

Inside the Pickleball Boom

Meet some of the women behind the fastest-growing sport in the country.

By Emma Masur

The great sport of pickleball has been growing and evolving since its establishment in 1965, when three dads decided to create a backyard game to entertain their children during summer break. And it was a mom who named the game!

All the world's greatest ideas were developed through an entrepreneurial spirit, and this sport is no exception.

Here are 13 talented and influential female entrepreneurs leading the way in the business of pickleball.

How did you get started in the pickleball space?



Melissa **McCURLEY**

CEO of PickleballTournaments.com

In 2014, I was gainfully employed as the director of data and voice infrastructure at American Express. At the time, pickleball found me and I wasn't looking for a new career. My mom asked me to play in a pickleball tournament because her regular partner was on a cruise. I didn't really play pickleball but said yes. When I came out to play, one of the women, Jettye Lanius, told me her husband, Bob (who is in the PHOF), developed PickleballTournaments.com. Jettye knew my brother and I worked in IT and asked if we'd be interested in looking at the system. We agreed, and a few weeks later found ourselves in Southern California at the SoCal Classic helping run the tournament that they were hosting on pickleballtournaments.com. We continued to evaluate the software for another three months before we made the decision to purchase the system in that year. The rest, as they say, is history!



Stacie **TOWNSEND**

Founder of The Pickler
ThePickler.com

I am a partner at a full-service law firm in Florida. I practice business law, which stems from my legal training and love for business. I fell into law school after my softball career, which ended in 2012 when softball was taken out of the 2012 London Olympics. Quite soon after, my mother introduced me to pickleball. She started playing after retiring from Corporate America and encouraged me to play as a stress-relief activity (particularly since I was a former softball athlete). I was instantly hooked. The Pickler started soon after that because my mother wanted a shirt to play pickleball that didn't have pickles on it. So, The Pickler was born, and has since evolved to be a pickleball content and media company.

What or who inspired you to start your business?



Blake **RENAUD**

Founder of the PicklePlay app
PicklePlay.com

We were going to build an app for a different sport, but after falling in love with pickleball and seeing how it brings together people of all demographics, ages, and stages—and experiencing a lot of frustration on where we play, who we play, how we keep track of our group's play schedule and who is coming—we knew it was time to shift our entire focus to pickleball.



Hannah **JOHNS**

Media & Content Director for the PPA Tour
PPATour.com

Now that the PPA has expanded so much, the on-camera work is only a small part of what I do. I run our PR department, direct content and media distribution, organize broadcast and on-air talent, and act as the pro player liaison for our touring pros. Our team members are all bouncing around doing a lot of things, but we enjoy the dynamic responsibilities and ever-evolving landscape in the sport. It keeps us on our toes.



Rachel **SIMON**

Author of "Pickleball for All"
HarperCollins.com

I wrote my first pickleball article for the New York Times in May 2020, after realizing pickleball made for an excellent pandemic activity, since you could social distance easily and it was simple and inexpensive to set up. The article garnered a lot of interest, and I decided to keep writing about the sport's growth and popularity, which I explored further in my book "Pickleball for All" published by HarperCollins.

What does it mean to you to be a woman entrepreneur in the pickleball community?



Aubri **STEELE**

Owner and Founder of Civile Apparel
CivileApparel.com

Being a female entrepreneur in this space has been an honor and an incredible experience. The entire pickleball community is so warm and welcoming. In addition, I find that people react very positively to me being a female entrepreneur—many of them offering support or wanting to get involved. It's truly a humbling experience.

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE >>>>



Catherine **BAXTER**

Founder of Nettie Pickleball Co.
PlayNettie.com

The pickleball entrepreneurial community is amazing. As the game grows, it's definitely a competitive landscape out there, which could lead to infighting and toxicity. But in my experience, other leaders and founders recognize that the pie is big as the game grows. I think the fact that there are so many women founding companies in pickleball has contributed to the collaborative spirit that I have experienced. There are so many great brands and leaders—Varsity Pickleball, The Pickler, Pickleball Magazine, Civile, Recess, Georgie & Lou, just to name a few—and I can't wait to see what launches next!



Jill **BRAVERMAN**

CEO of DUPR
MyDUPR.com

Being a female entrepreneur in pickleball means being comfortable that your insides don't always match your outsides—it's more than okay to wave your contradiction flag high! It means standing your ground but doing it graciously, with a "velvet hammer" as my mentor Anne Worcester, former CEO of the WTA tour, always says. It's remembering that it's hard to be something you've never seen, which is why female entrepreneurs have a fiduciary duty to young women everywhere to show what it means to be strong and female on and off the court.



Lori **MANZER &** Mimi **KUCHMAN**

Georgie & Lou
GeorgieandLou.com

We are fully enjoying being part of the pickleball community as female entrepreneurs. Creating new partnerships in an emerging market has given us opportunities to grow alongside our competitors, rather than competing against them. Building long-lasting relationships has helped the success of our business. We have been lucky enough to collaborate with other female-owned companies, not just in pickleball, but throughout the retail segment.

What are you most looking forward to in the next year as you continue to grow your brand within the pickleball community?



Kim **BASTIEN**

Head of Partnerships at The Dink
TheDinkPickleball.com

I look forward to growing The Dink and introducing more brands to the pickleball community. I have a personal goal to attend a pro event to meet some of the pro players that we cover on a daily basis. The pickleball world is changing so rapidly—it will be exciting to see what non-pickleball brands get involved. Will it be Nike? Or Hulu? Or...can't wait to see.



Jodi **WUJKOWSKI &** Lori **BOSCH**

Founders of jojo+lo
JojoandLo.com

We can't wait to continue to take our pop-up shop to exciting new pickleball tournament destinations. We are also planning to launch a new jojo+lo collection for kids! We want to do more wholesaling to pickleball stores around the country and potentially sell through a third-party distributor, and possibly Amazon. We are partnering with professional pickleball players and pickleball social media influencers who want to represent our brand and earn commissions from their sales. We want to continue to create and help change the image of pickleball—one graphic tee at a time. Jojo and I are passionate about our fashions and giving the sport of pickleball a makeover, while keeping our promise to our customers: no dancing pickles, no pickleballs with smiley faces and no fluorescent green!



Elise **IVY**

Founder of ROKNE
RoknePickleball.com

From a ROKNE business perspective, I am most looking forward to our 2023 collaborations. We are elated to expand upon our partnership with Saks 5th Avenue and Verb Technologies live-streaming platform, 'Market.' In addition, I'm eager to announce some new collaborations/partnerships that will continue to prove the point that pickleball is America's fastest-growing sport and not stopping any time soon.

From a player perspective, I am most looking forward to witnessing the positive impact that pickleball has on its communities at the local level. It's exciting to see entire families out on the courts bonding over a sport so many of us have fallen in love with.



Laura **GAINOR**

Founder of VossbergGainor.com and PickleballintheSun.com

As I've been fortunate to work in marketing throughout my career, this game is truly unique in the opportunities it will bring to brands and professionals targeting the ever-growing audience demographics. Pickleball in the Sun is a huge passion of mine that will continue to evolve as I'm excited to have the opportunity to continue to collaborate with other entrepreneurs with the same mindset to help grow the game. The brand speaks to the power that pickleball is helping families see the world, particularly by traveling to various destinations that have dedicated pickleball facilities. By getting families or friends together to share their love for pickleball across the country, the hope is to continue to grow the sport and help players experience new destinations for play and truly make the sport a part of their own lifestyle. •