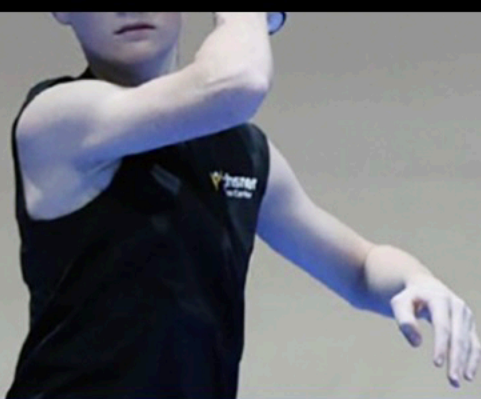




SPORTS ILLUSTRATED HIGH SCHOOL ON SI

LOUISIANA TEEN AUSTIN ROMAGUERA IS RISING FAST

From backyard courts to national medals, the Metairie standout is climbing toward a pro future

BY CHLOE WELLINGTON-HUNT

AN ACCIDENTAL BEGINNING

Austin Romaguera discovered pickleball in sixth grade at his middle school. After baseball practice and during recess, he and his friends spent hours on a nearby court. In only four years, the Metairie athlete progressed from casual play to national junior recognition.

EARLY NATIONAL SUCCESS

At the National Junior Pickleball North Carolina Regional in March 2026, Austin finished pool play 5-0 and then earned gold in elite 4.0-5.5 doubles. He also captured bronze at the 2025 Pickleball World Championships with decisive 11-0 and 11-1 game scores.

CLIMBING THE RANKINGS

At the time of publication, Austin ranked No. 2 in National Junior Pickleball Boys 15-18 doubles, behind Aidan Cheung. The NJP format gives players ages 8-18 age-specific competition through round-robin play followed by medal rounds.

BASEBALL BUILT THE FOUNDATION

Before focusing on pickleball, Austin was the starting center fielder for Eastbank Little League and helped his team reach the 2022 state championships. The swing mechanics, movement, hand-eye coordination and competitive experience transferred naturally to serves, groundstrokes and court coverage.

A COMMUNITY WHERE HE BELONGS

Austin still enjoys baseball, but pickleball gave him a community spanning different ages, careers and backgrounds. Older players became mentors and big-brother figures. By ninth grade, he had formed close friendships and found an environment where he felt comfortable being himself.

LEARNING FROM THE PROS

His favorite professional player is Hayden Patriquin. Austin identifies with Patriquin's scrappy, physical approach and studies how a shorter athlete can succeed through speed, anticipation, quick hands and precise shot placement rather than relying on height and reach.