

A Resource Guide: Visa Options for Foreign Padel Players & Coaches

Prepared for USA Padel Member Clubs

Created using material presented during the Club Member Call, June 25, 2026

By Vanessa Cohen, Esq. | Immigration Attorney

vcohen@hsusalaw.com | 786-661-9690

Introduction.....	3
Important Disclaimer:.....	3
How to use this guide?.....	3
Section 1: Visa Options Overview.....	4
1.) O-1 Visa - Extraordinary Ability.....	4
Who Qualifies?.....	4
Evidence Required: Must meet at least 3 of the following criteria.....	4
Key Practical Details.....	4
2.) P-1 Visa - Internationally Recognized Athletes.....	5
Types:.....	5
3.) Green Cards - Permanent Residency.....	5
EB-1A - Extraordinary Ability (Preferred Path).....	5
PERM Labor Certification (EB-2 or EB-3) - Club-Sponsored Path.....	5
4.) B-1 / B-2 Tourist Visa & ESTA - What's Allowed Without a Work Visa.....	6
What IS allowed on B-1/ESTA:.....	6
What is NOT allowed on B-1/ESTA:.....	6
Practical Tip:.....	6
5.) Alternative Visa Strategies.....	6
E-2 Treaty Investor Visa.....	6
L-1 Intracompany Transferee Visa.....	7
H-1B (Generally Not Recommended for Coaches).....	7
H-2B & J-1 (Temporary/Training Options).....	7
OPT and F-1 Student pathway (for clubs with younger talent):.....	7
Section 2: Side-by-Side Comparison.....	8
Section 3: The Green Card Process - A Plain-Language Summary.....	9
Key Distinction: Self-petition vs. Employer-sponsored.....	9
Important notes from the call:.....	9
Section 4: Employer Obligations - What Clubs Must Know.....	10
Employment Contracts.....	10
Termination.....	10
Injury and Medical Situations.....	10
Section 5: Common Problems & How to Solve Them.....	11
Problem 1: The coach doesn't have enough experience yet.....	11
Problem 2: The athlete is past their competitive prime.....	11
Problem 3: You want someone to both play and coach - which visa?.....	11
Problem 4: Someone is already doing clinics on a tourist visa.....	12
Problem 5: The club wants to keep someone long-term but isn't sure where to start.....	12
Section 6: How USA Padel Can Help.....	13
Appendix: Contact & Resources.....	14
HARATZ & STUBBE, PA.....	14
USA Padel.....	14
Key Terms Reference.....	14

Important: This guide is for general informational purposes only and does not constitute legal advice. Every immigration case is unique. Clubs and individuals should consult a qualified immigration attorney before taking any action.

Introduction

One of the most common challenges facing padel clubs across the United States is finding a clear path to bring in foreign coaches and staff to help grow the game. The U.S. immigration system offers multiple options, but choosing the wrong one or skipping the process entirely can put both the club and the individual at serious legal risk.

This guide summarizes the visa options most relevant to padel clubs, drawn directly from the June 2026 USA Padel Club Member Call featuring immigration attorney Vanessa Cohen of Haratz & Stubbe. Vanessa specializes in EB-1A, O-1, and NIW visas for athletes and coaches, with extensive experience in sports immigration.

Important Disclaimer:

This guide is for general informational purposes only and does not constitute legal advice. Every immigration case is unique. Clubs and individuals should consult a qualified immigration attorney before taking any action.

How to use this guide?

- Use Section 1 to understand what each visa type allows.
- Use Section 2 to compare options side by side.
- Use Section 3 to understand the green card process.
- Use Section 4 to learn what foreign nationals cannot do without a proper visa.
- Use Section 5 to solve common problems clubs face.
- Contact a trained and experienced immigration attorney directly for an individual case assessment.

Section 1: Visa Options Overview

1.) O-1 Visa - Extraordinary Ability

The O-1 visa is the most versatile and commonly recommended option for padel clubs bringing in foreign professional players or coaches. It allows the holder to both compete and work, including coaching, teaching clinics, and club employment, as long as the specific activities are clearly defined in the petition from the start.

Who Qualifies?

