

#13 FEBRUARY 2026

wp WORLD PICKLEBALL MAGAZINE

WPBL MID-SEASON REPORT: "SPOTAINMENT" DELIVERS AS
CHENNAI SUPER CHAMPS ROAR

PLUS

THE USLPL REVIEW: THE INAUGURAL SEASON OF U.S.
LEGENDS PICKLEBALL SENIOR PRO LEAGUE BRINGS OUT
THE BEST IN THE PLAYERS AND THE SPORT
STRATEGY, DEPTH, AND AN "ARMS RACE": INSIDE THE
2026 CNPL DRAFT

THE WEIGHT OF A SUITCASE: SUSAN SWERN'S MISSION
ACROSS AFRICA

SPOTLIGHT ON PHUC HUYNH: VIETNAM'S BREAKOUT
STAR OF THE PPA ASIA TOUR

BEYOND THE COURT: HOW BRAZIL IS TURNING
PICKLEBALL INTO A TOOL FOR SOCIAL CHANGE

AND YOUR USUAL FAVOURITES

DRILL BITS

REFEREE'S ROOM

IN PICTURES

GEAR GURU



BEYOND THE COURT: HOW BRAZIL IS TURNING PICKLEBALL INTO A TOOL FOR SOCIAL CHANGE

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As the sport reaches all five regions of Brazil, a new movement led by Pastor Maranhão is proving that pickleball is not just a game—it's a vehicle for redemption and social inclusion.

A Democratic Explosion

The rise of pickleball in Brazil has been nothing short of meteoric. Following our initial coverage in May 2025, the sport has successfully expanded into all five macro-regions of the country: South, Southeast, Midwest, Northeast, and North. While private arenas in clubs, gyms, and condominiums are proliferating, the true heart of this expansion lies in accessibility.

Cities like Petrópolis have recently inaugurated public courts, reinforcing the local philosophy that pickleball is "the most democratic sport that exists". This push for inclusivity aims to bridge the gap between social classes, ensuring that everyone—from the wealthy to the most vulnerable—has the opportunity to play.

The Missionary's Journey

Leading the charge to reach the vulnerable is Pastor Maranhão, the Chaplain of the Brazilian Pickleball Association and a global ambassador for the sport. His journey with pickleball began in 2007 in San Diego, California, during a sports chaplaincy training week.

Upon returning to Brazil in 2012, Maranhão found a country void of the sport he had come to love. It wasn't until 2017 that pickleball took root in Belo Horizonte and Governador Valadares—the latter becoming home to the first Brazilian Pickleball association. Nominated as an ambassador for both the International Federation of Pickleball and the World Pickleball Federation, Maranhão saw an opportunity to combine his passion for the game with his missionary calling.

A Tool for Redemption

For Maranhão, the court is a classroom for life. He has successfully introduced pickleball into institutions for juvenile offenders, prisons, and addiction recovery centres. In these environments, the sport serves as a vital tool for inclusion, physical activity, and resocialization.

One of the standout initiatives is **Pickleball Cristolândia**, a project within the Cristolândia mission of the Brazilian Baptist Convention. Here, a court was constructed inside the institution, allowing sheltered individuals to train and earn credits to compete in association tournaments. This model of support has extended to recovery homes in Minas Gerais, Rio de Janeiro, and Brasília.

From Prisons to Stadiums

The scope of this "social mission" is vast. Internationally, Maranhão has introduced the sport to refugee communities and private groups across Paraguay, Argentina, Venezuela, Portugal, Romania, and Ukraine. Locally, the movement achieved a major milestone with **Pickleball Mineirão**, managing an arena with three courts at the famous Mineirão stadium to introduce the game to beginners.



The message driving this expansion is simple: maintain focus, balance, and direction—principles that apply as much to daily life as they do to the game.

A Call for Solidarity

As the movement grows, so does the need for support. The organisation is currently seeking donations of equipment to sustain these needy social projects. They are calling on athletes worldwide to embrace the spirit of solidarity and join the mission of promoting pickleball as a force for good.

As Pastor Maranhão and his team continue their work, the message is clear: Long live pickleball.

