

From Argentina and Spain to global fame: the padel passion that conquered the world

A story of unstoppable rise, starting quietly in the late 1960s in Mexico. Born almost by chance in the villa of millionaire **Enrique Corcuera**, padel began its journey with small steps before truly taking off in the 1980s. The sport's rise to success was driven by **Argentina** — where its popularity skyrocketed — and **Spain**, where it quickly gained strong support from sports institutions. One of the key factors in padel's success is its ability to engage people of all ages and backgrounds — including children, seniors, and individuals with disabilities — an inclusive aspect that continues to be one of its strengths.

In both Argentina and Spain, a positive social environment quickly emerged, where padel promoted a healthy and active lifestyle. Between the late 1980s and early 1990s, the sport began to spread to other nations, with the first courts appearing in **Brazil, Uruguay, Chile, France, the United States, Canada, and Italy**. Thousands of people became passionate about this sport, which was lived with great enthusiasm in Argentina and associated with prestige and exclusivity in Spain.

With padel's rapid growth in Argentina came the first business opportunities and major tournaments. According to the **FIP Research & Data Analysis Department**, the brand Sport Connection, in collaboration with Tonio and Cacho Nicastro, organized the first international tournament in history, made possible by their contacts in Spain. The first Spain-Argentina match was held in January 1988 in Mar del Plata, Buenos Aires province.

According to records from the time, the Spanish delegation, led by captain and manager Don Rafael Silvela, was composed of the 16 best Spanish players, including Juan Fontán, Javier Arenzana, Santiago Arpón, José Segismón, Miguel Goizueta, Arturo and Carlos Jiménez, Fernando and Javier Sartorius, Manolo Lezon, Antonio Caveró, Pedro Vernis, Joaquin Not ("Chechu"), and Julio Alegría. On the women's side, María, Ana, and Sofía Silvela, along with María Wakonigg, were part of the team.

Some of the Argentine players included Ricardo Cano, Alberto Pizzolo, Willy Barrera, José Luis Abuchdid, Manuel Caracotche, Javier Maquirriain, Pequeño Quintín, Guillermo Caporaletti, and Severino Iezzi for the men's team, and Adriana Costagliola, Virginia Mazzuchi, Daniela Alvarez,

Liliana Patrón, and Cecilia Baccigalupo for the women's team. Baccigalupo would later win three World Championships, first with Mazzuchi in 1992, and then with Costagliola in 1994 and 1996.

In August 1988, the first Argentine team traveled to Spain, visiting **Bilbao, Madrid, and Marbella**. It soon became clear that Spain and Argentina would take on a central role in the international padel scene. During those years, a bilateral relationship was established between the two countries that helped develop the sport beyond their borders. Among the innovations, it was decided to organize an annual Spain-Argentina match, which continued for three years.

Also in 1988, a group of friends led by Oscar "Cacho" Nicastro founded the **Argentine Padel Association** (APA), with Alberto Villaverde as the first president. The goal was to officially represent the sport, define its philosophical and technical principles, establish the rules, and plan and manage the development of padel in Argentina.

In Spain, the **Asociación Española de Padel** was founded in 1991 and was officially registered under the acronym P.A.D.E.L., standing for "promoción de actividades deportivas, educativas y lúdicas" (promotion of sports, educational, and recreational activities). In 1991, after several meetings between Spaniards and Argentinians and the birth of the first national federations, the idea of creating an International Federation was born. Thus, on July 12, 1991, the federations of Argentina, Uruguay, and Spain met in Madrid at the Club de Golf La Moraleja, establishing the International Padel Federation. The first elected president was Julio Alegría Artiach, a Spaniard from Bilbao. During that meeting, the rules for the first **World Championship** were set, to be held in Madrid in 1992, with the finals at Expo 92 in Seville, Spain. But that's another story...



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