

## **Sports Marketing Assessment Report: USA Pickleball**

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## **Environmental Analysis**

Pickleball has evolved from a backyard invention into one of the fastest-growing sports in the United States. Its popularity skyrocketed during the pandemic, bringing in new players of all ages, but particularly older generations. As USA Pickleball looks to maintain its growth and trajectory while also broadening its appeal to a younger generation of players, it is essential to evaluate the current landscape of the sport.

### SWOT Analysis:

**Strengths:** The most obvious strength of pickleball is its rapid rise in popularity over the last few years. The sport saw a 40% increase in players during the pandemic and now has about 16,000 locations available to play in the United States (USAPickleball.org). Pickleball also has relatively low barriers to entry. The rules are simple, and the only requirements are a paddle, a ball, and a court to play on. Temporary courts can be easily set up on several existing sport surfaces such as basketball courts, volleyball courts, badminton courts, but the most common has been tennis courts. The United States Tennis Association (USTA) reports that at least 10% of tennis courts in the U.S. have been taken over and repurposed for pickleball (Pickleball's growth sees more courts repurposed, [www.sportsbusinessjournal.com](http://www.sportsbusinessjournal.com)).

The sport also benefits from its social nature. Pickleball was created with inclusivity in mind and was meant for people of all ages and skill levels to be able to enjoy. This sets it apart from other sports like golf, which often come with steeper learning curves and higher barriers to entry, like high cost. The approachability of the game and family-friendly nature makes it more appealing for people looking for recreational activities to enjoy with loved ones (Why Pickleball is the Ultimate Family-Friendly Sport, [saltedcitysports.com](http://saltedcitysports.com))

Weaknesses: Despite its accessibility, pickleball continues to struggle with a perception issue. It is often seen as a sport geared towards older adults, due to its early adoption in retirement communities. While this demographic was instrumental in driving the sport's initial growth, it now presents a challenge in reaching younger generations. Without a stronger foothold among Gen Z and Millennials, pickleball risks stagnating as its core player base ages out (The Future of Pickleball, [sfia.org](http://sfia.org)).

Another significant weakness is the sport's limited visibility at the professional level. Compared to more established sports, professional pickleball remains in its early stages. It lacks the mainstream media coverage, major corporate sponsors, and popular events necessary to capture a wider audience. The absence of recognizable star players and televised competitions hurts its ability to attract younger athletes looking for professional competition. (Pro Circuit Growth, [usapickleball.org](http://usapickleball.org)).

Opportunities: One of the biggest growth opportunities for pickleball lies in reaching younger audiences. One possibility to tap into this audience is to integrate into local youth organizations, physical education programs, and community centers. Creating more youth specific leagues and tournaments can help shift away from the narrative that pickleball is for older people and instead is a lifetime sport.

Another great opportunity for pickleball is the rise of pro leagues and increasing media coverage. Increasing coverage through new partnerships would allow players to obtain bigger brand deals and attract major sponsorships to the sport. With more money entering, the prize pools would also grow and the incentive for professional players to compete would rise (The Future of Pickleball, [centercourt pickleball.com](http://centercourt pickleball.com)).

Threats: One of the biggest threats to pickleball is overcrowding. The sport is growing faster than cities can add courts, and frustrated players may drop out if they can't find time or space to play. There's already a gap between facility growth and player demand, and that pressure will only increase (Facility Shortage and Participation Growth, [sgbonline.com](http://sgbonline.com)). Additionally, recent legislation in Florida limiting the construction of pickleball courts and golf courses in state parks may set a precedent for other states to impose similar restrictions, potentially limiting the sport's expansion (Florida House passes bill, [nbcmiami.com](http://nbcmiami.com))

It also faces competition from other activities. Sports like tennis and basketball have deeper roots, more funding, and established player development avenues. If pickleball doesn't modernize its image and expand into schools, media, and popular culture, it could slowly lose relevance, specifically among younger players (Changing the Narrative, [sfia.org](http://sfia.org)).

