

GROWTH / COMMUNITY / BELONGING

Give players a reason to return.

A practical playbook for building a stronger, more connected pickleball club.

WHERE ARE YOU? START HERE

Thinking about opening a club Playbook 03: Before you sign the lease

Open, and want more regulars Playbook 01: Give players a reason to return

Need more new players Playbook 04: Share your story

Thinking about what's next Playbook 02: Beyond the numbers

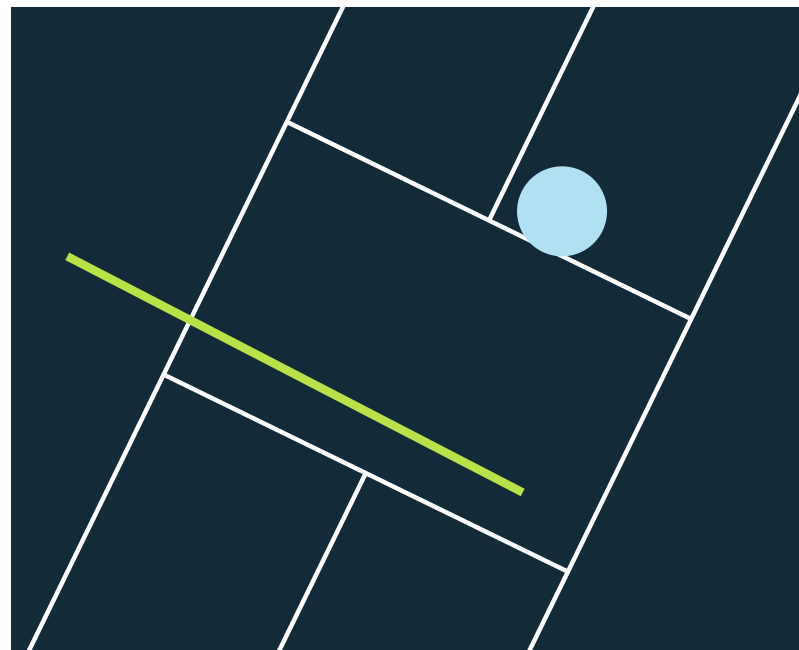
Under pressure right now Playbook 01: Section 10, then Playbook 04

SMALL ACTIONS. LASTING CONNECTIONS.

Know your players.
Show them the next step.
Keep score every week.

LISA & DUSTIN DEMERITT

Lessons from building Pickles.



00

START HERE

A stronger club. One step at a time.

For independent and franchised clubs, and whoever runs the club day to day.

We were normal people who got there early, listened hard and kept getting back up. We opened Pickles in March 2021, when clubs like ours were rare, and that timing helped. You can't buy it today.

The good news: what kept players coming back hasn't changed. People want to feel known, and they want to know what to do next. Running a club is hard either way. **Choose your hard.**

We don't have every answer. This is what worked for us, nothing held back.



HOW TO USE THIS PLAYBOOK

STEP	WHAT TO DO	TIME
1	Take the health check on the next page. Circle your two lowest scores.	10 min
2	Do the page for one of them. Short answers are enough.	30 min
3	Try one change for 30 days. Pick the scorecard number it should move (section 10).	30 days
4	Then decide: keep it, adjust it or stop it. Pick the next one.	15 min

Print it, or write on it in any PDF markup app. These pages share what worked for us. They aren't legal, financial or franchise advice.

01

CLUB HEALTH CHECK

Where should you start?

Ten minutes. Be honest, not hard on yourself. Score each line from 1 (not yet) to 5 (we nail this).

STATEMENT	SCORE 1-5	GO TO
We know what our players want: competition, improvement, or a good time with people they like.		02
A newcomer who arrives alone is welcomed by name and in a game within ten minutes.		03
Every lesson or clinic ends with a next step, and our coaches send players into it.		04
Players at every level have an event or goal to work toward.		05
Our regulars make room for new players, and we don't leave that to luck.		06
Our quiet hours earn their keep, and we know which programs are worth it.		07
Our memberships make it easy to try us and give people a reason to move up.		08
A player gets the same care when the owner isn't there.		09
We know how many weeks of cash we have, and we check a few numbers weekly.		10

TOTAL SCORE (OUT OF 45)

MY TWO LOWEST LINES

Do this check again with one staff member. Where your scores differ is often more useful than the scores.

