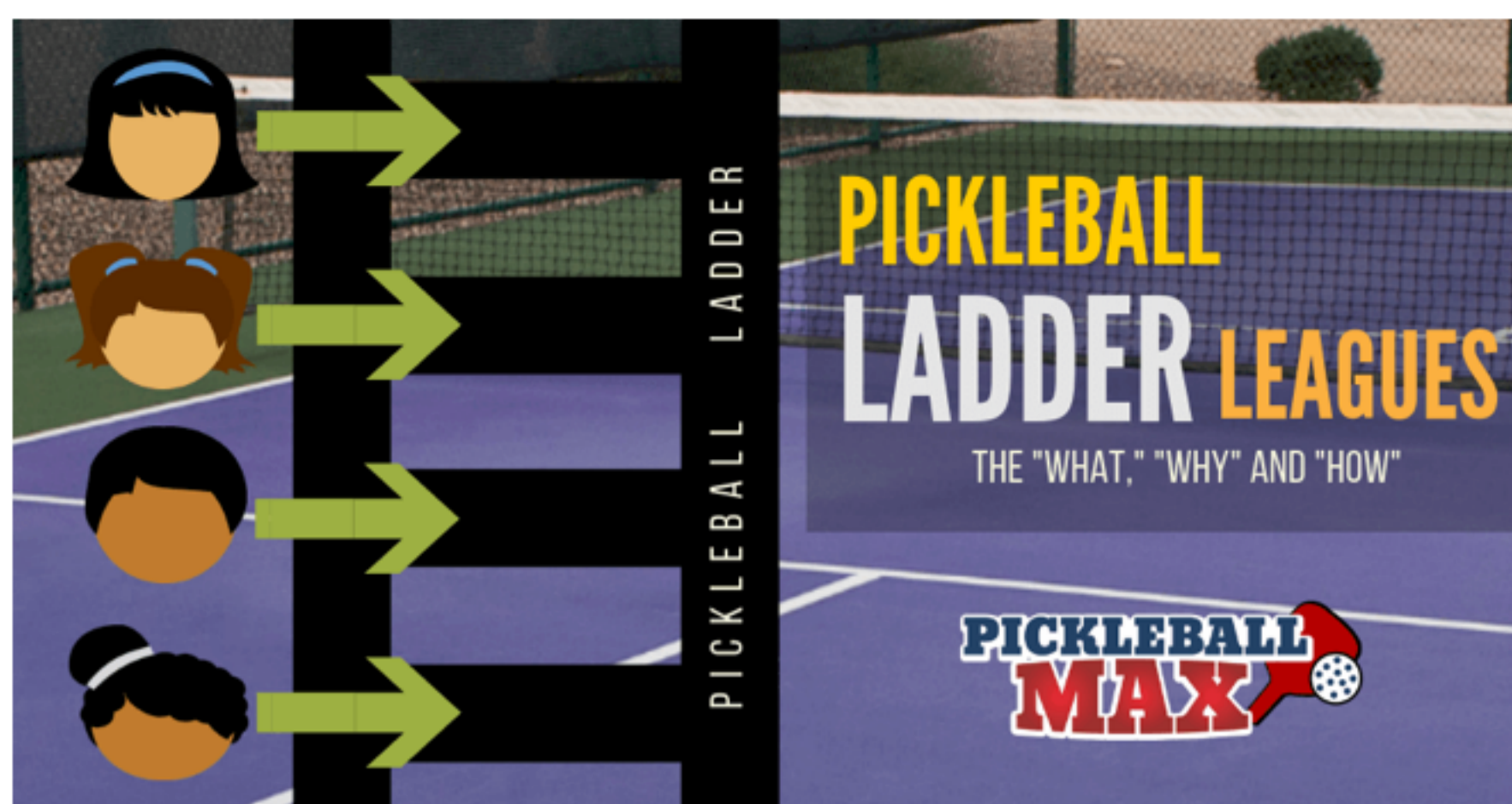


## Pickleball Ladders – Are they Popular at your Club?

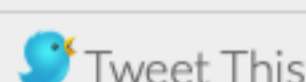
If you're a member of an "official" pickleball club, play at your local YMCA or Community Center or have simply been playing pickleball at your local courts, you've likely heard of ladder leagues. Perhaps you've even seen a flyer for them posted at your favorite venue. But unless you have actually participated and competed in one, you likely have questions about how they work.



### Structure vs. Chaos

As you know first-hand – or can intuitively assume – pickleball is most fun when similarly-skilled players play together and compete against each other. Unfortunately, in rec play that doesn't always happen.

The 2.0's want to play with the 3.5's, the 3.5's want to play with the 4.5's and the 4.5's think they're God's gift to pickleball. Without adequate structure, chaos generally prevails.



Playing non-competitive games is generally fun for nobody and can be incredibly frustrating for all involved. For the lower-rated players it can be demoralizing and confidence-sapping. For the higher-skilled players it just isn't challenging. Pickleball ladders may be the answer.

### What is a Pickleball Ladder? What's a Ladder League?

Ladders leagues are generally organized leagues in which players with relatively similar skills compete against each other in a competitive, structured and, typically, weekly format. Think of a pickleball "ladder" as a graphical representation of a player's ranking (by skill and performance) over a period of time (10 weeks, for example). The rungs on the ladder represent a player's current position (ranking) on the ladder relative to the other players – with the top rung of the ladder being the individual or team currently ranked the highest (the best winning percentage) and the bottom rung being the lowest-ranked individual or team.



### How does an Individually-Ranked, Round-Robin Pickleball Ladder Work?

There are various formats for pickleball ladder leagues. One of the most popular ladder league formats is that of an individually-ranked, round-robin – many may refer to this format as a "shootout." In such a format, those participating in the pickleball ladder will be placed in groups of four in the order of their position (ranking) on the ladder each week. In this format, all players will play three doubles games in a round-robin format with the other three players in the foursome. After the scores are tallied for each of the three matches, players may be *individually* moved up or down the ladder the following week – of course, depending upon their performance in those 3 round-robin games. The ultimate goal is to climb the ladder to the highest rung.

### Are there Multiple Ladders? Can People Move from One Ladder to the Next?

As we just illustrated, one moves up (and down) the ladder each week depending upon their performance on the courts the previous week. If you win, you go up the ladder. If you lose, you go down the ladder. What if you're stuck each week on the highest (or lowest) rung? To address this, many leagues have multiple ladders – with each ladder being 8-16 rungs high – depending, of course, on the number of similarly skilled players. For this example, let's assume 4 different ladders (with 16 players per ladder) are organized at your club. The first ladder is for 2.0 rated players. The second ladder is for those rated 2.5 – 3.0. The third ladder is 3.5 – 4.0. The final ladder is 4.5+. If one person is dominating the top 1 or 2 rungs of their respective ladder each week, that person should potentially be moved to the next higher-skilled ladder (on the lowest rung). Likewise, if one person is perpetually stuck on the bottom rung, perhaps that person needs to be moved to a lower-skilled ladder.

There are many different ways to organize ladder leagues – with an equally number of different ways to manage and administer the league. We would love to hear your feedback. Has your club organized a ladder league or something similar? What has worked? What hasn't?

See you on the courts!