

TRANSITION / VALUE / WHAT COMES NEXT

Beyond the numbers.

A practical playbook for building value and preparing your club for a sale, whether that's next year or never.

WHERE ARE YOU? START HERE

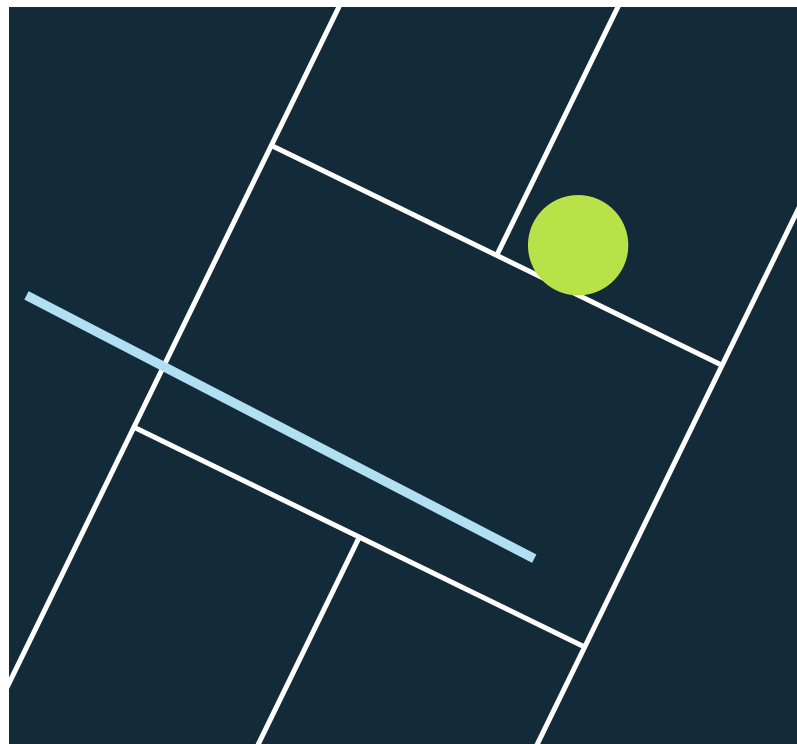
Thinking about opening a club	Playbook 03: Before you sign the lease
Open, and want more regulars	Playbook 01: Give players a reason to return
Need more new players	Playbook 04: Share your story
Thinking about what's next	Playbook 02: Beyond the numbers
Under pressure right now	Playbook 01: Section 10, then Playbook 04

STAY READY, SO YOU NEVER HAVE TO GET READY.

Explain what matters.
Support your story.
Prepare for the handoff.

**LISA & DUSTIN
DEMERITT**

Lessons from building Pickles.



00 START HERE

Make your value easy to see.

For independent and franchised clubs, and whoever runs the club day to day. You don't need to be selling to use this.

A club that's easy to understand is easier to run, easier to finance and easier to sell. That's true whether you sell next year, in ten years, or never.

We were normal people who got there early, listened hard and kept getting back up. We sold Pickles in 2024, in a strong market, and timing helped. Today's buyers ask harder questions. That makes preparation more valuable, not less. The good part: almost everything a buyer wants to see also makes your club better to own today.

Choose your hard. A little work now, or a scramble later.



HOW TO USE THIS PLAYBOOK

STEP	WHAT TO DO	TIME
1	Take the readiness check on the next page.	10 min
2	Start with your two lowest scores.	2 min
3	Label every answer: Known, Estimated or Needs checking.	As you go
4	Pull it together in your story deck (section 11).	A few hours
5	Close your biggest gap first (section 13).	30 days

This playbook helps you prepare. It doesn't value your club or promise a price. Bring financial, legal and franchise questions to qualified people you trust.

01

READINESS CHECK

How ready are you, really?

Ten minutes. Score each line from 1 (not yet) to 5 (ready today). No one sees this but you.

