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Focus on...Netherlands Padel boom: it all started with Hiddink

The 16th round of the **Qatar Airways Premier Padel 2024** season is being staged at the **Rotterdam Ahoy**, and it's the first time that the **Premier Padel** circuit has landed in the Netherlands, a nation where padel has living incredible growth in the last four years. It has grown from 160 clubs and 330 courts in 2020 to 650 clubs and 2,720 courts today, according to estimates by the **FIP Research & Data Analysis Department**. These numbers make the Netherlands the fifth largest nation in the world in terms of number of courts after **Spain, Italy, Argentina and Sweden**. Padel gained importance in the **Netherlands** just under 20 years ago, partly thanks to the historic football coach **Guus Hiddink**, who decided to build a court at **PSV Eindhoven's** training centre in 2006: the dimensions were not regular, but the aim was above all to entertain the players.

The first 'official' padel courts in the **Netherlands** were built in **Vijfhuizen** and **Spijkenisse**, while the first clubs with padel courts were founded in **Den Bosch** and **Enschede** (source: KNLTB). Padel in the Netherlands in the early 2000s was initially supported by the **Nederlandse Padel Sport Federatie**; in 2011 the **Nederlandse Padelbond** (NPB) was founded, recognised by the **International Padel Federation** (FIP), which subsequently merged on 1st July 2020 with the historic tennis federation founded back in 1899, the **Koninklijke Nederlandse Lawn Tennis Bond** (KNLTB), which also became the official representative of padel in the Netherlands.

In 2023, 586 clubs, 2,418 padel courts and almost 130,000 player licences were affiliated with the KNLTB. In recent years, there has been a strong presence of this country in the organisation of official FIP tournaments: there have been 15 **CUPRA FIP Tour** tournaments, 12 of which were combined and three in the men's category, and 11 FIP Promises combined held in 10 different cities. In **Alkmaar**, in June 2019, there was also the first tournament in the history of the CUPRA FIP Tour circuit, the FIP Rise TPC Alkmaar won by the South American pair formed by Argentinean Fermin Ferreyra and Venezuelan Roberto Rodriguez.

In the **FIP ranking**, there are 39 male and 30 female Dutch women players with points. Among the women, the most representative players are **Marcella Koek** (number 75), who, paired with **Stephanie Weterings** (89), reached the round of 16 of a Major tournament (Ooredoo Qatar in Doha) in 2024, and **Rosalie Van Der Hoek** (120): all three are the only athletes from the country

who have participated in Premier Padel tournaments this year. **Weterings** is the Dutch player with the most wins on the **CUPRA FIP Tour**: five FIP Rise, followed by Marcella **Koek**'s four FIP Rise (three of which she won with Weterings, including two in London in 2023, and one at home, in Houten, in the same year). *"It started to spread during the pandemic: people could play on outdoor courts, and many former football players also played and shared their performances on social networks – said **Weterings** during the FIP European Padel Championships in Cagliari –. It quickly became popular because indoor activities weren't allowed, but the growth continued even after. Even today, many courts are being built: I think people like it so much because it's a fast-paced, fun sport to play".*

In the men's category, the top finishers are **Sten Richters** (number 187) and **Bram Meijer** (number 192), who have together won four **CUPRA FIP Tour** tournaments (three FIP Rise and one FIP Promotion in 2022) and **Thijs Roper** (203), the only one to have participated so far in a Premier Padel 2024 stage (the BNL Italy Major in Rome) and winner in March 2024 of the FIP Promotion Cairo with Egyptian Georges Wakim. At the national team level, there are four participations in the **FIP World Padel Championships** and currently, by virtue of the results achieved in the 2022 edition, the Netherlands are ranked tenth in the women's ranking and 13th in the men's, and achieved a sixth place in the women's and a fifth place in the men's at the **FIP European Padel Championships** in Cagliari.

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