

A Paddle, A Plastic Ball, And A Whole New World



A pickle you do want to be in

NEWSFLASH: We begin tonight's session with the newest wave sweeping across the nation – a paddle sport that skyrocketed from curiosity to a full-scale national sensation. The Indian Pickleball League (IPBL), the country's first official professional pickleball league sanctioned by the Indian Pickleball Association under the Ministry of Youth Affairs & Sports, has now concluded its thrilling maiden season. Six city-based teams — representing Mumbai, Hyderabad, Chennai, Bengaluru, Lucknow, and Gurugram — battled across singles, doubles, and mixed doubles in a format designed for fast-paced, spectator-friendly action. The league showcased a compelling blend of top international stars and emerging Indian talent. The climax came at the KD Jadhav Indoor Hall in New Delhi, where the Mumbai Smashers completed a stunning fairytale run against Hyderabad Royals, to lift the inaugural IPBL title. But what exactly is this newly emerging, crowd pleasing paddle sport? And why is it taking India by storm? Stay with us, as **Saachi Maurya, AGS (IGCSE Curriculum) Gurgaon, IX** unfolds the story ahead.

Opening serve

Launched by the Times Group on December 1, 2025, and sanctioned by the Indian Pickleball Association (IPA), the IPBL is India's first and only franchise-format pickleball league which has been officially recognised by the Ministry of Youth Affairs & Sports, Government of India. For the uninitiated, pickleball is a combination of ping-pong and tennis on a badminton court, albeit with a few unique rules. It sounds puzzling but the game is simple - and it started simply as well: in the state of Washington, a family lacked the shuttles needed to play badminton but not the creativity to make a new game out of table tennis paddles, a badminton court and a Whiffle ball. And the pickle part? Legend says the family owned a beloved dog named Pickles who chased after the balls – hence the name Pickleball!

Powerplay

From a tiny tournament in 1976 to thousands of courts now installed worldwide, pickleball has spread like wildfire, its simple and addictive playing style attracting many to pick up the sport. A USA pickleball union was set up in 1984 and soon competitions were happening all over. The pickleball craze soon spread outside of the country into regions like China, the Philippines, and even India. In India alone, this particular sport has witnessed nearly 300% growth, drawing in roughly

70,000 players who step onto the court every week.

But make no mistake - its accessibility does not make it a common man sport alone. Many famous personalities - international and local - have picked up the sport for recreational purposes such as Akash and Shloka Ambani, Ranbir Kapoor, Leonardo DiCaprio, Bill Gates, Taylor Swift, and the list goes on. The hype is real. And so are the benefits.

The game changer

Pickleball suits urban lifestyle perfectly. It's affordable enough to be played on college campuses or during office trips, and simple enough for those who haven't exercised in a while. The court measures just 6.1 by 13.4 metres (20 by 44 feet), significantly smaller than a tennis court, which is 8.2 by 23.77 metres (27 by 78 feet). Easier to stay fit without all that running. With its lighter rackets and easier rules, pickleball is more beginner-friendly and more cost-effective alternative to tennis and badminton. Hence, the game has found its way onto corporate campuses, school grounds, residential complexes, community centres, and even rooftops. It requires minimal training, making it the ideal sport for people who want to stay active without spending hours learning technique. Its social connectivity creates a welcoming community that brings people of all ages and backgrounds together, combating iso-

lation and depression. Who needs an anti-depressant when you're fighting for the last point on court? The pandemic showed us how desolate one can become – so it's no wonder pickleball spread so effectively during those days in particular.

Love all

The beginning of the IPBL has proven how influential this homemade sport has become. It is being featured as part of exciting amenities in real estate homes, while designers are incorporating backyard and community courts into modern home layouts. The sport goes beyond mere friendships - dating apps like Tinder report that in 2023, pickleball was the most preferred activity for ideal first dates. Some platforms like PickleMatch even use a player's skill and experience to pair up compatible players. The sport is no longer just played; it is lived, shared, and displayed. Alongside the physical boom, a digital ecosystem has flourished. Apps such as Hudle and PicklePlay allow players to locate courts, book play sessions, discover local leagues, and keep track of IPBL fixtures. With just a tap, anyone can join the growing pickleball community. Whether the Hyderabad Royals win or the Mumbai Smashers power through to victory, one thing is clear: pickleball has landed in India with unstoppable momentum. So, will you join in? The match is just getting started and the ball is now in your court!