NOTES

WHAT GOOD LOOKS LIKE

Every 4 or 5 is something to protect. Every 1 or 2 is a clear place to start.

ONE THING THIS WEEK

Circle your two lowest scores and turn to the first page they point to.

02 KNOW YOUR PLAYERS

Who are you building for?

“Everyone” isn’t a plan. Know your four or five kinds of players, what each one wants and what they need next.

AT PICKLES

We gave our player types names so the whole team could picture them: First-Time Franny and Frank. Hitting Hannah and Hank. Growing-Family Gloria and Glen. Mid-Life Michelle and Michael. Retired Angie and Albert, who had time to play and loved to. Each one got a different next step.

PLAYER TYPE	WHAT THEY WANT FROM THE GAME	WHAT THEY NEED NEXT	DO WE OFFER IT?

Ask every player one question early: are you here for competition, to improve, or for a good game with people you enjoy? All three are great answers. They lead to different next steps.

WHAT WE’RE SEEING NATIONALLY

24.3M Americans played pickleball in 2025	7.5M core players, playing 8+ times a year	13–24 the age group with the highest participation rate
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Source: SFIA 2026 Pickleball Single Sport Report, June 2026.

NOTES

WHAT GOOD LOOKS LIKE

Any staff member can name your player types and the next step you’d offer each one.

ONE THING THIS WEEK

Talk to a newcomer, a regular and someone who stopped coming. Ask what would make it easier to play here again.

03

THE FIRST VISIT

Help people feel known.

Players come back when two things are true: they feel known, and they know what to do next.

AT PICKLES

We greeted every person who walked in. Once we knew a name, we used it. We studied the schedule, so we knew who was there for a lesson and who their coach was. We walked the floor and listened. Those small moments mattered more than anything we spent on marketing.

**FIRST-VISIT CHECKLIST: RUN IT FOR EVERY NEW PLAYER**

- | | |
|---|---|
| ☐ Greeted within a minute, by name if booked | ☐ Asked “What brings you in today?” |
| ☐ Shown where to wait, play and find the bathrooms | ☐ Introduced to at least one player |
| ☐ In a game at the right level within ten minutes | ☐ Checked on once during play |
| ☐ Told what to try next before leaving | ☐ Name and contact captured, with permission |

Your marketing makes a promise. The first visit keeps it or breaks it. Playbook 04, section 02, shows how to line the two up.

NOTES

WHAT GOOD LOOKS LIKE

Every first-timer leaves knowing at least one person's name and their next step.

ONE THING THIS WEEK

Before each shift, have staff scan the schedule and know who's coming in and why.

04

THE PLAYER JOURNEY

Always show the next step.

A schedule can overwhelm a new player. A coach who just watched them play and says “here’s your next step” makes it easy.

AT PICKLES

After every lesson or clinic, the coach walked players to the desk, showed them the next step on our progression card and encouraged them to sign up. **Our biggest miss:** we thought we were building for people who already played. Teaching new players became a huge part of our business. If we opened again, we’d plan the second and third visit from day one.



THE HANDOFF, IN THREE SENTENCES

“You did great today. Here’s what I’d recommend next, and here’s why. Let’s look at when it’s offered.”

IF A PLAYER IS...	THEIR NEXT STEP IS...	WHEN IT RUNS
Brand new		
Getting comfortable		
Playing regularly		
Ready to compete		

EVERY COACH

- | | |
|---|--|
| ☐ Knows your player path and uses the handoff | ☐ Is patient and kind with beginners |
| ☐ Recommends club programs, not only private lessons | ☐ Places players the same way the club does |

NOTES

WHAT GOOD LOOKS LIKE

No one leaves a lesson or clinic wondering what to do next, and lessons turn into clinics, leagues and events.