## **Goals**

The success of our plan rests on four integral goals that we have set for ourselves. These goals are specific, measurable and align with our organization's mission to make pickleball more exciting and accessible to people of all ages.

One of the primary goals is to increase youth participation, specifically targeting the 13 to 17 age group. This demographic is very underrepresented, and it is a good area for long-term loyalty and has grown to pickleball as a sport (USA Pickleball Annual Growth Report 2024). The plan emphasizes partnering with schools to integrate pickleball into physical education programs, alongside offering beginner clinics and family-friendly tournaments. These efforts aim to lower the barrier of entry by providing free or affordable equipment to get younger players involved and to welcome them into the sport. Progress will be measured through increased youth

memberships, school program adoption rates, and participation in youth leagues and tournaments. This focus on youth not only grows the sport but also challenges the outdated perception that pickleball is primarily for older adults (Pickleheads 2024; The Kitchen Pickle 2025).

Another critical goal is to shift the public perception of pickleball to attract more players aged 18 to 34. Despite its rapid growth and popularity pickleball is still a sport that old people play which limits the attraction of the sport to a younger demographic (APP Research 2023). To address this, the marketing plan includes strategies to increase social media engagement by 25% from this demographic through collaborations with influencers, athletes, and content creators who resonate with younger audiences. Pickleball's athleticism and social components will be emphasized through high-energy video advertisements, viral social media challenges, and more media coverage of professional events. In order to help reinvent pickleball as a dynamic, inclusive sport for players of all ages, success will be measured by tracking social media mentions, follower growth, and event attendance among younger players (Pickleball Dinks 2024).

Facility availability is another key factor in sustaining pickleball's growth, leading to the goal of adding 3,000 new courts nationwide. Even though there are a lot of courts now, they cannot keep up with the growing demand, particularly in urban and youth-populated areas (SGB Online 2024). Creating public-private partnerships to turn unused areas, such parking lots and outdated tennis courts, into pickleball courts is the main objective of this project. Additionally, incentives will be offered to developers to include pickleball courts in new residential and commercial projects. Special emphasis will be placed on securing fair geographic balance so that underserved communities can access the sport. The number of new courts constructed or

repurposed and the partnerships established to support these efforts will be utilized to measure success (Sports Destinations 2024).

Lastly, increasing ambassador-program expansion by 40% is critical to further developing grassroots participation and maintaining organic growth. Local ambassadors and champions promote events, recruit new members, and create a sense of community. In order to further enhance their potential, the plan recommends expanding training for ambassadors with a focus on youth outreach and social networking on the internet. They would receive access to information and materials developed for younger groups as a result. Incentives such as commission-based rewards and gamified leaderboards will motivate ambassadors to prioritize recruiting players aged 13 to 34. The amount of ambassador-generated social media material, new player registrations, and the growth in ambassador-hosted events will all be utilized to measure the success of this objective (USA Pickleball Annual Growth Report, 2024).

These objectives combined offer a robust framework that supports changes in attitude, development of infrastructure, extension of participation, and community participation. Through enhanced accessibility and emphasis on younger players, USA Pickleball can guarantee the future viability of the sport and raise its appeal across its traditional followers. A unified and long-term strategy for expanding pickleball across the country is ensured by the interconnectedness of these objectives, where new courts and ambassador programs encourage greater youth engagement.

### **Strategies**

USA Pickleball is at a turning point. Following decades of consistent growth and a stratospheric surge in popularity during the COVID-19 pandemic years, the organization now

confronts its next challenge: how to sustain this momentum, break into untapped markets, and expand access nationwide. The plan is based on four priorities that are designed to provide sustained growth, optimize participation, and make pickleball a player in mainstream sport culture.

The first goal is to boost youth participation. While pickleball has long been viewed as a game for older adults, its simplicity, fast pace of the game, and low access barrier make it accessible to youth, as well. Including pickleball in school physical education lessons by age-level equipment exposes children to the game from an early age and promotes play culture. Free clinics and establishing structured, tiered youth programs provide continuous acquisition opportunities, and intra-school tournaments try to stimulate competition. Certified coaches can potentially provide training and instruction, building confidence and long-term motivation.

