

Storage **Pickle** Solved

Woman's bag for Pickleball players crammed with easy-access areas and compartments **BY EDITH G. TOLCHIN**

Melanie J. Romero of Denver invented an all-in-one storage bag for pickleball players.

According to pickleheads.com, there are now over 70,641 pickleball courts in the United States. Here is Romero's story about this invention, tailor made for such a popular sport.

Edith G. Tolchin (EGT): What is oktō™ pickleball? Also, for the uninitiated, please talk a little about the sport.

Melanie J. Romero (MJR): Oktō is the ultimate pickleball backpack, named for the octopus—an intelligent, adaptable creature that perfectly reflects both the spirit of the sport and functionality of our bag. I designed it after spending countless (fun) hours on the court and getting frustrated digging through bottomless bags.

The oktō bag offers unmatched organization and features: over 20 more than any other pickleball bag on the market. Its pockets and compartments are customizable, so players can adapt it their style of play and routine.

Pickleball is the fastest-growing sport in America. It's played on a court similar to tennis but about one-third the size. Players use solid paddles and a plastic Wiffle ball.



While it's easy to learn and enjoy on Day 1, mastering it can take a lifetime. The smaller court fosters a social, fast-paced doubles game that prioritizes skill and finesse over brute strength. It's inclusive for all ages and fitness levels, which is why it's booming—over 37 million players in the United States.

I picked up the sport about three years ago and started developing the oktō bag shortly thereafter. We officially launched on July 15, 2025.

EGT: What kind of market is involved in Pickleball?

MJR: Pickleball attracts players from ages 8 to 80-plus, with the 18–34 demographic leading in participation. There are over 10,000 places to play in the USA, and the market continues to grow—projected at 8 percent annually through 2028. The largest states for pickleball are California, Texas and Florida, followed by North Carolina, New York and Illinois.

EGT: Please tell us about your background and where you reside.

MJR: I'm a mechanical engineer, born and raised on a farm in New Mexico. I've worked for the past 26 years as the west coast regional sales manager for a UK-based manufacturer, Kinetrol.

I've also invented several products, including the SnapBagger (a yard cleanup tool), and the

“I've been building and inventing things since childhood; it's in my DNA. I'm a creative problem solver by nature, and I typically invent out of necessity.” —MELANIE J. ROMERO

YardPup (a pet waste scoop). oktō is my first foray into textile design.

I've been building and inventing things since childhood; it's in my DNA. I'm a creative problem solver by nature, and I typically invent out of necessity. I hold several U.S. utility and design patents, along with registered trademarks.

EGT: Please share that patenting experience.

MJR: Oktō's fold-out workstation is patent-pending. I wrote the provisional utility patent myself, using AI assistance, and had it reviewed by a retired patent attorney friend. Remarkably, I filed it for under \$100. That's a huge contrast to my previous inventions, for which I spent tens of thousands of dollars on patent work. This provisional gives me a full year to test the market before filing a non-provisional application.

EGT: What are oktō Pickleball bags made from? Materials? Special features? Advantage over competitors?

MJR: Oktō is constructed with durable, water-proof materials and premium-grade hardware. Unlike most bags, which hang awkwardly or not at all, ours comes with two integrated hooks so it hangs level on a fence.

What really sets oktō apart is its 20-plus, purpose-driven features. It's a hybrid of quick-access zones (for gear you need between games) and private, zippered compartments for your valuables. Quick-access areas use strong magnetic closures instead of zippers, offering smooth, one-handed access.

The interior includes 16 customizable pockets for organizing gear at your fingertips. A removable, insulated lunchbox is included, and a patent-pending, fold-out workstation offers a space for your phone, business cards, pens and notetaking—ideal for players handling business on the court.



Oktō also travels well. It features a trolley sleeve for attaching to a rollaboard suitcase and a side bottle holder that zips flat for compact storage. And each purchase supports coral reef restoration through the Diver Mojo Foundation—because we love the octopus and the ocean it calls home.

EGT: Where are you manufacturing? In the United States, or overseas?

MJR: We manufacture in Vietnam.

EGT: Have you had any obstacles in developing the bags?

MJR: Yes. Developing a textile product was new territory for me. I'm very hands-on with metal and 3D CAD, so my past inventions were easy to prototype in-house. But with oktō, I had to rely on professional design help. Translating my ideas into tech packs and samples took longer and cost more than expected, simply because bag prototyping was outside my skill set.

Named for the octopus, the oktō bag has 20-plus purpose-driven features that include multiple customizable pockets and compartments. Quick-access areas use strong magnetic closures instead of zippers for smooth, one-handed access.

EGT: Where are oktō Pickleball bags sold?

MJR: Currently, we're selling direct to consumer on our website (oktōpickleball.com) and on Amazon. We're also in talks with major online retailers like Pickleball Central and Pickleball Warehouse, as well as brick-and-mortar stores including Dick's Sporting Goods.

EGT: What successes have you had with marketing and PR?

MJR: We're just getting started, but early momentum has come from live events and direct engagement.

Our launch at the National Pickleball Expo was a success, and we've begun experimenting with social media marketing. One of our recent TikTok videos reached 8,000 views, which was exciting for a new brand.



EGT: Will you add any new products to your website?

MJR: Yes. We plan to offer more colorways and potentially new models over time. I also have two new pickleball-related inventions in development. These will complement the oktō brand and be great additions to our Shopify site.

EGT: What insights about product development can you share?

MJR: My biggest piece of advice is to focus group your designs early. It's easy to fall in love with your own ideas, but your customers may see things differently. Getting honest feedback will help ensure that what you're creating truly meets their needs. 📌

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Edith G. Tolchin has written for *Inventors Digest* since 2000 (edietolchin.com/portfolio). She is the author of several books, including "Secrets of Successful Women Inventors" (<https://a.co/d/fAGlvZJ>) and "Secrets of Successful Inventing" (<https://a.co/d/8dafJd6>).

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Best wishes, Jack Lander

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