STATEMENT	SCORE 1-5	GO TO SECTION
A stranger could explain why our club matters after five minutes with us.		02
We know who is most likely to buy a club like ours, and what they value.		03
We can say in one sentence who we serve and what we do for them.		04
We can show, with records, that players come back.		05
We know which programs drive the business and where we have room to grow.		06
Every number we'd share has a clear source and time period.		07
The club runs for a week without the owner.		08
We've listed what we own beyond the P&L: plans, data, brand, equipment.		09
We know what could stall a deal, and we're fixing it.		10
We have a written plan for the first 30 days of a new owner.		13

TOTAL SCORE (OUT OF 50)

MY TWO LOWEST LINES

NOTES

WHAT GOOD LOOKS LIKE

Every low score is a to-do, not a verdict. Most owners start in the 20s and 30s.

ONE THING THIS WEEK

Circle your two lowest lines. Do the first page they point to this week.

02

OUR STORY

Same club, different story.

Buyers pay for what they understand. Numbers show what happened. Your story shows why it keeps happening.

AT PICKLES

When we decided to sell, our first presentation was all spreadsheets. It was accurate, and it undersold us. The first offers came in well below what we believed the club was worth. So we rebuilt it ourselves around why Pickles mattered: who played, why they came back, and what we'd built that a buyer couldn't build quickly. Same club. Same books. It sold fast, and for far more.



01 What would a buyer miss by reading only your financials?

The things you see every day that never show up in a report.

02 Which three real moments prove it?

A player, an event, a turnaround. Specific beats impressive.

03 What record backs up each one?

Attendance, bookings, reviews, emails, photos.

NOTES

WHAT GOOD LOOKS LIKE

Someone who has never visited can explain, in two sentences, why your club matters.

ONE THING THIS WEEK

Write one sentence: "Our club serves ___ by consistently providing ___."

03

WHO'S BUYING NOW

Know who's across the table.

Different buyers value different things. Knowing yours shapes everything you prepare.

BUYER TYPE	WHAT THEY USUALLY VALUE	WHAT THEY'LL WORRY ABOUT
A local owner-operator	A community they can step into and run	How much the club depends on you
A multi-club group	Location, systems, room to add their playbook	Fit with their model and costs
An investor	Steady cash flow and low risk	Your books, your lease, your staff
Your landlord or a neighbor business	The space and continuity	Lease terms and what changes
A player, coach or member	The club they already love	Financing and running a business

In 2026, multi-club groups are actively buying and combining clubs, and they tend to keep what makes each club local. Source: The Dink, "After the Gold Rush," July 2026.

AT PICKLES

Our presentation included a short profile of our ideal buyer: someone who loved community, had real business sense and cared about the sport. Writing it down sharpened everything else we prepared.

01 Who is your most likely buyer, and why?

02 What will they want to see first?

NOTES**WHAT GOOD LOOKS LIKE**

You can describe your most likely buyer in two sentences, and your preparation speaks to them.

ONE THING THIS WEEK

Write your ideal buyer profile in five lines or fewer.

04

PURPOSE

Why does your club matter here?

Not why you opened. Why it matters to the people who play there today.

01 What need does your club meet in this community right now?

Think about who would lose something if you closed tomorrow.

02 Why do players choose you over other options?

Use their words. Ask five of them if you're not sure.

03 What would a buyer question after hearing your story?

Name the claim that needs stronger proof, including criticism.

YOUR ONE-SENTENCE PURPOSE

Our club serves _____ by consistently providing
_____.

Franchisees: separate the brand's promise from what your local team has built. Your local story is yours.

NOTES

WHAT GOOD LOOKS LIKE

Your team would describe the club's purpose the same way you just did.

ONE THING THIS WEEK

Read your sentence to two staff members and one regular. Adjust it until it rings true.

05

PLAYERS AND COMMUNITY

Show the people behind the totals.

A contact list, active players and a real community are three different things. Buyers know the difference.

AT PICKLES

We didn't just say we had a great community. We showed how it worked: what happened when someone walked through the door, how a first lesson became part of someone's weekly routine, and why people came back. Show a buyer the mechanics, not just the warm feeling.

