

# A little bit squash, a little bit tennis: welcome to the world of padel

SPORT

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In case you wondered, there are a total of 40 sports in the Olympics, including 32 in the upcoming Paris 2024 Summer Olympics and eight in Milano Cortina 2026, the next Winter Olympics.

But in total there are roughly 200 sports that have international recognition through an international governing body of some sort, a small part of the estimated 8,000 sports played worldwide.

Humanity's ingenuity in inventing new ways of finding pleasant pastimes, new ways of keeping fit and socialising is impressive. A relatively recent example is Padel – sometimes called Padel Tennis – a sport invented in Acapulco, Mexico, by Enrique Corcuera in 1969, after he modified his squash court to incorporate elements of platform tennis.

It is a racket sport typically played in doubles on an enclosed court slightly smaller than a doubles tennis court. Although Padel shares the same scoring system as tennis, the rules, strokes, and technique are different. The balls used are similar but with a little less pressure. The main differences are that the court has walls and the balls can be played off them in a similar way as in the game of squash, and that solid, stringless bats are used. The height of the ball being served must be at or below the waist level.

Many well-known professional padel players have previously competed in tennis, including former WTA Tour players Roberta Vinci and Lara Arruabarrena. Most of the Padel vocabulary is Spanish comes due to its popularity in Spain. However, with rapid growth in the Middle East and Africa, more and more words are being added to the padel vocabulary.

One of the most-used shots in padel, the **bandeja**, is a crucial part of padel vocabulary. In essence, it is an overhand shot hit with spin rather than power. The *bandeja*, which is always taken out of the air without letting the ball bounce, is often used to slow a rally down or to bring down a lob without smashing. Defensively oriented players, or players who are not great hard-hitters, will often rely on having a good *bandeja*. While often seen as a safe option to tread water in a rally, well-placed *bandejas* can prove to be winners.



The next word to watch out for is **víbora**, which is similar to the *bandeja*. The main difference is the *víbora* is hit with a lot more power and spin than the *bandeja*. A *víbora* is typically hit diagonally down. It is meant to speed up a rally and take away initiative from the opponent, while the backspin on the ball prevents it from bouncing up and away from the wall. Unlike a smash, a *víbora* is not per se an attempt to a winner-although it often is.

### Game's lingo

Another bit of lingo that is used often is the **bajada**. In the simplest terms, it is when a ball takes a high bounce off the wall and is brought down with an overhand hit. While usually the case, a *bajada* does not necessarily have to be hit with venom. Any overhand hit that has the ball bouncing off the wall first falls under the umbrella of the *bajada*, which literally translates to 'the bringing down' from Spanish."

One of the more delicate shots in padel – and one of the harder ones to get right – is the **chiquita**. A *chiquita* is similar to a drop shot, in the sense that you are putting the ball in the frontcourt and close to the net. However, a *chiquita* is also hit from the frontcourt. It is a very delicate shot, basically lifting the ball over the net very softly from close range and making it drop down right behind it. The purpose of the *chiquita*, as it will bounce right in front of the net, is to leave the opponent in an awkward position. As the ball drops down, it cannot be volleyed back with power.

**Salida** translates as 'exit', and that is essentially what it is. A



player running off the court to save a ball that has bounced off the wall and out of the 20 by 10 court is a **salida**. To be successful in a *salida*, you need to be excellent at anticipating a smash and then have the footwork to actually return the ball. The likes of Alejandro Galán, Martín Di Nenno and Agustín Tapia are famous for their *salidas* in the men's Circuit, with players like Tamara Icardo, Gemma Triay and Ariana Sánchez doing so in the women's Circuit.

### One for the flair players

A more niche term, but one worth knowing within padel vocabulary, is **cadete**. Most often, it is used by players who have more flair in their game, like Paquito Navarro. A *cadete* is a behind-the-back shot. This means a shot is hit with the dominant hand going behind the back, rather than hitting a simple backhand. *Cadetes* are mostly used when backed in the corner and having no space to hit a backhand, although it is not by any means a practical shot.

### The rules

Serves are always underhand. Balls that hit the walls around the court after bouncing on the ground are still in play.

Padel balls are required in official matches; these are similar to tennis balls but are slightly smaller. Padel is usually played casually with regular tennis balls.

Padel rackets are made of a composite material without strings. The hitting surface is perforated. The racket is similar to the one used in platform tennis, but has its own specifications.

The court has a floor made of concrete, plastic or artificial grass. It is designed similarly to a tennis court, only smaller – measuring 10x20 m, with a 0.88m (34.6 inches) high net in the middle. The court is surrounded by 4 metre high walls made of glass or brick, or a fence when outside.

Padel follows the same scoring as the tennis scoring system with the following exception:

In the 2020 season, World Padel Tour introduced the 'Gold Point' or

'Golden Point', a new scoring method for main tournaments (Master Final, Master, Open and Challenger) organised by the World Padel Tour.

This method of scoring has been widely adopted throughout non-professional tournaments as well. The golden point occurs when the score reaches deuce during any game.

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 wins the game.

### Organisers

Padel Pro Tour (PPT) was the professional padel circuit which was created in 2005 as a result of the agreement between a group of organizers of matches of padel and Association of Professional Players of Padel (AJPP) and the Spanish Feminine Association of Pádel (AFEP).

Nowadays, the most important padel circuit is World Padel Tour (WPT), which started in Spain though it has already reached international expansion.

In 2014, WPT travelled to Portugal, Argentina and Dubai. The sport's popularity along the Costa del Sol in southern Spain and the Algarve in southern Portugal has exposed it to a large number of British visitors, leading to an increased popularity of the sport in the UK and a launch of the UK Padel Federation in 2011.

In 2021, there were approximately 700 Padel Courts in Sweden. The Swedish Padel Association was included as a member of the Swedish Sports Confederation.

Despite being a game born in Spanish-speaking countries, the number of padel players and clubs built in the northern part of Europe is growing. Sweden is the country with the second highest number of padel clubs after Spain.

While countries such as Finland, Denmark, the Netherlands and Norway mainly opt for building indoor padel clubs because of their climatic conditions, Belgium, Italy, France and Germany prefer outdoor courts.

Believe it or not, there are almost 250 padel courts in Britain ready and waiting for you, with even more on the way.

## Want to know more?

To discover your nearest court, visit Padel courts in Britain on the LTA website, at <https://www.lta.org.uk/play/ways-to-play/padel/padel-courts-in-britain/>