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PICKLEBALL MEMBER PROFILE

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The Power of the Paddle: How Pickleball Changed Everything for Will and Tina Plantillas

Three years ago, Will and Tina Plantillas were looking for something fun to do

together on a Saturday afternoon. They grabbed a couple of old badminton rackets, headed to their neighborhood tennis courts in Chandler, Arizona, and hit the birdie over the net. What they kept noticing at the courts were flyers for a local pickleball tournament.

“What’s pickleball?” they wondered.

Sparking a Passion

The couple ultimately went to Dick’s Sporting Goods, bought two

inexpensive paddles and a ball, and headed to the courts to start hitting around. Shortly after, players on the court gave a friendly introduction to the game, which changed everything. It didn’t take long for the Plantillas to be hooked. What started as curiosity became a shared passion, and soon they were playing five or six nights a week.

Newcomers

Neither came from a

racquet-sport background. Will had spent twelve years training in Muay Thai kickboxing, while Tina had never played a team sport. “I’ve always said I



wasn't athletic and can't do sports," laughed Tina, who is an operations manager at Bank of America. "Pickleball changed that. It gave me confidence and a sense of belonging I didn't know was missing."

Building a League

Six months after discovering the game, they entered a small tournament. Soon after, they took their enthusiasm a



step further: creating events that captured the same energy and camaraderie that drew them to the sport in the first place. Together, they founded the American Pickleball League, an organization that partners with DUPR to host official Minor League Pickleball tournaments across Arizona.

Their events, held at venues such as Pickler Scottsdale, draw up to 192 players over a weekend and sell out quickly. They've earned a reputation for professionalism, fun, and inclusivity. "We wanted it to feel like a mini MLP," Will says. "The atmosphere is team-based and rowdy in the best way. Players cheer, high-five, and really connect."

Behind the Scenes of Success

The Plantillas handle every aspect of the operation, which includes sponsorships, logistics, marketing, and community engagement. Their tournaments have attracted major brands like Jigsaw Health, Skechers, and Currex Insoles, and they funnel much of that support directly to the athletes through prizes and giveaways.

For Will, who also works full-time in home-sales management, the balancing act is worth it. "We both love this game, and we love the people it brings together," he says. "It's a lot of work, but seeing everyone smiling on the courts makes it worth every late night."

A Story of Resilience

Tina's connection to pickleball extends beyond tournaments. Earlier this year, she contributed a chapter to

the Amazon-published anthology *25 Tools for Life*, writing about how discovering the sport reshaped her outlook. “Before pickleball, I didn’t really know what my thing was,” she says. “Now I’ve found something that combines movement, community, and joy.”

Inspired by Connection

That sense of purpose hasn’t been without setbacks. Will tore his MCL during a gold-medal match at a PPA Mesa event, and Tina broke her foot while drilling for a tournament. Both were sidelined for months but returned stronger.

“Even when we couldn’t play, we were still at the courts supporting others,” Tina says. “The people we’ve met through this sport have become like family.”

“We really believe in what Kyle and his team are doing with the school,” Tina says. “They’re teaching players not just how to win, but how to love the process.”

Beyond Arizona, Will has also served as interim general manager for the former Milwaukee Masters Major League Pickleball team, an experience that deepened his understanding of the sport’s growing professionalism. But for both, the heart of their work remains local: creating opportunities for everyday players to experience the excitement of competition and the connection of community.