Second, the strategy seeks to change perception to bring the 18–34-year-old as central to the current growth of pickleball. Recent data indicates a significant increase in pickleball participation among young adults. In 2023, individuals aged 25–34 comprised the largest age group of players, accounting for 16.7% of participants (Pickleheads 2025, Pickleball Statistics-the numbers behind America’s fastest growing sport). To recast the sport as young, active, and trendy, USA Pickleball will collaborate with Gen Z influencers and content creators to produce entertaining, viral social content. Producing TikTok challenges, highlight videos, and featuring young celebrities or players in promotions and exhibitions has huge visibility potential. It can help dissolve the stereotype that pickleball is a game for older individuals. This demographic shift is vital not just to participation but also to the sport's long-term cultural sustainability.

To meet rising demand, the plan includes a bold proposal to add 3,000 new courts nationwide. The initiative will be supported in a large part by public-private partnerships, with

vacant space such as abandoned parking lots, community centers, or unused tennis courts being converted into pickleball courts. Spurring developers and municipalities with name sponsorship, grants, or tax credits can accelerate this. In addition, sponsorships from companies for co-branded installations not only provide much-needed capital but also enhance visibility and credibility for the sport.

Lastly, the plan includes a 40% expansion of the ambassador program, a grassroots initiative of paramount significance for player recruitment and retention. Ambassadors will be trained in youth outreach strategies, social media outreach, and event planning. They will be equipped with free equipment and encouraged through commission-driven incentives and gamified reward programs that make recruitment fun and rewarding. They will be the focus community leaders, introducing the game to new waves of individuals and creating healthy local pickleball cultures.

Simultaneously, these four columns- youth engagement, demographic rebranding, building infrastructure, and ambassador buildings are built to permit pickleball to withstand being an ephemeral fad sport but a solidly rooted, multi-generational sport with durability. By adopting innovation with a community focus, USA Pickleball is favorably positioned to sustain its development.

### **Success Measured (ROI)**

The success of this two-year marketing plan will be evaluated using clear, data-driven performance metrics aligned with USA Pickleball's core goals of growing the game and reshaping its image. These metrics will measure our ability to engage new demographics,

particularly younger players, expand court access, and strengthen grassroots participation. Each strategic initiative in the plan is tied to specific outcomes, and success will be judged both by the reach and impact of these efforts and by the return on investment they generate.

For youth engagement, our \$750,000 investment will aim to introduce pickleball to over 25,000 young players by distributing starter kits and curriculum materials to 1,000 schools, funding regional youth tournaments and clinics, and forming partnerships with national youth organizations like the Boys & Girls Clubs and YMCA. This will be measured through youth membership growth (targeting a 10% increase), school adoption rates, clinic participation, and tournament sign-ups. This initiative directly addresses USA Pickleball's goal of building a sustainable future player base.

To change the sport's perception among 18–34-year-olds, we will track social media follower growth, influencer content reach, engagement rates, and event participation. Our \$900,000 investment in influencer campaigns, targeted digital ads, and high-energy video content is expected to result in a 20% increase in engagement from this demographic, more than 50,000 new followers across social platforms, and 5 million+ video impressions. These metrics will show not only increased awareness but also a shift in how younger audiences view and interact with the sport.

Facility expansion will be measured through the number of new or converted courts, local partnerships formed, and the geographic spread of increased access. With \$900,000 allocated for matching grants and infrastructure support, we aim to create or convert 1,200 courts, establish 50+ city and nonprofit partnerships, and expand pickleball access across 20 states. These outcomes will support membership growth and help alleviate overcrowding—removing one of the largest barriers to consistent play and retention.

