

▼ Padel courts are 25% smaller than tennis courts and surrounded by walls of glass and wire mesh

PHOTOGRAPH: IBL/REX/SHUTTERSTOCK



supplanted five-a-side football pitches.

Padel in Italy is officially recognised as a discipline of tennis and is governed by the Italian Tennis Federation, which, given the incredible growth of the sport, broadcasts padel matches every day of the year on its Super Tennis television channel.

"The growth of padel in Italy follows in some way the growth of tennis in the country," said the federation president, Angelo Binaghi.

"And it is a blessing the tennis federation is its governing body, otherwise the risk was that padel courts would replace tennis ones, and one sport risking damaging the other," he added.

Matteo De Simone, 44, a padel player and the club manager of Padel City, said the secret of the sport's success was that "it is a suitable sport for everyone, of all ages, and this has contributed to making padel not only a sport but a real movement in Italy".

De Simone added: "Among the players who attend our courts there are children aged six up to men aged 80. And above all there are many women."

At the professional level Italian women outcompete men, said Carlo Ferrara, 50, the founder of the Mr Padel Paddle blog and the owner

The rules

Thick, smooth and perforated paddles that resemble beach tennis rackets are used for padel, which is mostly played in doubles. The courts are surrounded almost entirely by walls, part glass and part metal mesh. The scoring is the same as in tennis, but the ball can be played off the walls. When serving, the ball must bounce once on the floor and hit at waist level. Players can reach over the net when hitting a ball, but if the ball hits the net – or the wall or fencing before it hits the floor – it is a foul. After the ball hits the floor it may hit the wall or fencing before it is played back. Out-of-court plays are authorised, leading to some dramatic flourishes.

of the My Padel F84 club in Rome. "There are no Italians in the top 100 rankings of men in the world, while there are seven Italian women in the female rankings."

Chiara Pappacena, 27, who is currently No 61 in the World Padel Tour rankings, said Italian women had long faced discrimination in the sport.

"This is finally changing," she said. "I am very proud to see very young girls and women over 60 on the padel courts today. Even if you are a beginner, you will still enjoy playing this game."

Padel continues to grow in other European countries such as Sweden, where its popularity has not gone unnoticed by the online dating site Tinder, which has created its very first padel court as a meet-up location on a rooftop in Stockholm.

The sport is most popular, however, in Spain, where padel courts have long been a common sight.

Nacho Perulero, a spokesperson for the Spanish Padel Federation, estimated the sport was now played by about 5 million people in Spain. Here, too, the pandemic had helped fuel an "exponential growth" in padel playing.

He added: "It is practically impossible to reserve a court in any big Spanish city these days."

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