ONE THING THIS WEEK

Fill in the table with your coaches, print it and put it at the desk.

05

GOALS FOR EVERY LEVEL

Give every level something to train for.

An event on the calendar gives players a reason to take lessons, join clinics and play leagues. Build the path backward from it.

AT PICKLES

We built tournaments for newer and social players, not only the best ones. A beginner had a path: lessons, then clinics, then a league, then a beginner event already on the calendar. For one team event, everyone got a rating, played an eight-week qualifier, then a three-day tournament with rally scoring. It filled courts for months, not days.

THE GOAL	WHO IT'S FOR	WHAT PREPARES THEM	DATE
A first tournament for beginners			
A social team event			
A juniors or family event			
An intermediate league or ladder			
An advanced event			

Progression doesn't always mean more competitive. For some players, the goal is feeling confident enough to come back without a friend. That counts. Newer and social players are the heart of most clubs, and they tend to stay the longest.

NOTES

WHAT GOOD LOOKS LIKE

Every player can name the next thing they're working toward, and it's on your calendar.

ONE THING THIS WEEK

Put one beginner-friendly event on the calendar eight to ten weeks out. Build the path backward.

06

BELONGING

Make room for the next person.

Your regulars are your foundation. Without meaning to, they can also become a wall. Welcoming is the club's job, not luck.

RESPECT WHY PEOPLE ARE HERE

Friends who book a private court should get to enjoy their time together. In hosted open play, the club runs the rotation and makes sure everyone gets included.

DON'T LEAVE IT TO THE NICEST PERSON

Welcoming new players is the club's job. Staff own it. We learned to give regulars one small, specific ask instead of expecting them to do it all.

A SMALL, SPECIFIC ASK

"Would you welcome these two players into your first game?"

01 Who gets a warm hello but still struggles to join a game?

Think solo arrivals, beginners, quieter players, different abilities.

02 Which sessions need a host to manage rotations?

NOTES

WHAT GOOD LOOKS LIKE

New players say they felt included, not just greeted.

ONE THING THIS WEEK

Assign a host for your busiest open play, with one job: make sure everyone plays.

07

QUIET HOURS AND PROGRAMS

Fill the quiet hours. Keep what earns.

Evenings tend to fill themselves. Weekday daytime is where many clubs win or lose the year. And a full session can still lose money.

AT PICKLES

Our retirees had time and loved to play, so we built around them. We also didn't promise members fixed court times, which let us move programs to wherever demand was.

Program revenue – direct costs = what it contributes

SESSION

AVG. PLAYERS

REPEAT PLAYERS

CONTRIBUTES

KEEP / ADJUST / STOP

QUIET-HOUR IDEAS TO TEST

- ☐ Hosted morning play for retirees
- ☐ Beginner clinics for new residents
- ☐ After-school juniors

- ☐ Company team events
- ☐ Private rentals and parties
- ☐ Your idea: _____

WHAT WE'RE SEEING NATIONALLY

~\$8,000

average monthly pickleball revenue per court, clubs with 10 courts or fewer

~\$5,600

per court at clubs with more than 10 courts

Source: Johns Design & Consulting industry data, reported in The Dink, "Pickleball Clubs Are Closing, Here's the Math Behind Why," October 2026. A gut check, not a target.

WHAT GOOD LOOKS LIKE

Your daytime sessions have a clear audience and a host, and every recurring session earns more than it costs.

ONE THING THIS WEEK

Ask five daytime players what time works and what would bring a friend.

08

MEMBERSHIP AND PRICING

Give people a reason to move up.

Your membership design decides who tries you, who stays and how steady your revenue is.

AT PICKLES

Everyone was a member. Our first level was free to join, so anyone could pay as they played. A one-time lifetime level lowered every visit after that. A monthly level included open play. Nobody had to commit to try us, and everyone had a reason to move up. Before we raised prices, we asked players, listened and planned around it.

DESIGN QUESTION**OUR ANSWER TODAY****CHANGE IT?**

Can someone play without joining?

What does a first visit cost, and how easy is it to book?

