



If you thought paddle technology had plateaued, 2026 is here to prove you wrong. Manufacturers have pushed the boundaries of materials science, resulting in a new wave of paddles that offer unimaginable combinations of power, spin, and touch. The era of choosing between a "power paddle" and a "control paddle" is slowly fading as hybrid engineering takes center stage.

Leading the pack is the highly anticipated JOOLA Perseus Pro V 16mm. Retaining the massively successful propulsion core from previous generations, the Pro V introduces KineticFrame technology. This addition stabilizes the paddle head on off-center hits, creating a remarkably consistent response across the entire face. While elongated paddles historically punish mishits, the Perseus Pro V manages to deliver explosive baseline power while remaining astonishingly soft and forgiving during intense kitchen firefights. It is a true all-court weapon.

For players whose game revolves around heavy topspin and aggressive slicing, the Thrive FURY Hybrid 15.5mm has emerged as the definitive choice. Engineered as a "Gen 3.5" paddle, the FURY features a gritty surface texture that violently grips the ball. The foam-enhanced core perimeter increases the paddle's overall dwell time—meaning the ball stays on the face just a fraction of a second longer—allowing for massive spin generation even on compact swings. If you love dipping drives at your opponents' feet, this is your paddle.

Finally, for those seeking elite performance without the professional price tag, the Luzz Glider is turning heads. Built with an aerospace-grade carbon face and a plush 16mm polypropylene honeycomb core, the Glider offers tour-level maneuverability and a massive sweet spot. It proves that in 2026, top-tier engineering is becoming accessible to everyone.

EAT. RECOVER. PLAY AGAIN.

Fight inflammation, reduce muscle soreness, and bounce back faster with these delicious, athlete-focused post-match meals.

BY DR. LANE ODOM & THE NUTRITION TEAM



We have all been there. You play "just one more game" for three hours straight, and the next morning, rolling out of bed feels like a monumental athletic achievement. Delayed Onset Muscle Soreness (DOMS) and joint stiffness are the unglamorous realities of a sport that demands constant lunging, stopping, and twisting.

While stretching, hydration, and rest are critical, what you put into your body immediately following an intense session can drastically impact your recovery time. After an intense match, your body needs a combination of protein to repair micro-tears in the muscle, complex carbohydrates to replenish depleted glycogen energy stores, and healthy, anti-inflammatory fats to soothe stressed joints.

Timing matters just as much as the ingredients. The 30 to 60-minute window following your final game is when your body is most efficient at absorbing nutrients. Instead of reaching for a greasy drive-thru burger on the way home from the courts, try preparing these simple, delicious recovery meals in advance. Your knees and lower back will thank you tomorrow.

TART CHERRY RECOVERY OATS

Best for: The morning after a grueling league night.

Tart cherries contain powerful antioxidants that have been shown to help accelerate strength recovery and reduce muscle soreness. This zero-decision breakfast is ready the moment you wake up.

- 1/2 cup rolled oats
- 1/2 cup Greek yogurt (high protein)
- 1/2 cup unsweetened 100% tart cherry juice
- 1 tablespoon chia seeds
- 1/4 cup frozen tart cherries
- 1 tablespoon chopped walnuts

Instructions:

1. Combine the oats, cherry juice, yogurt, and chia seeds in a mason jar.
2. Stir thoroughly, cover, and refrigerate overnight.
3. Top with extra cherries and walnuts before eating.

GOLDEN LENTIL & GINGER SOUP

Best for: Rebuilding energy over the next few days.

Red lentils provide excellent plant-based protein and fiber, while turmeric and ginger serve as natural, powerful anti-inflammatory agents to calm angry joints.

- 1 cup red lentils, rinsed
- 4 cups low-sodium vegetable broth
- 1 diced onion & 2 minced garlic cloves
- 1 tablespoon freshly grated ginger
- 1 teaspoon turmeric powder
- 2 handfuls of fresh spinach

Instructions:

1. Sauté the onion and garlic in a splash of olive oil until soft.
2. Stir in the ginger and turmeric, cooking for 1 minute until fragrant.
3. Add the lentils and broth. Simmer for 20 minutes.
4. Remove from heat, stir in spinach until wilted, and serve.

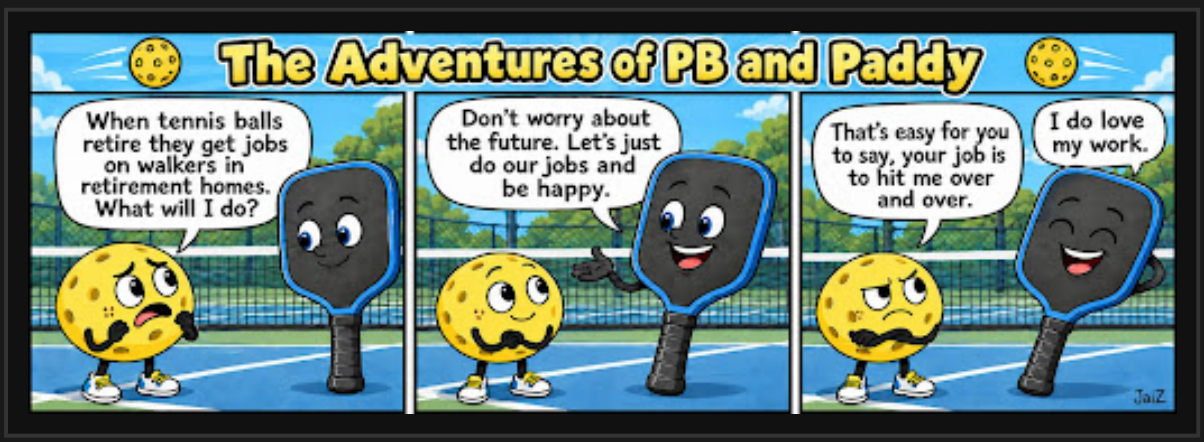
PickleToonz

THE ADVENTURES OF DILL + PIKL





PB AND PADDY





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