**WHAT TO SHOW****YOUR NUMBER****SOURCE AND PERIOD**

Registered contacts

Active players in the last 90 days

Paying members

First-timers who returned within 30 days

Where players live (distance)

Age and skill mix

01 If you stepped away, which relationships would stay with the club?

Which would need a deliberate introduction?

NOTES**WHAT GOOD LOOKS LIKE**

Every community claim you make has a number, a source and a time period behind it.

ONE THING THIS WEEK

Pull your active-player count for the last 90 days. Write down how you defined "active."

06

PROGRAMS AND REVENUE

What drives the business?

Help a buyer see what sells, what repeats, what it takes to deliver, and where there's room to grow.

REVENUE STREAM	ITS ROLE	TREND	DEPENDS ON ONE PERSON?
Open play and court time			
Memberships			
Lessons and clinics			
Leagues and events			
Retail, food and drink			
Rentals and partners			

Role: does it attract new players, keep them, or earn the margin? Most streams do one well.

AT PICKLES

We never hit full capacity, and we said so. Honest headroom is upside a buyer can picture. Unused daytime hours, approved plans and programs we hadn't tried all became part of the growth story.

NOTES

WHAT GOOD LOOKS LIKE

You can show which streams attract, which retain and which earn, and where your empty hours are.

ONE THING THIS WEEK

Mark your busiest and emptiest three hours of the week. That's your capacity story.

07

RECORDS AND EVIDENCE

Let the records support the story.

Every claim in your story should be easy to check. A confident explanation isn't a substitute for a record.

CLAIM WE'LL MAKE	EVIDENCE	PERIOD	LABEL

Label each line: Known / Estimated / Needs checking. Keep history and forecasts on separate lines.

01 What changed in revenue, costs or earnings, and why?

Unusual months need a one-line explanation.

02 What owner work would a buyer need to replace?

List duties and hours. You'll use this in section 08.

NOTES

WHAT GOOD LOOKS LIKE

A buyer could check any claim you make in a few minutes, and nothing surprises them later.

ONE THING THIS WEEK

Start with the claim you'd find hardest to prove. Find its record first.

08

OWNER DEPENDENCE

What happens when you're away?

A buyer needs to see the work behind the experience, including the work you make look easy.

AT PICKLES

For our sale, we wrote down every job the owners did, roughly how many hours each took, and how long it took to train someone new. We were organized: we tested, learned and turned what worked into repeatable processes. Buyers saw a business they could run, not a person they'd have to replace.

OWNER DUTY	HOURS / WEEK	WHO COULD TAKE IT	DAYS TO TRAIN	WRITTEN DOWN?
Planning and direction				
Money and bookkeeping				
Daily operations				
Hiring and training				
Marketing and community				
Partners and relationships				
Facility upkeep				

NOTES

WHAT GOOD LOOKS LIKE

Every duty has a name next to it and a written process.
Your hours per week keep going down.

ONE THING THIS WEEK

Hand off one duty on this list. Playbook 01, section 09, shows a simple four-step way to do it.

HIDDEN ASSETS

Some of your most valuable assets never show up in your financials. List them before a buyer has to ask.

Our story included approved plans to add courts and a partner who rented space inside our building. Neither showed up in a profit and loss statement. Both mattered to buyers.

- ☐ Approved plans, permits or zoning for expansion
 - ☐ A player list you have the right to transfer
 - ☐ Written processes and training materials
 - ☐ Booking software and data that transfer cleanly
 - ☐ Leagues and events that run without you
 - ☐ Partner or sublease income inside your space
 - ☐ Name, brand, website and social accounts in the business's name
 - ☐ A complete equipment and furniture list
 - ☐ Press, awards and community reputation
 - ☐ Lease renewal options and terms

Every box you can tick has a document behind it, saved in one folder.

Start a folder called "What we own." Put your equipment list in it today.

10

DEAL-KILLERS

Fix what could stall a deal.

Most deals don't fall apart over price. They fall apart over surprises. Find yours first.

