



Ultimate Pickleball League (UPL)

2026 Official Rules and Format

Powered by VAIR (Visually Assessed International Rating System)

Applies to: UPL Semi-Pro Circuit (unless a division/event addendum states otherwise)

January 2026

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0. Purpose and Format Overview

UPL is a team-based pickleball league designed to professionalize the pathway for elite amateur and emerging professional athletes. Each match features five games that test depth, strategy, and endurance:

- Games 1-3: Tiered doubles (A, B, C)
- Game 4: Doubles Dream Maker (6-player rotation doubles)
- Game 5: Singles Dream Breaker (6-player rotation singles)

UPL is built to be competitive, consistent, and broadcast-ready, with verified ratings and roster standards enforced through VAIR.

1. Venue Standards and Match Sites

1.1 Approved Facilities Only (No Public Courts)

UPL matches must be played at:

- Approved home clubs
- Partner facilities
- Designated league venues

Public courts are not permitted for official UPL matches.

1.2 Required Home Club and Camera System

Each team must designate an official home club meeting league standards. In some regions, multiple teams may share approved competitive sites depending on geography and team density.

Home Club Requirements:

- Private or commercial pickleball facility
- Sporfie camera system installed on a minimum of two (2) courts
- Cameras must be operational for:
 - Match recording
 - Live streaming (when applicable)
 - Ratings verification and league review

2. Player Eligibility

2.1 Verification Required (No Exceptions)

Every player must be:

- Verified by UPL, and
- VAIR-verified (official rating visible in league systems)

If a player is not verified, they are not eligible to compete.

2.2 Open Play

- Any gender may play with any gender (men's, women's, or mixed pairings allowed).
- Players of any age may compete only if they meet the event/division eligibility requirements and required waivers (including guardian waiver where applicable).

3. Skill Level and Rating Standards (VAIR)

3.1 VAIR is the Official Rating Standard

UPL uses VAIR for rating verification, roster compliance, and competitive integrity.

3.2 No 5.5+ Participation

Players rated 5.5 or higher (VAIR) are not eligible to compete in any UPL match.

This is intentional and reflects a traditional development pathway structure:

- PPA & MLP -> Major Leagues
- APP -> AAA
- Florida Pro League -> AA
- UPL -> A League

4. Roster Requirements (Semi-Pro Circuit)

4.1 Roster Size and Female Requirement

- Minimum roster: 6 verified players (must include at least 1 female)
- Maximum roster: 10 verified players (must include at least 2 females)

4.2 Roster Depth Recommendation (Avoiding Forfeits)

To prevent forfeits, teams are strongly encouraged to maintain 8-10 verified players.

4.3 Roster Composition Guidance (Depth)

If a team carries an 8-player roster, it is strongly recommended to include enough gender and skill depth to cover absences and keep the lineup compliant (commonly including at least one additional male and one additional female), but all roster members must remain slot/rating compliant.

4.4 Junior Division

If a Junior division is offered in the same event structure, it may mirror this format; however, Junior eligibility/rating rules must follow the Junior Division addendum if published.

5. Official Match Lineup (Slot System)

To prevent stacking and protect competitive balance, each team's official match lineup is submitted using six (6) required slots:

- A1, A2
- B1, B2
- C1, C2

5.1 Slot Rating Bands (Semi-Pro Focus)

A Slots (Top Tier Semi-Pro)

- A1-A2: 5.25-5.49

B Slots (Core Semi-Pro)

- B1-B2: 5.0-5.24

C Slots (Elite Amateur / Development)

- C1-C2: 4.0-4.99

5.2 Slot Compliance Rule

A player may not be assigned to a slot if their VAIR rating falls outside that slot's rating band, except as permitted under Section 5.3 (A-Slot Availability Exception).

5.3 A-Slot Availability Exception (Best Next Players)

If a team does not have an eligible A-slot athlete available for a match (commonly a 5.2-5.4+ level athlete; officially 5.25-5.49 in VAIR), the team may fill A1/A2 with its best next available eligible players, provided that:

1. No 5.5+ athletes may be used under any circumstance.
2. The team must assign players in a way that reflects competitive fairness: highest-rated available players must occupy the highest available slots (A before B before C).
3. This exception may not be used to create a slot advantage (for example, keeping a higher-rated player in B/C while placing a lower-rated player in A).

6. Match Format (Five Games)

6.1 Scoring

- Rally scoring to 21, win by 2
- Points are awarded on every rally, regardless of which team serves.

6.2 Games Per Match (All Five Must Be Played)

Each official UPL match consists of five (5) games, and all five games must be played unless UPL officials determine otherwise due to schedule, safety, or event operations.

Games 1-3: Tiered Doubles

1. Tier A Game: A1 + A2 compete (men's, women's, or mixed)
2. Tier B Game: B1 + B2 compete (men's, women's, or mixed)
3. Tier C Game: C1 + C2 compete (men's, women's, or mixed)

Game 4: Doubles Dream Maker

Game 5: Singles Dream Breaker

7. Special Formats

7.1 Doubles Dream Maker (Game 4)

- All six (6) players from Games 1-3 must participate unless injured
- Teams must submit a pre-set rotation order
- Players rotate after every point, following the submitted order

7.2 Singles Dream Breaker (Game 5)

- All six players rotate through singles
- Rotation occurs after every two (2) points
- Standard singles rules apply

8. Warm-Up, Timeouts, and Match Pace

8.1 Warm-Up

- Teams have 5 minutes to warm up before Game 1

8.2 Time Between Games

- 2 minutes between games

8.3 Timeouts

- Each team receives one (1) timeout per game
- Failure to be ready within the 2-minute interval between games results in forfeiting that timeout (or other enforcement at official discretion)

8.4 Court Monitors

- Court monitors ensure matches remain on schedule
- No extra warm-ups are permitted between games

9. Team and Match Scoring

9.1 Match Points

- Each game won = 1 match point
- A match contains 5 possible match points (0-5)

9.2 Match Winner

- The team winning 3 or more games wins the match
- All five games are still played (unless officials determine otherwise)

10. Match-Day Submission and Roster Lock

10.1 Lineup Submission

Team Owners (or approved representatives) must submit:

- The match lineup by slot (A1-C2)
- Rotation orders required for Games 4 and 5
- Any required verification confirmations per event procedure

10.2 Roster Lock (30 Minutes)

Roster Lock: Each team's roster and match lineup must be finalized no later than 30 minutes prior to match start.