- Top-tier professional players ranked nationally or internationally (top 50 in their home country can be a strong argument)
- Coaches with elite-level credentials, national team experience, major tournament participation, or documented coaching achievements
- Must show sustained acclaim, not just a single result
- O-1A covers athletes and coaches; O-1B covers performing arts (rarely applicable to padel)

Evidence Required: Must meet at least 3 of the following criteria

- National and international awards and recognitions (Rankings, titles, and awards at major competitions)
- Media coverage in publications or articles (authorities still prefer traditional print/online publications from major media or trade publications. Social media does not qualify)
- Authorship of coaching content, articles, or publications
- High salary compared to peers in the sport
- Participation as a judge or selector for others (note: serving as a hitting partner for a higher-ranked player may qualify)
- Membership in elite associations (USA Padel membership may support this argument)
- Original and significant contributions to the sport (example: an athlete who has played a significant role in the development of the sport in the US or their home country)

Key Practical Details

- Duration: 3 years initial, extendable in 1-year increments (visa validity might differ by country)
- Sponsor required: A U.S. employer, club, or agent must file the petition
- The petition must clearly define exactly what the person will do in the U.S. Any substantial change in role may require a new or amended petition
- Compensation is flexible: No prevailing wage requirement (unlike H-1B). Can be structured as percentage-based, per-session, or salary. Whatever is submitted to immigration should be followed consistently.

A note from the call:

“For coaches seeking to gain media coverage in publications or articles, there are many Padel-specific online news outlets and newsletters that are seeking news. It is recommended that coaches reach out to them directly to publish their work. Additionally, many local media outlets,

such as print newspapers or local television stations, are also seeking to feature new activities in the area. We have seen coaches successfully receive local newspaper and television coverage through this route.”- Scott Colebourne, Executive Director. Contact Scott at scott@padelusa.org to discuss media and publication support.

2.) P-1 Visa - Internationally Recognized Athletes

The P-1 is specifically for athletes coming to compete in tournaments or a series of events. It is generally easier to obtain than an O-1, but it is more limited in scope.

Types:

- **P-1A Individual:** For athletes with international recognition coming to compete at specific events. Lower bar than O-1 but requires documented international standing.
- **P-1A Team:** Covers the entire team or key members for a recognized team competing in the U.S. Useful for club teams touring the U.S.
- **P-1S Essential Support:** Covers coaches, trainers, hitting partners, and team staff essential to the athlete's performance. Tied directly to the athlete's P-1 petition.

Limitation for Clubs: A P-1 visa holder is designated as an athlete. A club can sponsor an athlete on a P-1, pay them a salary as a sponsored athlete, and have them train at the club. But technically, they cannot formally coach students or conduct paid clinics. If you want someone to both play and coach, the O-1 is the correct visa.

3.) Green Cards - Permanent Residency

Once a foreign national has been in O-1 status for 1–3 years and wants to stay in the U.S. long-term, a green card (permanent residency) is an option. There are two main pathways relevant to padel clubs.

EB-1A - Extraordinary Ability (Preferred Path)

- No job offer required - the individual self-petitions (with a lawyer's help)
- No labor certification (PERM) needed, which saves significant time
- Priority date is usually current for most countries, faster than other employment-based categories
- Must meet 3 of the same 10 criteria as the O-1, but the bar is higher, must demonstrate being in the top 1% nationally or internationally
- For padel specifically, arguing top 1% in the U.S. is currently more achievable than internationally, given the sport's growth stage in this market
- A club can also co-sponsor an EB-1A, though it is not required

PERM Labor Certification (EB-2 or EB-3) - Club-Sponsored Path

When a club wants to permanently employ a foreign national who does not qualify for EB-1A, PERM is the alternative. It is a more involved process requiring active club participation.

- **Step 1:** Prevailing wage determination - The Department of Labor sets the minimum salary for the position

Important: This guide is for general informational purposes only and does not constitute legal advice. Every immigration case is unique. Clubs and individuals should consult a qualified immigration attorney before taking any action.

- **Step 2:** Recruitment campaign - the club must advertise the role and demonstrate that no qualified U.S. workers applied
- **Step 3:** PERM application filed with the Department of Labor (Form ETA-9089)
- **Step 4:** I-140 petition filed with USCIS once PERM is certified (takes approximately 6–18 months)
- **Step 5:** Adjustment of status - final step, green card interview or consular processing
- Total timeline: approximately 3 years from start to finish.
- **Key difference from EB-1A:** Requires an active, committed sponsoring employer throughout the entire process

4.) B-1 / B-2 Tourist Visa & ESTA - What's Allowed Without a Work Visa

This section is critical. Many clubs unknowingly put foreign nationals at legal risk.