COMMON DEAL-KILLER	IS THIS US?	HOW WE'LL FIX IT	BY WHEN
Little time left on the lease			
A lease that can't be transferred			
Prepaid memberships or credits we can't total			
The owner is the business			
Business and personal money mixed together			
A key coach or staff member who may leave			
Repairs we've been putting off			
Claims we can't back up			
Franchise transfer rules we haven't checked			

NOTES

WHAT GOOD LOOKS LIKE

No surprises. Anything a buyer could find, you found first and either fixed or explained.

ONE THING THIS WEEK

Pick the one deal-killer that would take longest to fix. Start it now.

11

YOUR STORY DECK

Turn your answers into a story.

This is the structure we used for our own sale. Each section gets one clear takeaway and the evidence behind it.

#	SECTION	WHAT GOES IN IT	DONE
01	Snapshot	What it is, where, since when, in five lines	
02	Why it exists	The need you saw, in your own words	
03	How it works	Your model: memberships, programs, pricing approach	
04	The people	Players, community, how they return (section 05)	
05	The space	Facility, courts, lease basics, what's approved	
06	How people find you	Word of mouth, partners, what works (Playbook 04)	
07	What drives revenue	Streams and their roles (section 06)	
08	How it runs	Team, processes, owner hours (section 08)	
09	What a buyer gets	Hidden assets and equipment (section 09)	
10	Honest risks	What could go wrong, and what you've done about it	
11	Room to grow	Upside with evidence behind it	
12	The handoff	What a new owner must protect, and how you'll help	

Name your weaknesses. Buyers trust a story more when it admits what's hard. Keep detailed records in a separate folder, not in the deck.

NOTES

WHAT GOOD LOOKS LIKE

Someone unfamiliar with your club reads it once and gets it: what it is, why it works, and what they'd be buying.

ONE THING THIS WEEK

Draft section 02, why it exists. It's the hardest to write and the one buyers remember.

12

CHOOSING HELP

Pick help that knows your world.

The right help tells your story well. The wrong help turns your club into a spreadsheet.

AT PICKLES

Our first presentation came from help that didn't know pickleball and led with numbers. When we told the story ourselves, everything changed. Ask hard questions up front.

QUESTIONS TO ASK BEFORE YOU SIGN WITH ANYONE

- ☐ Have you sold a club or a similar community business? Can I see how you presented it?
- ☐ How will you explain why our club works, not just what it earns?
- ☐ Who do you think our likely buyers are? How will you reach them?
- ☐ How will you screen buyers before they see our details?
- ☐ Can we shape the presentation, or do you write it alone?
- ☐ What's your timeline, your fee, and how do we end the agreement if it isn't working?

NOTES

WHAT GOOD LOOKS LIKE

You choose help that asks about your players before your profit, and you stay involved in the story.

ONE THING THIS WEEK

Write the three questions that matter most to you before your first meeting with anyone.

13

PLAN AND HANDOFF

Close the biggest gap first.

You don't need perfect answers everywhere. Pick the gap that most affects readiness, then plan the handoff.

01 What's our priority gap, and why does it matter most?

Evidence, operations or something a buyer will ask about first.

02 What will show it's finished?

A record, a confirmed answer or a handoff someone else completed.

RESPONSIBLE PERSON

TARGET DATE

A NEW OWNER'S FIRST 30 DAYS: WHO NEEDS AN INTRODUCTION?

- | | | |
|---|--|---|
| ☐ Staff and coaches | ☐ Key players and group leaders | ☐ Partners and suppliers |
| ☐ Systems, logins and accounts | ☐ The landlord | ☐ Open issues and promises in progress |

NOTES

WHAT GOOD LOOKS LIKE

A clear plan for the gap, and a handoff list that makes a new owner feel welcome on day one.

ONE THING THIS WEEK

Put the target date on your calendar and tell one person who'll hold you to it.

14

KEEP GOING

Thank you for doing this work.



Getting ready is quiet work. Most of it never shows. But it makes your club stronger to own today, and it gives you options tomorrow.

We don't have every answer, and every club is different. Take what helps. Leave the rest. Stay ready, and 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: The Dink, "After the Gold Rush: How Pickleball Facilities Can Win with Community," July 2026.