

Pickleball Firefight: David vs. Goliath

Corporate Influence and Unfair Treatment of Junior Players



Casa Grande, Arizona Sep 16, 2026 ([IssueWire.com](https://www.issuewire.com)) - KOBO Pickleball (KOBO SPORTS LLC), www.kobopickleball.co, challenges a PPA rule that excludes junior amateurs' USAP-approved paddles while accepting them in other amateur divisions.

MESA, Arizona — September 16, 2026 — Two Phoenix-area junior pickleball players face a difficult choice at this week's Mesa Veolia Arizona Open: stop using the KOBO THUNDER AXE paddles they have trained with and switch to UPA-A-approved equipment, or forgo competition in their junior divisions.

According to KOBO SPORTS LLC, both players are developing amateurs using USAP-approved paddles. Yet the tournament requires UPA-A certification for PPA Juniors while continuing to accept USAP-approved equipment in ordinary amateur age/skill brackets—including 3.0 through 4.5.

A parent could use the same USAP-approved paddle in an amateur bracket that their child cannot use in a junior bracket at the same tournament.

The distinction is explicit in the [published event rules](#).

KOBO considers that blatantly unfair. PPA's notice cites player feedback and fair competition but supplies no junior-specific evidence explaining why these paddles are unacceptable for children competing as amateurs while remaining acceptable for other amateur players.

The rule also determines which brands get access to junior competition.

When a young player's paddle becomes ineligible, the manufacturer supporting that player loses its place on court unless it obtains the additional certification. Equipment purchases, brand exposure, and potential sponsorship opportunities can shift toward participating brands.

KOBO believes that commercial effect deserves scrutiny because the tournament and certification system developed within closely related organizations.

PPA's May 2026 announcement identifies **Pickleball Inc. as the parent of PPA and Major League Pickleball**. Its businesses also encompass equipment retail, tournament software, and media. The announcement claims a **90% market share for its events and organized-play software business**—a company-reported figure, not a measure of the entire pickleball market.

UPA-A's August 2026 announcement describes its transition from an LLC under the UPA umbrella toward an independent nonprofit, with completion expected by November 1. **That makes disclosure of its current control, finances, and independence safeguards especially relevant.** [UPA-A announcement](#)

UPA-A says its performance testing protects competitive integrity. KOBO supports legitimate testing. Its objection is the selective exclusion of amateur juniors' equipment without a substantiated explanation for treating them differently.

KOBO is calling for scrutiny of potentially anticompetitive conduct. The concern is whether concentrated control over competition, certification, retail, and promotion is restricting equipment choice and disadvantaging independent brands. These concerns warrant investigation; they do not establish that an unlawful monopoly has been proven.

KOBO calls on PPA to immediately:

- **Accept currently USAP-approved paddles in amateur junior divisions at Mesa and all future PPA tournaments.**
- **Explain why amateur juniors are prohibited from using USAP-approved paddles while other amateur brackets at the same events are allowed to use them.**
- Disclose who approved the restriction and whether sponsors or manufacturers influenced it.
- Explain the safeguards separating certification decisions from commercial interests.

KOBO requests a written decision before the affected juniors' first matches.

Young amateurs should not have to change paddles to satisfy a commercial system whose necessity for their division has not been explained. They deserve fair rules, a clear explanation, and the opportunity to compete with the equipment they have trained to use—the same equipment other amateurs are allowed to use at the same PPA-organized event.

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