

HOW TO START A JUNIOR PADEL PROGRAM

A Practical Guide from the USPA

2026 Edition 1.0

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Introduction

Junior programs are the foundation of the sport's long-term growth. A club that successfully develops young players does not just fill a few courts on weekday afternoons; it creates a pipeline of lifelong participants, builds community roots, and positions itself as a hub of local padel culture.

Padel has an important advantage over most racquet sports. The learning curve is gentler. Children can rally earlier. The glass walls make the ball recoverable, keeping beginners engaged rather than frustrated. A ten-year-old with two hours of padel experience can have genuine fun on a court in a way that takes months in tennis or squash to achieve.

This guide has three core areas: how to coach junior players well, how to find them in the first place, and how to build a program structure that is sustainable for your club. It draws on direct experience operating junior racquet sports programs at scale, USPA competitive pathway resources, and the specific context of the U.S. padel market in 2026.

None of this requires a large coaching staff, a dedicated junior academy, or a significant upfront investment. The minimum viable program can start with as few as three or four children. What it does require is clear thinking about what you are trying to create and a willingness to learn from what has worked across other racquet sports.

USPA Grant

\$500 available for junior events with 10+ participants. Requires event photos and free USPA memberships for all participants.

Contact info@padelusa.org to apply.

Section 1: Coaching Philosophy & Methodology

Building the right experience before building the right technique

The most important question in entry-level or beginner junior coaching is not “what are we teaching?”, but “how will children come back next week?”, everything else follows from that.

A technically rigorous coach who runs an environment where children stand in lines waiting for their turn will see attrition within two or three sessions. A coach who makes every child feel like they are actually playing will receive frequent praise and referrals from parents, and in time, the program will grow.

1.1 The Right Priority Order

Be Safe, Have Fun, Learn, in that order. If the children come back next week because they had a good time and they were safe, you're already succeeding. The learning takes care of itself over time.

This sequence is not just a philosophy statement. It is a practical operating principle that should inform every decision you make on the court.

Safety First

Junior programs carry real liability and safeguarding obligations. Before the first class:

- Ensure your club has appropriate liability insurance covering minors
- Familiarize yourself with USPA SafeSport requirements, which govern interactions between coaches and junior athletes
- Where relevant, review the USPA Code of Conduct's specific section on parents and guardians, and set expectations of a positive teaching environment with parents before the first session.
- Establish court rules for juniors that may differ from adult use: no unsupervised court access, no running on wet courts, discuss racquet safety protocols, and explain safe player positioning on the court.

Fun as Infrastructure

Fun is not the soft part of junior coaching. It is the infrastructure. The primary driver of fun in junior padel is simple: Children need to be hitting the ball, not watching others hit it. Every structural decision about your class format should keep this in mind.

Learning as an Outcome, Not a Method

Learning happens when children are engaged and repeating actions in context. Formal instruction has its place, but it should be a small fraction of court time, especially in the first months of a program. The best coaches use informal coaching moments, correcting grip while a child is already rallying, demonstrating footwork by joining a rally, explaining the back wall during a natural pause in play, rather than stopping the class to lecture.

1.2 What to Do on the Court

Keep Children Moving and Hitting

One of the single biggest mistakes in junior racquet sports coaching is the “line drill.” Four or five children standing in a line, each waiting their turn to hit one ball fed by the coach before going to the back of the line again. It looks organized; however, it offers almost no meaningful playtime and kills engagement in a single session.

The alternative model keeps every child active simultaneously:

- Pair children and have them attempt to rally across the net, against the glass, or over the service line from the start.
- For younger children, a rally could mean tossing the ball back and forth rather than hitting it with a racket, or rolling the ball along the turf with the racket.
- Use mini-rallies (target 3–5 shots) rather than technical drills as the basic unit of activity.
- Rotate partners frequently so children are not stuck with a mismatched partner for a full session.
- Use games and challenges (longest rally, first to 5, cooperative point-building) to structure activity with built-in motivation.

Coach Feeding: When and How

There is a legitimate use for a coach-fed drill that is different from the line-drill problem. When children have progressed enough to work on specific shots, particularly back-wall play and lobs, which are harder to practice in open rallies, targeted feeding by the coach gives them consistent repetitions of a specific technical challenge.

The key distinction is that feeding should be brief, purposeful, and immediately followed by a return to cooperative play. A feeding drill in which the coach drops and hits balls to the student for 10–15 minutes is appropriate when the goal is specific and defined. It is not appropriate as the primary structure of a beginner class.

