

## Pickleball Basic Rules — Page 1 of 2

- Pickleball is played either as doubles (two players per team) or singles; doubles is most common
- The same size playing area and rules are used for both singles and doubles

### The Serve

- The serve must be made underhand.
- Paddle contact with the ball must be below the server's waist (navel level).
- The serve is initiated with at least one foot behind the baseline; neither foot may contact the baseline or court until after the ball is struck.
- The serve is made diagonally crosscourt and must land within the confines of the opposite diagonal court.
- New for 2021, you can now bounce the ball to hit a "drop serve". It must be dropped, not tossed upwards into the air or thrown downward. If you choose to use the "drop serve," you will not have the restrictions of a regular serve i.e. contact below the navel, swinging upwards at contact, etc. This means that you will be able to hit back-spinning serves if you choose to use the "drop serve."
- Only one serve attempt is allowed. As of 2021, there is no more "let serve". The ball is in play, whether it hits the net or not.

### Service Sequence

- Both players on the serving doubles team have the opportunity to serve and score points until they commit a fault \*(except for the first service sequence of each new game).
- The first serve of each side-out is made from the right-hand court.

- If a point is scored, the server switches sides and the server initiates the next serve from the left-hand court.
  - As subsequent points are scored, the server continues switching back and forth until a fault is committed and the first server loses the serve.
  - When the first server loses the serve the partner then serves from their correct side of the court (except for the first service sequence of the game\*).
  - The second server continues serving until his team commits a fault and loses the serve to the opposing team.
  - Once the service goes to the opposition (at side out), the first serve is from the right-hand court and both players on that team have the opportunity to serve and score points until their team commits two faults.
  - In singles the server serves from the right-hand court when his or her score is even and from the left when the score is odd.
- \*At the beginning of each new game only one partner on the serving team has the opportunity to serve before faulting, after which the service passes to the receiving team.

### Scoring

- Points are scored only by the serving team.
- Games are normally played to 11 points, win by 2.
- Tournament games may be to 15 or 21, win by 2.
- When the serving team's score is even (0, 2, 4, 6, 8, 10) the player who was the first server in the game for that team will be in the right-side court when serving or receiving; when odd (1, 3, 5, 7, 9) that player will be in the left-side court when serving or receiving.

## Pickleball Basic Rules — Page 2 of 2

### Double-Bounce Rule

- When the ball is served, the receiving team must let it bounce before returning, and then the serving team must let it bounce before returning, thus two bounces.
- After the ball has bounced once in each team's court, both teams may either volley the ball (hit the ball before it bounces) or play it off a bounce (ground stroke).
- The double bounce rule eliminates the serve and volley advantage and extends rallies.

### Non-Volley Zone

- The non-volley zone is the court area within 7 feet on both sides of the net.
- Volleying is prohibited within the non-volley zone. This rule prevents players from executing smashes from a position within the zone.
- It is a fault if, when volleying a ball, the player steps on the non-volley zone, including the line and/or when the player's momentum causes them or anything they are wearing or carrying to touch the non-volley zone including the associated lines.
- It is a fault if, after volleying, a player is carried by momentum into or touches the non-volley zone, even if the volleyed ball is declared dead before this happens.
- A player may legally be in the non-volley zone any time other than when volleying a ball.
- The non-volley zone is commonly referred to as "the kitchen."

### Line Calls

- A ball contacting any line, except the non-volley zone line on a serve, is considered "in."
- A serve contacting the non-volley zone line is short and a fault.
- New simplified definition for 2021: Players should not call the ball "out" unless they can clearly see a space between the line

and the ball as it hits the ground. What does this mean for us? You must see space between the ball and the line in order to call it "out." The only way to call a ball "out" is to see space between the ball and the line. If there is any doubt about the line call, it is in. If you cannot call the ball "out" or "in," it is "in."

### Faults

- A fault is any action that stops play because of a rule violation.
- A fault by the receiving team results in a point for the serving team.
- A fault by the serving team results in the server's loss of serve or side out.

A fault occurs when:

- A serve does not land within the confines of the receiving court
- The ball is hit into the net on the serve or any return
- The ball is volleyed before a bounce has occurred on each side
- The ball is hit out of bounds
- A ball is volleyed from the non-volley zone
- A ball bounces twice before being struck by the receiver
- A player, player's clothing, or any part of a player's paddle touches the net or the net post when the ball is in play
- There is a violation of a service rule
- A ball in play strikes a player or anything the player is wearing or carrying
- A ball in play strikes any permanent object before bouncing on the court

## PICKLEBALL CLINIC 101

Pickleball started in 1965 in Seattle, when Joel Pritchard (a 6-term U.S. Representative from Washington) wanted a fun game for the kids. Rules were made to take power away from the game by using an underhand serve, the two-bounce rule, the NVZ (No Volley Zone, or "kitchen") and to make it fun.