A foreign national on a tourist visa (B-1/B-2) or ESTA (Visa Waiver Program) cannot work in the United States, including coaching, teaching clinics, or providing paid instruction of any kind. This is considered unauthorized employment, which carries serious consequences for both the individual and the club.

What IS allowed on B-1/ESTA:

- Compete in tournaments and collect prize money
- Participate in exhibition matches (limited to foreign-based team competing in an international league, or an amateur/prize-money competitor meeting strict foreign residency criteria)
- Attend clinics or training camps as a student/participant
- Scout facilities, negotiate contracts
- Meetings with clubs, sponsors, or agents
- ESTA (Visa Waiver Program) countries: maximum 90-day stay, no extension

What is NOT allowed on B-1/ESTA:

- Receiving a salary or ongoing employment compensation of any kind
- Coaching clients for payment - even informally
- Working at a padel club or academy
- Teaching lessons - even a single session for pay
- Performing services that are primarily for a U.S. employer
- Receiving any form of compensation from a U.S. Sponsor

Practical Tip:

If a foreign coach wants to come to the U.S. to build their profile before applying for an O-1, they can enter on a B-1 visa, play USA Padel tournaments, and build their ranking and media coverage without coaching for pay. That U.S. tournament record can then support a future O-1 application.

5.) Alternative Visa Strategies

E-2 Treaty Investor Visa

Important: This guide is for general informational purposes only and does not constitute legal advice. Every immigration case is unique. Clubs and individuals should consult a qualified immigration attorney before taking any action.

- Designed for individuals who invest a substantial amount in a U.S. business (typically \$50K–\$200K+ depending on the business type)
- Investor must be a national of a treaty country (most common padel countries qualify)
- Must own at least 50% of the business
- Can work full-time managing or operating the investment, applicable to a padel academy, club, or coaching business
- Initial stay: 2 years, renewable indefinitely. Visa validity depends on the country of the individual
- Employee path available: If a club is 51%+ owned by nationals of the same treaty country, an employee from that country may qualify for an E-2 employee visa

L-1 Intracompany Transferee Visa

- For transferring an existing employee from a foreign club or academy to a U.S. affiliate, subsidiary, or parent company
- The employee must have worked for the company abroad for at least 1 of the last 3 years either under a managerial/executive role (L-1A) or specialized knowledge (L-1B)
- L-1A (managers/executives): up to 7 years; strong path to EB-1C green card for managers
- L-1B (specialized knowledge): up to 5 years
- No prevailing wage requirement
- Requires a qualifying corporate relationship between the foreign and U.S. entity

H-1B (Generally Not Recommended for Coaches)

- Lottery-based - submitted annually, and selection is completely random regardless of qualifications
- Requires the position to demand a university degree - difficult to establish for most coaching roles
- If the lottery is not won, the individual has no visa for that year - not a reliable pathway
- Scott's note: *"I've had people apply multiple times with master's degrees and not get it. It truly is a lottery."*

H-2B & J-1 (Temporary/Training Options)

- H-2B: Temporary worker visa, also lottery-based, maximum 1 year to 18 months. Could work for a coach needed for a specific short-term season.
- J-1: Trainee or intern classification. Limited scope but may be applicable in specific development or educational program contexts.

OPT and F-1 Student pathway (for clubs with younger talent):

- International students on an F-1 visa can work during their studies (CPT - Curricular Practical Training) and after graduation (OPT - Optional Practical Training). Work on both OPT and CPT must clearly be related to the student's field of study.
- STEM degree holders may qualify for 3 years of OPT rather than the standard 1 year, giving clubs more time to retain them.
- If a student is enrolled in a "Day 1 CPT" master's program, they could potentially study and work part-time simultaneously under CPT while the club prepares a longer-term visa.

- H-1B is the visa that can bridge the gap at the end of OPT. If filed before the OPT expires, the individual can continue working while the H-1B is decided. However, H-1B is lottery-based and not guaranteed.