Finally, ambassador program expansion will be evaluated through a 40% increase in active ambassadors, the number of local events hosted, and new players registered through ambassador-led initiatives. While this area is supported by multiple budget lines (youth and influencer overlap), its success will be judged by community-level traction and the volume of social media and on-the-ground engagement generated by trained, incentivized ambassadors.

In total, our \$3 million investment is expected to generate \$2–\$3 million in direct new revenue within the first two years through increased memberships, tournament participation, merchandise sales, and sponsorship deals driven by stronger engagement and visibility among younger players. However, the true return on investment goes far beyond short-term financial gains. This strategy will solidify USA Pickleball’s long-term presence as a modern, inclusive, and multi-generational sport with staying power. By establishing a new generation of players, modernizing the brand, and enhancing sponsor appeal, this upfront investment lays the foundation for sustainable growth and positions USA Pickleball for long-term cultural relevance and financial success over the next decade. It is a necessary and strategic step to scale the sport beyond its current base and future-proof the organization’s revenue pipeline.

### **Budget**

To effectively support USA Pickleball’s strategic objectives of sustaining growth and repositioning the sport for younger demographics, we propose a detailed two-year marketing budget of **\$3 million**. This budget is allocated across four strategic initiatives: youth engagement, perception transformation, facility expansion, and ambassador program development. Each category is structured to deliver strong ROI and measurable outcomes while maintaining cost-efficiency.

A targeted investment of **\$750,000** will support bringing pickleball to schools, youth programs, and underserved communities. \$400,000 will provide starter kits and curriculum materials to approximately 1,000 schools nationwide, averaging \$400 per school (USA Pickleball Youth Grant Program, 2023). \$200,000 will fund regional youth tournaments and clinics, covering logistics volunteer coordination, and digital promotions. \$150,000 will support partnerships with national youth organizations like the Boys & Girls Clubs and YMCA to launch local youth leagues. Our deliverables are 1,000+ schools reached, 25,000+ youth introduced to pickleball, and a 10% increase in youth memberships by 2026.

To reshape the sport's image and appeal to Gen Z and Millennials, we propose a **\$900,000** investment in influencer content, ad campaigns, and digital storytelling. \$350,000 will go toward influencer partnerships, including TikTok challenges, Instagram reels, and YouTube features. This leverages a high average ROI of \$5.20 per dollar spent (Influencer Marketing Hub, 2023). \$300,000 will support paid digital ad campaigns on social media and OTT platforms to reach younger audiences at scale. \$250,000 will fund the production of 5-6 high energy short form video ads for use on streaming platforms, YouTube pre rolls, and ESPN+. We are planning for a 20%+ increase in engagement among 18–34-year-olds, 50k social followers added, and 5M+ video impressions.

A **\$900,000** allocation will address facility shortages by expanding access in youth-dense and underserved areas. \$600,000 will go to matching mini grants for converting underutilized spaces like tennis courts, parking lots, and schoolyards. \$300,000 will support infrastructure planning and coordination through local partnership and permitting liaisons. We plan to create/convert 1,200 new courts, gain 50+ city or nonprofit partnerships, and create broader access across 20 states.

Ambassadors drive grassroots momentum and player recruitment. We propose \$450,000 to expand this network by 40% and modernize their tools. \$200,000 will go toward developing digital dashboards, CRM systems, and analytics platforms to improve performance tracking. \$150,000 will fund youth-targeted training in outreach, event planning, and digital content. \$100,000 will establish a reward system including merchandise kits, tiered recognition, and event-based bonuses. We are targeting 1,200 active ambassadors, 8,000+ new players reached through events, and 1,500+ local activations.

This targeted investment plan allows USA Pickleball to maintain momentum while driving generational change. With a \$3 Million commitment over two years, the organization can expand its base in high-growth demographics, enhance visibility and relevance through modern media, solve access gaps by leveraging underused community space, and deepen grassroots engagement through a revitalized ambassador network. Each initiative is built on measurable KPIs and scalable success strategies. This budget empowers USA Pickleball to extend its leadership role and position pickleball as the sport of choice for all ages- especially the next generation.

## References

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