

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE DISTRICT OF MARYLAND

Sport Squad, Inc. v. USA Pickleball Association

No. No. 8:24-cv-01712-PX, United States District Court for the District of Maryland (February 23, 2026)

SUMMARY

The United States District Court for the District of Maryland denied Sport Squad, Inc. d/b/a Joola’s motion to dismiss USA Pickleball Association’s counterclaims. The court held that the counterclaims plausibly alleged damages for fraudulent misrepresentation and concealment, false endorsement under the Lanham Act, and declaratory relief concerning an alleged bait-and-switch involving pickleball paddles labeled as USAP-approved. Joola was ordered to answer the counterclaim within fourteen days.

CASE DETAILS

|                       |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
|-----------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| COURT                 | United States District Court for the District of Maryland                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
| WRITING FOR THE COURT | Paula Xinis                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
| JURISDICTION          | United States District Court for the District of Maryland                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
| DECIDED               | February 23, 2026                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| DOCKET                | No. 8:24-cv-01712-PX                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| DISPOSITION           | other                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
| PROCEDURAL POSTURE    | Plaintiff-counter-defendant Sport Squad, Inc. d/b/a Joola moved under Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 12(b)(6) to dismiss USA Pickleball Association's counterclaims for fraudulent misrepresentation and concealment, false endorsement under the Lanham Act, and declaratory judgment.             |
| STANDARD OF REVIEW    | On a Rule 12(b)(6) motion, the court tests the legal sufficiency of the pleading, accepts well-pleaded allegations as true, construes facts and reasonable inferences in favor of the nonmoving party, and requires allegations sufficient to raise the right to relief above the speculative level. |
| PRECEDENTIAL VALUE    | Unknown; memorandum order from a federal district court                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |

TOPICS

- motions to dismiss
- trademark law
- declaratory judgment
- contracts
- civil procedure

## PRACTICE AREAS

civil procedure

trademark law

contracts

commercial litigation

remedies

## QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether USAP sufficiently pleaded damages for its fraudulent misrepresentation and concealment counterclaim.
2. Whether USAP sufficiently pleaded a protectable interest and proximate injury for its Lanham Act false-association counterclaim.
3. Whether USAP's declaratory-judgment counterclaim was duplicative of its tort and Lanham Act claims or could proceed to clarify its contractual right to place Joola on probation.

## HOLDINGS

1. USAP sufficiently articulated damages by alleging reputational harm, lost business relationships, and lost revenue resulting from Joola's alleged sale of falsely branded paddles; dismissal of Count I was therefore unwarranted.
2. USAP plausibly alleged a protectable interest and losses proximately caused by Joola's alleged false association of the USAP approval seal with nonapproved paddles, including reputational harm; dismissal of Count II was denied.
3. The declaratory-judgment counterclaim could proceed because the requested declaration would clarify and settle USAP's contractual right to place Joola on probation and involved a contractual violation distinct from the intentional misrepresentation theories in Counts I and II.

## KEY QUOTATIONS

*“A request for declaratory judgment may proceed when the declaration “will serve a useful purpose in clarifying and settling the legal relations in issue, and . . . when it will terminate and afford relief from the uncertainty, insecurity, and controversy giving rise to the proceeding.””*

## FACTUAL BACKGROUND

USAP reviews and approves pickleball equipment for compliance with its rules and authorizes compliant equipment to bear the USAP Pickleball Approved logo. Joola submitted a paddle prototype that passed USAP's specifications and received approval, but allegedly manufactured and sold a more powerful, materially different version while using the USAP approval designation. USAP alleged that the resulting scandal damaged its reputation and business relationships, caused lost revenue, and potentially triggered a contractual probationary period for Joola.

## PROCEDURAL HISTORY

Sport Squad initiated the action concerning USA Pickleball Association's authorization for Sport Squad to use the USAP seal of approval on pickleball paddles. USAP answered the operative amended complaint and asserted three counterclaims. The court denied Joola's motion to dismiss and ordered Joola to answer the counterclaim within fourteen days.

## DISPOSITION

other

## CASES CITED

- Presley v. City of Charlottesville, 464 F.3d 480, 483 (4th Cir. 2006)
- Ibarra v. United States, 120 F.3d 472, 474 (4th Cir. 1997)
- Bell Atl. Corp. v. Twombly, 550 U.S. 544, 555 (2007)
- Lexmark Int'l, Inc. v. Static Control Components, Inc., 572 U.S. 118, 129–32 (2014)
- Belmora LLC v. Bayer Consumer Care AG, 819 F.3d 697, 711–12, 713, 715 (4th Cir. 2016)
- Bridge v. Phoenix Bond & Indemnity Co., 553 U.S. 639, 656 (2008)
- Centennial Life Ins. Co. v. Poston, 88 F.3d 255, 256 (4th Cir. 1996)
- Burger v. Healthcare Mgmt. Sols., LLC, Civ. No. RDB-23-1215, 2024 WL 473735, at \*9 (D. Md. Feb. 7, 2024)

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