

Strategic Recommendation

How Cobra wins: own the premium patriotic lane, cheaply · September 19, 2026 · Prepared by Pang for Ryan Eckert · Confidential

Everything in the prior sections points to one strategy. The market is cooling and consolidating, specs are commoditized, and customer-acquisition cost is what kills small brands — so Cobra must win on a defensible identity that generates *organic* demand, in a lane no one else owns.

Positioning: premium, American, and substantive

Cobra already sits in the open lane — premium American/patriotic carbon at \$160–170, anchored by the Ivan Lendl signature. The job is to make that identity **real, not decorative**, because cheap flag paddles are a commodity. Build the substance from things that are true:

- An **American brand and story** (American-designed, an American company, the mission behind it).
- A **veteran / first-responder program** — Proton already proves this works via GovX military discounts; it is copyable and authentic.
- The **Ivan Lendl Signature Edition** as the credibility anchor no value brand can match — lead with it. (Confirm the endorsement rights are documented; see the caution below.)

The four moves

1. **Own the premium patriotic identity on purpose** — substantive, not just red-white-blue graphics.
2. **Hold price at \$160–170.** Do not enter the value-carbon war; justify the premium with identity, endorsement and quality, never "cheaper carbon."
3. **Make durability + a strong warranty a headline feature.** Delamination is the category's sorest pain point; the brands that won (Ronbus, Vatic) made *solving* it their pitch. If Cobra's face is thermoformed, an aggressive, loud warranty both neutralizes the biggest risk and plants a flag in a second open lane.
4. **Win customers organically** — seed the review ecosystem (Pickleball Effect, Pickleheads, Matt's Pickleball), be community/Reddit-native like Ronbus, and amplify Lendl — instead of paying for every customer with ads, which is the exact CAC that destroys the margin.

One hard caution — do NOT claim "Made in USA." Cobra's T700 carbon paddles are almost certainly manufactured overseas, like nearly everyone's. A made-in-USA claim carries real FTC

exposure (civil penalties up to ~\$53,000 per violation, and it applies to websites and packaging).

Lean on being an **American brand** with an American story, a veteran program, and Ivan Lendl — all true — never on where it is manufactured. Safe language: "American brand," "American-designed," "veteran-owned" (only if literally true).

Risks to manage

- **Consolidation:** undefended brands get bought or buried — a distinctive patriotic niche is the defensibility (and a potential exit).
- **Certification & material changes:** ~\$1,500+ per model and a full re-test on any material change — lock each recipe before certifying.
- **Endorsement rights:** verify the Lendl agreement is documented before marketing the signature edition as exclusive.