Section 2: Side-by-Side Comparison

Visa	Best For	Can Coach?	Can Compete?	Duration	Needs Sponsor?
O-1	Players + coaches (most clubs)	✓ Yes, if in the petition	✓ Yes	3 yrs + extensions	✓ Yes (club or agent)
P-1A	Tournament-only athletes	✗ No	✓ Yes	Event-specific	✓ Yes (club or agent)
P-1S	Support staff tied to P-1 athlete	✓ Limited (essential support)	✗ No	Tied to P-1	✓ Yes
EB-1A	Green card – extraordinary ability	✓ Yes	✓ Yes	Permanent	✗ Self-petition
PERM EB-2/3	Green card – club-sponsored	✓ Yes	✓ Yes	Permanent	✓ Yes
E-2	Investor or employee of the investor club	✓ Yes	✓ Yes	2 yrs, renewable	✗ (own investment)
L-1	Transfer from a foreign club affiliate	✓ Yes	✓ Yes	Up to 5–7 yrs	✓ Yes
B-1/EST A	Competing in tournaments	✗ No	✓ Compete only	Up to 90 days	✗ None needed
H-1B	Specialty degree roles (rarely useful)	Rarely possible	✗ No	3 yrs + extensions	✓ Yes

Important: This guide is for general informational purposes only and does not constitute legal advice. Every immigration case is unique. Clubs and individuals should consult a qualified immigration attorney before taking any action.

Section 3: The Green Card Process - A Plain-Language Summary

Key Distinction: Self-petition vs. Employer-sponsored

- **EB-1A:** The individual self-petitions. No club involvement required, though clubs can help support the application. Best for players or coaches who have been in O-1 status for 1–3 years and want to transition to permanent residency. This does require the coach or professional athlete to be a true expert with significant experience and prior achievements.
- **PERM (EB-2/EB-3):** The club actively sponsors the individual. A much longer process, currently approximately 3 years, requires the club to remain committed throughout.

Important notes from the call:

- Having an O-1 does not automatically mean someone qualifies for an EB-1A. The EB-1A bar is higher - top 1% of the field, not just 'extraordinary' in their context.
- For coaches or players who are no longer actively competing at a high level, the EB-1A case must focus entirely on current coaching achievements and ongoing contributions to the sport in the U.S. Past rankings from 10–15 years ago carry little weight.
- Clubs should only pursue PERM sponsorship if they are fully committed to retaining that person long-term - the process is expensive, time-consuming, and binds both parties.
- PERM is relevant not just for coaches but also for administrative and operational staff at clubs who are already in the U.S. on another visa and whom the club wants to keep permanently.

Section 4: Employer Obligations - What Clubs Must Know

Bringing a foreign national to work at your club creates legal responsibilities beyond just the visa itself.

Employment Contracts

- An O-1 requires a formal employment contract. The scope of work defined in that contract, the specific activities the person will perform, must match what was submitted to USCIS.
- If the role changes substantially (e.g., a player-coach shifts to a full-time director role), the club may need to file an amended or new petition before the change takes effect.
- Whatever compensation structure is agreed upon and submitted to immigration should be followed consistently. Discrepancies between what was submitted and what is actually paid can create problems at renewal or the green card stage.
- If the coach or professional player is coming to work at a club and play tournaments. It is advisable that they include the itinerary of the tournaments or letter from the organization to support their itinerary.

Termination

- If a club is the sponsor on the O-1 visa, and terminates an O-1 visa holder, the club has an obligation to report the termination to USCIS.
- The individual then needs to find a new sponsor quickly or make alternative arrangements to maintain legal status.
- Unlike H-1B visas, O-1 employers are not required to pay for the individual's return ticket home upon termination, but this should be addressed in the employment contract.

Injury and Medical Situations

- Athletes and coaches on visas must remain able to perform their duties. If a significant injury occurs, it is recommended to leave the U.S. for recovery in their home country and return when fit, rather than remaining in the U.S. on a non-working basis.
- This is particularly relevant for players on O-1 visas, where the activity listed in the petition is the basis for their legal status.

Section 5: Common Problems & How to Solve Them

Problem 1: The coach doesn't have enough experience yet

You've found someone great in Spain or Argentina, but they don't yet have the credentials for an O-1, no published articles, limited media coverage, and only a few years of formal coaching.

