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Young and full of talent: the NextGen of padel takes the stage at the FIP European Championships

Young, full of talent, and in some cases already stars in the **FIP rankings**. The **NextGen** of padel fills the days at the **FIP European Padel Championships** in **Cagliari**, where, alongside the "senior" players, they are having a crucial formative experience both athletically and personally. The chapter of young promises sees **Spain** at the forefront, a great school of world champions. This elite group already includes the two very young members of the women's team, **Andrea Ustero** (born in 2007) and **Alejandra Alonso** (2006), who form one of the most promising and already established pairs in the world of padel. After winning the title at the **FIP Juniors World Padel Championships** last November, Alonso (ranked 19th in the FIP ranking) and Ustero (18th) have reached the semifinals three times in the **Premier Padel 2024** circuit (in Mexico, Argentina, and Chile), standing out for their competitiveness and boldness even against more experienced and titled opponents. *"The best moment so far has been the World Championship",* Andrea told Spanish journalists. Regarding their growth in tournaments, she explained that *"at first, we knew we could go home after the early rounds. Now it doesn't happen as often, because we start to believe in ourselves and know we can beat the best"*.

In the men's category for Spain, other young stars already well known to fans worldwide stand out: talents like **Javi Leal** (who will turn 21 on Sunday the 28th, the day after the finals) and **Pablo Cardona**, born in 2004, who reached the quarterfinals in the **Premier Padel** tournaments in **Genoa** and **Malaga** and who will be **Paquito Navarro's** new partner at the **P2** in **Finland** next week.

OTHER STARS There are also those, like the British **Tia Norton**, who are already the spearhead of their national team despite their young age. Tia, who will turn 21 in December, is the youngest player on the team but also the most experienced. *"It's a bit strange, but the most important thing is that we support each other, along with the coaches, friends, and families",* Tia told English journalists shortly before the start of the tournament. *"It's a special occasion to represent our country"*. So far, she has done so excellently, winning the **FIP Promotion Sharjah** in the **United Arab Emirates** last April. Since the beginning of the year, Tia has made her mark in other stages of the **CUPRA FIP Tour**, such as the **FIP Rise** in **Doha** and **Dubai** (where she reached the semifinals).

Among those born after 2000, the Dutchman **Thijs Roper** cannot be missed. A nineteen-year-old from Maarn, near Utrecht, he discovered padel in 2019 at his tennis club, one of the first in the Netherlands to build dedicated courts. *"There are two most beautiful moments in my career so far,"* he said in an interview last year. *"The first is being part of the National Team, and the second is entering the top 400 of the FIP ranking"*. Since then, progress has been rapid: Thijs is now ranked 208 in the world and this year played for the first time in a **Major** (in the first qualifying round in Rome) after winning the **FIP Promotion EPF 1 Cairo** last March. One spot higher in the rankings (207) is the Swede **Adam Axelsson**, born in 2005, who since mid-June has achieved victory in the **FIP Rise** in **Cordenons** (Italy) and reached the final in **Koksijde** (Belgium).

Not to forget the Portuguese **Constança Gorito** (ranked 425), the Swiss **Pascale Sidler** (ranked 57 in the junior ranking), and many other promising players who bring freshness to the **European Championships** and the future of padel.

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