How to choose your first padel racket

Five things decide how a racket plays. Shape and weight matter most; the rest is detail. Read this once and you will understand any spec sheet in a shop.

1. Shape decides the most

ROUND

Big sweet spot, low balance.

Easiest to control, kindest to the arm. The usual first racket, and what most coaches hand a beginner.

TEARDROP

Middle balance.

A mix of control and punch. Where most players end up once they can rally.

DIAMOND

Head-heavy, small sweet spot.

Built for smashing. Demanding, and harder on the elbow. Not a first racket.

2. Weight, and why heavier is not better

Most rackets sit between 350 and 375 grams. Heavier hits harder and steadier, but tires the arm and slows your reactions at the net. Lighter is quicker and easier on the elbow, at the cost of power.

IF YOU ARE	LOOK FOR	WHY
New to the sport	350–365 g, round	Control and comfort while you learn where the sweet spot is
Playing weekly, rallying well	360–370 g, teardrop	Enough punch without losing control
Attacking, finishing at the net	365–375 g, diamond	Mass behind the smash
Prone to elbow or shoulder trouble	Under 360 g, round, soft core	Less shock through the arm

3. The four specs people misread

Balance

Measured in millimetres from the handle end. Higher number means more weight in the head: more power, slower to swing. Around 265 mm is head-heavy; under 255 mm is easier to handle.

Core

The foam inside. Soft cores are forgiving and gentler on the arm. Hard cores give more output when you swing fast, and punish a late swing.

Carbon (3K, 12K, 18K, 24K)

The weave of the face. A higher number is not automatically better: it is stiffer and more powerful, but less forgiving. Fibreglass faces are softer and suit beginners well.

Thickness

Nearly every racket is 38 mm. It almost never separates two rackets. Ignore it.

Before you pay

1. **Work out your shape first**
   Beginner or arm trouble: round. Playing regularly: teardrop. Finishing points at the net: diamond.

2. **Pick a weight you can still swing in the third set**
   If you are between two, take the lighter one. Weight can be added with lead tape; it cannot be removed.

3. **Try before you commit, if a club near you rents or demos**
   Twenty minutes on court beats any review. Many clubs keep demo rackets.

4. **Check last year's model**
   Brands release yearly, and the outgoing model is often the same racket in different paint, for much less. Ask about the warranty first: some brands exclude closeout stock.

5. **Compare the total, not the sticker price**
   The same racket can differ by $100 or more between US shops on the same day.

Five mistakes beginners make

- **Buying a pro's racket.** Tour rackets are heavy, stiff diamonds for fast swings. And the retail version often is not what the pro plays: Babolat's terms say its players "may play with a customized or different model than the equipment depicted".
- **Assuming more carbon is better.** 24K is stiffer, not superior. Plenty of good players prefer 3K.
- **Buying a pickleball paddle by mistake.** Padel rackets are thicker, have holes, and use a low-pressure ball. Not interchangeable.
- **Ignoring the arm.** Elbow pain ends more padel careers than anything else. A softer, lighter racket is not a compromise.
- **Paying the first price you see.** US stores differ widely on the same model.

Where to check prices: we track every US store we can find and publish what each one charges, shipping included, checked daily. No store pays for its place in the list, and we never sell rackets ourselves. Look up any model at **padelpriceguide.com**.

Glossary, in one line each

Sweet spot	The area of the face that returns the most energy. Bigger is more forgiving.
Balance	Where the weight sits, in millimetres from the handle end.
Bajada	The shot played off the back glass, hit downward into the court.
Overgrip	The wrap over the handle. Cheap, replaceable, and changes how the racket feels more than most specs.