Solution:

- Have them come to the U.S. on a B-1 to compete in USA Padel tournaments and build their ranking. That U.S. competition record can support a future O-1.
- Work with them to build their coaching record and resume - Often, coaches have a strong history but may not have documented it. Work with them to ensure they document all their coaching achievements, obtain FIP or other federation certifications, and publish coaching content through padel specific publications.
- Don't rush the application. A well-built file that clearly meets 3 criteria is far more effective than a premature application.
- They can build their record and resume anywhere in the world.

Problem 2: The athlete is past their competitive prime

You want to bring in a former professional player to coach, but their ranking and competitive results are 10–15 years old. USCIS may question whether their claim is current.

Solution:

- Shift the application entirely to their coaching identity. Do not rely on old player rankings; build the case around what they are doing now.
- Document recent coaching achievements - who they have coached, what results those players have achieved, and any certifications or judging roles.
- Show ongoing contribution to the sport - ambassador roles, club development, media appearances, and tournament commentary.

Problem 3: You want someone to both play and coach - which visa?

A club wants to bring in a top-30 player from another country with only 2–3 years of coaching experience. Should the application focus on playing or coaching?

Solution:

- File the O-1 as a player, and include coaching activities explicitly in the petition itinerary.
- Filing purely as a coach requires demonstrating elite-level coaching credentials - a harder bar to meet for someone who is primarily still a player.
- The dual framing - 'professional padel player and club coach' - allows the application to lean on the stronger player credentials while still authorizing coaching work.
- This must be structured correctly from day one. Do not start coaching first and apply later.

Problem 4: Someone is already doing clinics on a tourist visa

A club has a foreign coach coming in on an ESTA or B-1 to run clinics or teach lessons. This happens more often than clubs realize.

⚠ This is unauthorized employment - A serious immigration violation

It puts the individual at risk of being barred from future U.S. entry.
It also creates legal exposure for the club.

Stop immediately. Contact an immigration attorney to assess the situation
before the individual's next trip to the U.S.

Problem 5: The club wants to keep someone long-term but isn't sure where to start

Recommended sequence:

- Encourage the coach to document all of the history in padel, including playing and coaching roles
- Reach out to a trained immigration attorney who is experienced in visas for padel coaches and players. USA Padel can provide a list of attorneys.

Section 6: How USA Padel Can Help

USA Padel offers the following as outlined by Scott, Executive Director

- **Media coverage:** USA Padel regularly publishes articles about coaches and players on the website. If your club is working to build a coach's profile for a visa application, reach out, and USA Padel can help with relevant published coverage.
- **Awards and recognition:** USA Padel tournament awards (e.g., USA Padel 2000 winner) and official recognition can serve as documented evidence for O-1 and EB-1A applications.
- **Membership documentation:** USA Padel club and individual memberships can support the 'membership in elite associations' criterion for O-1 and EB-1A applications.
- **Community and newsletters:** Padel newsletters actively seek content. Getting a coach featured - methodology, coaching philosophy, tournament results - is achievable and valuable.

Contact USA Padel for media and publication support

Appendix: Contact & Resources

Vanessa Cohen, Esq.

Immigration Attorney

Specializes in EB-1A, O-1, and NIW visas for athletes, coaches, and exceptional talent

Also handles: E-2, EB-5, L-1, EB-1C, family-based immigration

Email: vcohen@hsusalaw.com

Office Phone: (305) 503-5195 | Cell Phone: (786) 661-9690

USA Padel

Scott Colebourne

Executive Director

Email: scott@usapadel.org

For media support, USA Padel membership documentation, and tournament coverage

Key Terms Reference

- USCIS: U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services - the agency that adjudicates visa petitions
- DOL: Department of Labor - sets prevailing wages and oversees PERM applications
- OPT: Optional Practical Training - post-graduation work authorization for F-1 students
- CPT: Curricular Practical Training - work authorization during an F-1 student's studies
- ESTA: Electronic System for Travel Authorization - used by visa waiver (tourist) countries; 90-day limit
- Prevailing wage: The minimum salary DOL requires for certain visa categories (H-1B, PERM)
- Self-petition: Applying for a green card without an employer's involvement (EB-1A only)
- LLC: Limited Liability Company - a U.S. business structure that O-1 holders can use to sponsor themselves

This guide was prepared from the USA Padel Club Member Call, Session 3 (June 2026). It is for general informational purposes only and does not constitute legal advice. Consult a qualified immigration attorney before making any visa-related decisions. Every situation is unique, and individuals should retain legal counsel to review their specific circumstances and determine the best course of action.