1.3 Age-Appropriate Rules and Expectations

Allow Double Bounces

For beginner and younger children, especially, allow the ball to bounce twice without penalty. This is not a concession; it is developmentally appropriate and dramatically increases the amount of successful contact beginners experience. A child who reaches and hits a ball that bounced twice feels successful. A child who watches the same ball die and is told they lost the point or rally will feel unsuccessful. The difference in retention between those two experiences is significant.

Do Not Impose Adult Scoring on Beginners

Formal scoring, deuce, advantage, Golden Point, and Star Point are irrelevant to a six-year-old or even a ten-year-old who has been playing for a month. What matters is that they experience the act of playing: hitting, moving, competing in simple ways. Use rally scoring (1,2,3,4, etc.), cooperative rally targets, or simple “first to X points” structures before introducing formal padel scoring.

You should not impart to the child your view of the sport. What padel is to a ten-year-old is not four people rallying with Star Point. Get the child to have fun, get a rally going, and allow them to enjoy padel through their own experiences.

1.4 Progression Framework

A simple three-stage model works well for most junior programs. Children move through stages based on demonstrated ability, not age or time enrolled.

Stage 1: Introduction	Movement, basic contact, cooperative rallying. No formal scoring. Allow double bounces. Focus on keeping the ball moving and enjoying the game. Wall play is exploratory, not technical.
Stage 2: Development	Introduce basic positional play (T-line positioning), simple net approaches, and wall awareness. Begin simple formal scoring. Feeding drills for wall shots. Pair children by approximate level.
Stage 3: Match Play Ready	Consistent rally capability, understanding of scoring and rules, basic tactical awareness. Eligible to enter USPA Junior tournaments. Encourage signing up with a friend for their first competitive experience.

1.5 Coach Qualifications and Development

You do not need a world-class padel coach with decades of experience to run a successful junior program. You need someone good with children, energetic, safety-conscious, and willing to help educate children in a fun manner. Often, coaches with decades of experience or high-level former professional players are not the best coaches for young children, or they are not interested in coaching beginner junior players. Many successful junior programs are launched by coaches from adjacent racquet sports, such as tennis, squash, and pickleball, who bring strong coaching frameworks and adapt them to padel.

- The USPA has endorsed the Racquet Sports Professionals Association (RSPA) and RB Padel Academy as an official Endorsed Padel Coaching Organization. RSPA and RB Padel Academy certifications are available for coaches looking to formalize their credentials.
- FIP also offers an International Referee Course for Level 1 certification, which covers officiating standards relevant to junior competitive play.
- Encourage coaches to self-educate through coaching courses and online coaching resources.

Section 2: Marketing & Outreach

Finding your first students and building a community around the program

Marketing a junior program is a different challenge from marketing adult tournaments. You are not reaching the participants directly; you are reaching parents, whose decision-making process involves time, logistics, safety, social fit, and cost, and you are doing this in a market where most families have never heard of padel.

The good thing is you do not need a large marketing budget. You need clarity on what you are offering, a low-friction way for parents to express interest, and the discipline to show up where families are already gathering and communicating.

2.1 Positioning Your Program

Lead with Accessibility, Not Competition

Resist the temptation to lead with competitive outcomes (“our juniors compete nationally”) when you are starting a program. Parents of children who have never played padel are not thinking about FIP rankings, tournaments, or national teams. They are thinking about: will my child enjoy it? Will they have fun? Is it worth the cost?

Position your program around those answers first. Use language that signals welcome and ease of entry:

- "Learn Padel" or "Padel 101" - Emphasizes beginner-friendliness explicitly
- "Intro to Padel for Children" - Age-specific and clearly developmental
- "Family Padel" - Positions padel as a shared activity that parents and children can do together

2.2 The Family Angle

One of Padel's genuine advantages over tennis and squash as a junior recruitment tool is that adults can learn quickly enough that a parent and child can play together meaningfully after just a few sessions. This is a powerful marketing message that few other racquet sports can match as clearly.

Build programs and marketing around this angle:

- "Parents play on the next court while children learn" - Solves the logistics problem for time-pressed families
- "Learn together" - Parent and teens in the same session at a beginner level
- "Family Padel Sunday" - structured open play where families play together with a coaches guidance but no formal class structure
 - This works especially well if your courts are underutilized on Sunday afternoons, which is common at most clubs

2.3 School Outreach

Private Schools

Private schools are your most actionable target for school-based outreach. Unlike public schools, private institutions operate with minimal bureaucratic restriction on what they can promote, host, or endorse. A direct conversation with a PE teacher, activities director, or head of school can quickly open real doors.