After roster lock:

- No additions, swaps, or substitutions may be made for that match
- Exceptions are allowed only under Sections 11 (Substitutions) and 12 (Injury Replacements), with league approval and without violating slot/rating requirements

11. Substitutions (Verified + No Advantage)

11.1 Approval Required

All substitutions must be:

- VAIR-verified, and
- approved by UPL officials before the substitute competes.

11.2 No Rating Advantage / No Slot Advantage

Substitutions are allowed only if the substitute:

- does not create a rating advantage under league standards, and
- remains compliant with the slot system and rating bands (A/B/C), including the 5.5+ prohibition

11.3 Prohibited Players

Non-rostered or unverified players are strictly prohibited from competing in any UPL match. No exceptions.

11.4 Injury Sub-Out (Match Only) + Return Next Match

If a player is injured during a match, that player may be substituted out for the remainder of that match.

- The injured player may not re-enter that same match once substituted out.
- The injured player may return in the next match if medically able to compete and not otherwise restricted by UPL officials.
- All injury substitutions must remain compliant with verification, roster lock, and slot/rating rules.

12. Injury Replacements (Long-Term Injury Standard)

12.1 Short-Term Injury

Short-term injuries are handled under Section 11.4 (sub-out for the remainder of the match, return next match if able).

12.2 Long-Term Injury (Inactive + Replacement)

If an injury is expected to extend longer than one (1) week and/or is projected to extend for multiple months, the team must treat the injury as long-term for league purposes:

- The team must notify UPL officials and request an injury replacement
- The injured athlete will be designated inactive until medically able to return and cleared under league procedures
- Any replacement must be approved before competing.

12.3 Injury Replacement Eligibility Requirements

A team may request an injury replacement only if the replacement athlete meets all of the following:

1. Tryout Requirement: Athlete attended a UPL tryout/combine
2. VAIR Requirement (Before Season Start): Athlete has a VAIR free account or Recreation VAIR rating established before the season starts
3. League Approval: Replacement must be reviewed and approved by UPL officials prior to participating
4. Roster + Slot Compliance: Replacement may not create a rating/slot advantage and must remain compliant with roster and slot standards

13. Forfeits

13.1 Failure to Field Minimum Roster

If a team cannot field the minimum roster during competition, the affected game is recorded as:

- 21-0 forfeit

14. Violations and Penalties (Strict Enforcement)

If a team is found in violation of roster, rating, substitutions, roster lock, or slot requirements:

- Automatic Forfeits: Any games played while in violation are automatic forfeits
- Future Forfeits: Future games may also be forfeited if the team cannot field a compliant roster and lineup
- Board/League Review: The matter will be reviewed by UPL officials and/or the UPL Board
- Discipline: Team may be fined, suspended, and/or removed for the remainder of the season depending on severity and repeat offenses

15. Uniform Standards

15.1 Uniforms Required

Uniforms are required for all teams.

15.2 Official Uniform Partner

The official uniform partner of UPL is Leorever.

15.3 Customization

Teams are encouraged to customize uniforms with city branding, colors, and sponsor logos while maintaining UPL and Leorever co-branding standards (as published).

16. Regional Pod Play and Championship Path

Teams compete within regional pods (West, Central, East) during the regular season to build rivalries and reduce travel.

Top-performing teams advance to the 2026 UPL Championship in Omaha, Nebraska - the official home of the UPL Finals - where the UPL National Champions are crowned.

17. Team Owners (Responsibilities)

Each Team Owner is responsible for:

- Managing communication between players, referees, and league officials

- Submitting lineups and overseeing match compliance
- Ensuring player readiness and adherence to the match schedule

Owners may be active or inactive players but must be present for matches unless the league approves a designated representative.

18. Coaching and Boundary Calls

18.1 Coaching

Non-playing teammates may provide coaching between points only, as long as it does not delay play or interfere with opponents.

18.2 Line Calls

Only the active players on court may make boundary and fault rulings during live play.

18.3 Disputes and Final Authority

Referees or UPL officials may review and make final determinations on disputed calls or rule interpretations.

Appendix A: One-Page Quick Reference (Team Owners)

Roster

- 6-10 verified players
- Min 1 female; min 2 females if roster is 7-10
- Recommended: 8-10 players

Ratings

- No 5.5+ athletes
- Slots:
 - A (5.25-5.49)
 - B (5.0-5.24)
 - C (4.0-4.99)
- If no A-level athlete is available, use your best next eligible players in A1/A2 (highest-rated available must fill highest slots)

Lineups

- Submit A1-C2 + rotation orders
- Roster lock = 30 minutes before match

Substitutions

- VAIR verified + league approved before play
- No rating advantage, no slot advantage
- Injury sub-out = remainder of match only; can return next match if able
- Long-term injury (over 1 week / projected months) = notify league + injury replacement process

Forfeits

- Minimum roster not fielded = 21-0 forfeit

Venues

- No public courts
- Approved clubs/venues only
- Sporfie cameras required (2 courts minimum)