Since most (80%) of shots should be from the NVZ line (or net) we will learn to play from front to back

**GRIP:** Shake hands grip

**READY POSITION:** Feet shoulder width apart, knees bent, paddle up in front of body, you should be able to look at back of paddle face.

**MOVEMENT:** Side to side shuffle step, no cross-over. When going back turn and run towards baseline looking over shoulder for ball, don't go backwards (avoid falls).

**BALL JUGGLING:** Hold paddle in front while balancing ball on paddle. Bounce ball forehand and backhand, initially low and then higher bounces. Do this while shuffle step left and right

**DINKS:** A soft shot that lands in the NVZ under control. Make contact in front of your body, elephant arm with firm wrist, watch the ball hit the paddle, paddle tip below wrist and softly lift and push ball, follow through just to top of net to keep ball low just over net. If you use the wrist you will pop the ball up high. Cross court dinks allow you to keep the ball bouncing closer to the net (tough for opponents to return without popping it up) and you hit over lowest part of net. Remember you can step in NVZ to hit dink then step out and back to ready position. Practice both forehand and backhand dink shots, backhand sometimes easier because wrist seems to be more firm.

**VOLLEY:** A volley is when you hit the ball in the air before it bounces. Used mostly when at NVZ. Ready position paddle up in front of body elbow away from body. Quick punch or direct the ball, not a swing, with firm wrist and direct the shot under control. When at NVZ pretend there is a wall behind you and don't bring your paddle behind your shoulder, just punch (like a ping pong hit) Remember you can not step into the NVZ when hitting or following through a volley shot.

**SERVE:** The serve is important because normally only the serving team can score. It must be in, no faults. Ball must be hit with an upward motion of the paddle, the paddle must be below the waist when striking the ball

and the paddle below the wrist. Server must stand between side and center line and one foot on ground behind baseline when ball is hit. Basically hit the ball as it drops from your hand (stroke like bowling or underhand softball throw). Watch ball hit paddle, opponents should see the top of your head. Best serves are deep and to opponents backhand. Both serving team players start from behind baseline and should stay there until they hit third shot. Remember the ball must bounce before they hit it. After that third shot get to NVZ quickly and you then hit volleys.

**RETURN OF SERVE:** Stand behind baseline, ball must bounce before you hit it. Your partner should be at the NVZ in ready position Don't try for pure winner, keep the ball in play. Try to hit the ball deep toward the center (forces opposition to make decision, who hits?). After you hit the return try to join your partner at the NVZ for best position.

**FOREHAND STROKE:** Ready position then step forward with left foot and rotate shoulders pointing left shoulder toward target, left hand out in front, bring paddle back, bend knees, swing forward, firm wrist and slightly open faced paddle, watch paddle hit ball, follow through toward target then return to ready position.

**BACKHAND STROKE:** Run to spot where ball will be waist high, step forward with right (front) foot and rotate right shoulder toward target. Bring left hand back as you pull paddle back (face perpendicular to ground), paddle head should be below ball and swing basically low to high (like flower opening up), contact the ball in front of forward foot. Keep firm wrist and long follow through. Quickly back to ready position

**PLAY THE GAME:** Game goes to 11, win by 2. Normally only serving team scores (Rally scoring is another way to keep score where point is scored after every fault, normally used to shorten games when many players are waiting).

**ANNOUNCING SCORE:** Your team score, other team score, which server (first or second) First team starts as second server (2), after that both players serve.

Remember this is a game with a funny ball and a funny name—HAVE FUN!

Jeff Conradi  
USAPA Ambassador

## PICKLEBALL CLINIC 102

### REVIEW

**DINKS:** Proper stroke, lift and push, low and slow, firm wrist. Cross court low and close to net, return to ready position. Forehand and backhand.

**VOLLEYS:** Proper ready position, feet shoulder width, knees bent and paddle up.

**SERVE:** Proper stroke. Balls deep and placement deep and to backhand. Both sides.

**RETURN OF SERVE:** Proper forehand and backhand stroke. Keep ball in play, deep and center best.

**FOREHAND:** Proper stroke, hit through the ball, good follow through. Placement more important than pace.

**BACKHAND:** Proper stroke. Good backswing and follow through. Placement over pace.

**DROP SHOT:** Used to be third shot drop but is any soft shot landing short and giving you time to get to NVZ position. Controlled shot hit similar to dink shot. Watch paddle hit ball and try to imagine net seven feet in front of you, hit it over that imaginary net to drop in NVZ. Try both forehand and backhand shots and aiming for both sides of opposition court. It must go over net, keep ball in play. This is important shot and must be practiced a lot.

**LOB SHOT:** A lob is any shot that sends the ball high over your opponents head forcing them back off NVZ. Keep your eye on ball, open faced paddle from ready position turn toward ball and start backswing transferring weight to back foot. Swing through the ball contacting the ball in line with front foot and follow through high. As weight shifts forward get back to ready position. Ideal lob just clears opponent's outstretched paddle (8-10 feet high). Tough shot from baseline to baseline. If it is short you will eat a hard return shot. Used to get time to get into position or occasionally catch them off guard. Best time is when you are at NVZ and get them off the net.