The most effective approach is the portable net clinic:

- Purchase a portable tennis or pickleball net (\$40–\$80 on Amazon), which folds into a carry bag
- Bring a set of padel rackets and foam or low-compression balls
- Set up on any flat surface, gymnasium, parking lot, sports field, and run a 30–45 minute introductory session
- Explain that on a full-size court, there are glass walls that make the game even more dynamic
- Distribute a simple one-page flyer with a QR code linking to a Google Form sign-up

Public Schools

Public schools operate under strict rules about what third parties can promote on campus. Do not invest significant time chasing public school partnerships until you have exhausted private school options. If you do pursue public schools, you may need to speak to multiple employees at the school before you receive helpful information. This may mean the front desk or the athletic department. If you know a teacher, the parents of children at the school or those involved in the school administration, this may be easier.

2.4 Community Channels

Physical Presence

- Post flyers at local shopping centers, gyms, pediatric offices, and family-oriented businesses
- Leave flyers at your own front desk with a simple message: “Ask us about our junior program”.
- Seek out community events that families attend, where you could set up your portable net to introduce padel and have players rally, be there with padel racquets and balls to meet parents.
- When your coaches are conducting adult classes, ensure they speak about junior programs. You don't know who does or doesn't have children or would have children. They know who would be interested in trying padel. Existing players in your club are your best advocates.

Digital Presence

- Post on your club's Instagram account with simple content: Children on court, smiling, hitting the ball
- Create a Facebook event for your first junior clinic and share it in local parent Facebook groups
- Contact the USPA (@usapadel) and ask to be featured. The USPA actively promotes junior program development and highlights clubs on padelusa.org

2.5 Registration: Keep It Simple

Do not require parents to create an account in your club management software to express interest in a program that does not exist yet. That is a conversion killer. Use the lowest-friction tool available at the awareness and interest stage.

A three-stage registration process works well:

Stage 1: Interest	Google Form collecting name, child’s age, preferred schedule, and email. No payment, no account creation. Explicitly non-committal. Goal: Build a list of interested families you can communicate with.
Stage 2: Introduction	Anytime you receive the lead, encourage them to come to the club to meet you, view the facility, and be on a court, even if it's only for 10 minutes or less. As families are unfamiliar with what padel is, being able to see the sport in action will help encourage them to join. Many clubs offer a free first-class program; if this is unmanageable, you could offer free court times for families who are first-timers, or free racket and ball rentals to allow them to try the sport.
Stage 3: Enrollment	Once you have enough interest to run a class (minimum 2 children), send enrolled families to your club management system or a simple payment link. Now they’re committed and motivated.

2.6 The USPA as a Marketing Asset

Your club’s USPA membership is a credibility signal that many parents will respond to positively, especially those from tennis or other organized sports backgrounds who understand what a national governing body means.

Use USPA branding in your junior program materials (per USPA branding guidelines). Point parents to padelusa.org for information about the sport at the national level, which gives your program context and legitimacy.

Section 3: Program Structure

Building something sustainable from the first eight students

Program structure is where most junior programs fail, and they usually fail in one of two ways. Either the club tries to replicate a full-scale youth tennis academy before it has the enrollment to support it, too many divisions, too complex a schedule, not enough children in any one class to feel like a program, or it keeps things so informal that parents cannot plan around it, and enrollment never stabilizes.

The goal is a structure that is simple enough to launch quickly, coherent enough for parents to understand and commit to, and flexible enough to grow as enrollment builds.

3.1 Age Groupings: Start with Two

The natural instinct is to divide children into many age brackets, U8, U10, U12, U14, U16, U18, mirroring what established tennis programs do. Do not do this when you are starting. With small enrollment, narrow brackets produce classes of one or two children, which is neither fun for children nor financially viable for the club.

Start with U12 and U18, just two brackets. You might have a seven-year-old and a ten-year-old in the same class. That’s not perfect, but if you set up too many divisions, you’ll end up with one child in every class, and that’s not sustainable for the child because it’s not fun, and not sustainable for the club because you’re essentially giving private lessons all afternoon.

U12 (Ages 7–12)	Broader age range, focused on fundamentals and fun. A 7-year-old and an 11-year-old can coexist well if the coach uses appropriate exercises. Class size of 4–8 students is ideal. If a 13-year-old wants to join and your U18 group has room, flex them up; if not, flex them down.
U18 (Ages 12–18)	More competitive edge appropriate. Players can handle formal scoring and simple tactical concepts. Bridge group between junior development and adult play. Goal: Get older juniors comfortable serving and rallying so they can begin to play with adults if there aren’t many juniors in the area.

As enrollment grows, you can subdivide. A natural split is U8 (ages 5–8) and U14 (ages 9–14) before eventually adding a U18 tier as your older cohort grows. Let enrollment drive the division structure, not the other way around.

