

ANYONE FOR PADEL?

What's behind the rise of padel tennis, the popular new game backed by celebrities like Sir Andy Murray? Cheryl Markosky finds out

Overhead view of a Padel Tennis match at night



Forget "Anyone for tennis?" Because these days you're more likely to hear: "Anyone for padel?"

Padel tennis, the world's fastest growing racket sport, is the love child of tennis and squash, an easy mix of both that is fast, fun and coming to a sports centre near you (if it hasn't already got there).

It's believed that padel was invented in Acapulco, Mexico in 1969 by Enrique Corcuera after modifying his squash court to incorporate elements of tennis. Originally, the walls and surface were concrete, but they've been typically replaced with glass walls and artificial turf.

A friend of Corcuera was so impressed by the game he imported it to Spain, and as they say, the rest is history. Padel's particularly big in Spain and wGoogle searches for padel after Spain.

Originally a niche sport, it soared in popularity during Covid, as it could be played outdoors (as well as indoors) and there's no physical contact.

Celebrity players include Rafael Nadal, David Beckham, Lionel Messi, Maria Sharapova and Martina Hingis. Sir Andy Murray, along with his brother Jamie, Andrew Castle and Annabel Croft, have invested in G4P, a company that's built courts at five venues, including an

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THE PADEL COURT

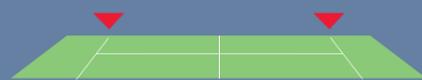
The padel court is 10 metres wide and 20 metres long



The net is 10 metres long and 88cm high at the centre, rising to 92cm at the ends



Service lines are parallel to the net at a 6.95m distance



The court is enclosed to bounce the ball off the walls



exhibition court at London's Westfield shopping centre. G4P has plans to construct a further 50 courts in the UK.

Jasper Colliver, South West London Regional Partner for house. Partnership, was introduced to padel (or "the new golf", as he calls it) by friends at the Roehampton Club where two padel courts were installed in 2021. "As a form of tennis, it's a lot easier to play. You have to bounce the ball first and then serve underarm below waist level, so no one can return the ball as hard – which suits tennis players like me who are terrible at serving. Also, you play doubles on a court that is one-third the size of a tennis court, with less running about."

Another big selling point, Colliver adds, is that everyone can play everyone else, compared to tennis where generally you need to find someone at your level. "As soon as you pick up a padel bat you can hit some good shots, get some fast-paced rallies going and feel amazing. Adults can play with children, with many of the

latter taking up padel to start with and then moving onto tennis."

The only downside currently, Colliver says, is trying to book a court. "Padel's become so popular sometimes you have to wait several weeks to play." Colliver even has prospective buyers wanting to live near sports venues, such as the Roehampton Club and Rocks Lane, that provide padel courts.

But things are changing as more padel courts come on stream. Rocks Lane in Barnes has installed four courts, with an additional 12 courts over at Rocks Lane on Chiswick Common.

According to former banker Oliver Milton, a member of the Roehampton Club who plays regularly in a group with Colliver, Roehampton currently has two padel courts and the club aims to have six new padel courts (with some or all covered) within the next 18 months.

It's been reported that some tennis players are concerned that



Padel Tennis match at night

BEGINNER'S GUIDE TO PADEL

- Doubles is the most common format, on a 10 by 20 metre court (smaller than a tennis court).
- Padel balls are similar to tennis balls, but are slightly smaller.
- Rackets are made of a composite material, with a perforated hitting surface, and are without strings.
- Courts have concrete, plastic or artificial grass surfaces.
- You have to bounce the ball first before serving underarm and you cannot serve above waist level.
- Scoring follows the tennis system, with the exception of the introduction of the "Golden Point", which occurs when the score reaches deuce. The receiving team chooses whether the service will come from the right or left of the court. The team that wins that one single point will win the game.
- Padel is for everyone. A beginner can play someone more advanced, an older player can play someone 20 years younger and mixed sex groups are common.

padel's taking over from tennis, but Milton doesn't believe this is happening. "A number of members regard padel as simply another sport they can play, rather than it replacing tennis. Padel can help with your tennis game, as certain drop and spin shots are brought over to tennis."

Milton adds that the Roehampton Club has always developed talented young tennis players and nurtured many under 18's who've gone on to train at Wimbledon. "Equally, some of the coaching staff at the Roehampton Club are ranked highly in the Padel League and will keep an eye out for padel players on the way up."

"More young members, in particular, are keen to play padel," he says, including my two kids, aged eight and ten. My youngest absolutely loves it. He can get into an actual game very quickly. It's a very friendly and sociable sport."

At the end of the day, it's about a mix of ages and sexes having fun playing a game they love. "Our group of 55 players has so much fun on club nights," says Milton. "There can be seven or eight of us on one court, chatting and watching, as well as taking turns to play. And as padel continues to grow it can only get more accessible."

"Anyone for padel?" You bet.

www.roehamptonclub.co.uk, www.rockslane.co.uk



Playing padel in mixed doubles on outdoor court.