What's the reason to move up a level?

What's included, and what's paid per visit?

How do we reward loyalty?

WHEN PRICES CHANGE, SAY IT EARLY AND PLAINLY

"Starting [date], [session] will be [price]. Here's what that lets us keep providing." Every staff member should explain it the same way.

NOTES**WHAT GOOD LOOKS LIKE**

A first visit is easy to say yes to, every level has a reason to move up, and price changes don't surprise anyone.

ONE THING THIS WEEK

Ask ten players what they value most before your next pricing decision.

09

TEAM, OWNER TIME AND FRANCHISE

Build a club that runs on a Tuesday.

The goal isn't for staff to sound like you. It's for every player to feel the same care when you're not there.

AT PICKLES

At first we did it all: the desk, 3 a.m. court cleaning, a point-of-sale system borrowed from a tanning salon. Then we got organized. We tested, learned and turned what worked into simple, repeatable processes.

HAND IT OFF IN FOUR STEPS	WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE
1. Side by side	They work next to you. You explain what you notice, and why.
2. They lead	They take the lead while you watch.
3. Debrief	Talk about what went well and what was missing.
4. Write it down	A one-page checklist, with a backup person.

FRANCHISEES: KNOW WHERE YOU STAND

- | | |
|---|---|
| ☐ Can we access and export our player data? | ☐ Which accounts are in our name: website, social, email list? |
| ☐ What happens to our agreement if the franchisor changes? | ☐ What can we change locally without approval? |

We were independent, so we won't pretend to know life inside a system. What we do know: players stay for people, not logos. Your players, team and local ties are yours to build.

NOTES

WHAT GOOD LOOKS LIKE

The club runs smoothly for a week without you, and you can answer every franchise question in writing.

ONE THING THIS WEEK

Pick one task you repeat. Have someone work side by side with you on it this week.

10

KEEP SCORE, ACT EARLY

Your weekly scorecard.

Six numbers, fifteen minutes, every Monday. Enough to spot trouble early.

NUMBER	WHY IT MATTERS	THIS WEEK	LAST WEEK
Court hours booked: mornings / midday / evenings	Shows your empty hours		
New players this week	Your future regulars		
New players who booked again within 14 days	Your best early warning		
Lessons and clinics that ended with a booked next step	Is your player path working?		
Active players in the last 30 days	Your real community		
Weeks of cash on hand	Your runway		

AN HONEST NOTE

If money is tight, act early. Talk to your landlord before you miss a payment, with a plan. Ask players what they'd miss most and protect it. Cut what they won't notice. Fill what you already run before adding anything new. And before you spend on ads, read Playbook 04, page 00. We never had to rescue a club, so treat this as a starting point.

National reference: roughly \$1,300 to \$1,850 a week in pickleball revenue per court, based on the averages in section 07. Most 2026 closures trace back to rent, too many clubs in one area and owners who expected a hands-off business (The Dink, October 2026).

NOTES

WHAT GOOD LOOKS LIKE

You spot a problem in week two, not month three, and the people you depend on hear from you first.

ONE THING THIS WEEK

Fill in this week's column. Put next Monday's 15 minutes on your calendar.

11

KEEP GOING

Thank you for doing this work.



Running a club is hard, and most of it happens when nobody's watching. We want every club to win, because we know what it takes from the people who run them.

Come back to these pages whenever something new comes up. Start with one exercise. Short answers are enough. Keep showing up for your people.

Be YOU. Play your way. See ya' on the courts.

Lisa & Dustin DeMeritt

THANK YOU

To David Johnson and the IAPPF, the International Association of Pickleball and Padel Facilities: much of the industry thinking in these pages grew out of conversations with David and his deep knowledge of the sport, the business and the people who run clubs. More for facility owners at iappf.org.

All four playbooks and our story: openplaybook.club

Sources: SFIA 2026 Pickleball Single Sport Report, June 2026. Johns Design & Consulting industry data, reported in The Dink, "Pickleball Clubs Are Closing, Here's the Math Behind Why," October 2026.