3.2 Scheduling: Work Around Competing Programs

One of the most underestimated challenges in launching a junior program is scheduling. You are not just competing for court time against adult programming; you are competing for a child’s time against dance, soccer, basketball, and homework. Understanding what your local competitors are doing, and when they do it, is a prerequisite for setting a schedule that families will actually keep.

Weekday After-School Windows

The classic junior racquet sports slot is immediately after school dismissal. Map your schedule against local school start and end times:

School ends at 2:30 pm	Classes at 3:00 or 3:30 pm
School ends at 3:00 pm	Classes at 3:30 or 4:00 pm
School ends at 3:30 pm	Classes at 4:00 or 4:30 pm

A suggested starting structure for weekday programming:

- U12 class: 3:30–4:30 pm (or shifted based on local school schedule)
- U18 class: 4:30–5:30 pm

45-minute classes may feel too short for parents to justify travel. 60 minutes is the standard in most well-run programs. 90 minutes works for older, more committed players, but is typically too long for beginners or those under 12.

Weekend Programming

Weekend slots can work particularly well when integrated with existing adult programming rather than competing against it:

- Run a junior class on one dedicated court during Saturday adult round robins, parents can play adults while children play juniors at the same time
- Sunday afternoons are often the least-utilized court time at most clubs. Family Padel programming works well in this window
- Offer a Saturday morning junior clinic as a standalone event before adult programming begins, Or if you have a spare court, allow children to play on the court at no cost while their parents are playing.

3.3 Minimum Viable Program

You do not need a full slate of classes and age groups to launch. When your program first starts, you need to resist the temptation to cancel classes with only one or two players. As soon as you cancel a class, you're signaling to that player and parent that you're not flexible or accommodating. Always encourage players in small programs to bring a friend along, as it will enhance their enjoyment and double your program numbers.

Getting to 8 children is your first milestone. Below that number, classes feel sparse, and retention is hard. At 8–12 children spread across two groups, you have enough mass for the classes to feel like a program, for children to have friends at the club, and for the financial model to start to make sense.

3.4 Pricing and Financial Structure

Junior program pricing should reflect the local market for comparable youth sports activities (tennis lessons, swim team, soccer club). As a new sport, you should generally price at or slightly below comparable activities to reduce the barrier to trial.

First Class Free	If you can, allowing players and parents to try a class for free is always a good option, as it gives them peace of mind and confidence that you are confident in your program.
Bring a Friend for Free	You should always offer programs that encourage players to bring their friends, as this will most likely be easy, as they are already familiar with each other and most likely have similar after-school pick-up and drop-off schedules.
Drop-in Rate	Good for one off attendance. Set it high enough to incentivize monthly enrollment (e.g., \$30–\$35 per session drop-in vs. \$20/session on a monthly plan).
Monthly Enrollment	Predictable revenue for the club, a commitment signal from families. A 4-session monthly plan at \$80–\$100 is a reasonable starting point in most U.S. markets.
Free Trial Class	One free trial session is the single most effective conversion tool for a new program. Parents who have invested time coming to the club are far more likely to enroll after a positive trial than a cold.
Family Discount	If offering adult and junior programming simultaneously, a family bundle (adult session + junior session) reduces friction and increases revenue per visit.

3.5 The Competitive Pathway

One of the most powerful retention tools for junior programs is a visible competitive opportunity. When students can see a progression from their first class to an actual tournament, the program feels like it is going somewhere, for both children and parents.

3.6 Tracking and Growing Enrollment

Run your junior program like a business within your business. Track the metrics that matter:

- Weekly active enrollment by age group
- Session attendance rate (are enrolled students actually showing up?)
- Retention from month to month
- Pipeline: How many families have expressed interest but not enrolled?

Review these numbers monthly. If U12 attendance is strong and U18 is thin, consider shifting court time accordingly. If retention drops after month two, survey parents, a brief Google Form asking three questions will tell you more than any amount of guessing.

Getting Started: Your First 30 Days

Week 1	Set up a Google Form for junior program interest. Post it on your club Instagram, club website, and in two local parent Facebook groups. Share with every family currently using your club.
Week 2	Contact two or three private schools in your area. Pitch a free portable net clinic. Book the first one. Hello,
Week 3	Run your portable net clinic at the first school. Distribute flyers with a QR code to the Google Form.
Week 4	Once you have expressions of interest, announce your launch date, time, and pricing. Send a confirmation email to everyone on your Google Form list. Offer a free trial class for the first session.
Week 5 (Month 2)	Run your first paid classes. Evaluate attendance and adjust the schedule. Submit for the USPA junior grant if your first event qualifies. Announce your next event on social media.

Questions and support: info@padelusa.org

[Review the Tournament Director Resources](#)

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