**OVERHEAD:** Never hit an overhead unless the ball is high enough. Hit the ball on the highest point you can reach with the center of your paddle. Point shoulder and finger of left hand up at ball until just before contact. Pronate your wrist and paddle just before contact with ball for more power and disguised shot. Keep head up until ball is long gone. Hit at opponents feet. Placement more important than pace. Keep in mind the wind. Keep paddle face flat for more power. Use hand to block sun. Do not back pedal, for safety turn sideways and run back.

**GAMES:** Consider keeping track of unforced errors—balls hit into net or out-of-bounds.

Jeff Conradi

## INTERMEDIATE PICKLEBALL CLINIC 201

**AGGRESSIVE DINK SHOTS:** Practice dink shots. They should be used to set up yourself or partner for a winning shot. Stay patient and move the opponents side to side. Cross court dink works best, lower part of net and more room to land the shot. Cross court shots allow you to place the ball closer to the net. On straight ahead dinks land the ball just inside the NVZ line and toward player's left foot. Harder to return and they might pop it up. Keep all dink shots low. If you have to take a step back to return a dink, make sure you step forward when done and then back to ready position. Remember it's a lift and push soft shot under control that lands in the kitchen. Return the ball by volleying if possible as it reduces the time your opponent has to react and especially on cross court dinks allows you to place the ball closer to the net. **HAVE PATIENCE AND LET THEM MAKE THE FIRST MISTAKE**

**VOLLEY FROM NVZ:** Paddle up ready position with knees bent at all times. Either paddle straight out or flat in front. Paddle away from body. Block shots or direct with a push forward. Slight negative paddle angle to return ball down just over net and directed at the left foot of opponent. Do not bring paddle behind shoulder. Things happen fast, try to keep the ball in play. Don't go for wide sideline shots as they are high risk.

**THIRD SHOT DINK OR DROP SHOT:** You have to master this shot. When making this shot don't think about the net, instead think of where you want the ball to land. A high shot over the net still keeps the ball in play. This shot is used generally as the third shot to give you time to get to proper position at NVZ. The drop shot is hit like a dink with slightly more power. Remember knee bend as the extension up will give you the right amount of extra power. Try to place this shot in middle of court slightly to person's backhand. If your opponent does not come in to the NVZ hit a drive instead of drop shot to keep them deep.

**THE LOB:** This shot is most effective when done from the NVZ after a few dink shots. The shot is hit as a dink shot with a little more power and higher follow thru. It just has to go over your opponents out stretched hand (8 feet) and best if cross court

and not too high or so deep as to be out. When returning a lob, generally your partner will run behind diagonally to return the lob and you will communicate to switch sides. If you let it bounce it gives you more time. Hit the return as a drop shot or return lob to give you time to get back in position or a drive toward middle court to cause confusion.

**SERVE AND RETURN OF SERVE:** Vary your serves. A consistent hard low serve sometimes is easy to return and allows your opponent to get to the NVZ easier. A deep serve especially if high, forces your opponent to step back to return the shot. It also may not allow a good swing due to proximity to wall or fence behind and places them farther from the NVZ where they want to be. Remember the serve must be in. Don't try to win points on serve by trying for lines, it's a low percentage. Same goes for return of serve. Place it deep to give you time to get to NVZ line, again a high deep return works well. Aim for center of court and favor the backhand side of the player. Get to the NVZ line ASAP.

**COURT POSITIONING:** Being in the right position makes the game easier. You move to your position when you or partner hits ball and just wait for the return. This is percentage pickleball by being in the right position. When you hit ball deep to left side of court, the player on the left side moves to protect the left line. Your partner moves to just right of center court line to protect the middle. Your team has effectively made a wall covering almost three fourths of the court. There is a small opening on the right side but it is a high risk low percentage shot since it is cross court. When you hit the ball to the right side you both move in that direction, right player covering the right sideline and partner covering just left of middle. Remember left or right handed players will have a more accurate shot down their line instead of cross court. If you hit the ball to the middle of the court, then both players cover slightly to middle of their side of the court. Protect the middle and force your opponent to hit high risk low percentage cross court sideline shot. If you hit short shot or dink, movement is similar except that player covering middle can move toward the ball a bit more and force the opponent to hit that high risk low percentage shot cross court.

## HINTS

- Only hit the ball as hard as necessary. Placement over pace.
- Hit more balls down the middle and you will win more points.
- Play percentage pickleball and reduce unforced errors.
- Communicate with your partner.
- Keep the ball in play. Let your opponents make the first mistake.
- Aim at your opponent's left foot as often as possible.
- Practice, practice, practice your skills. You won't use a shot in a game if not confident in the outcome.
- You can't win them all. HAVE FUN PLAYING THE GAME!

## UNDERSTANDING MY OPTIONS

Before I choose a shot, I need to understand the levels of risk and difficulty.

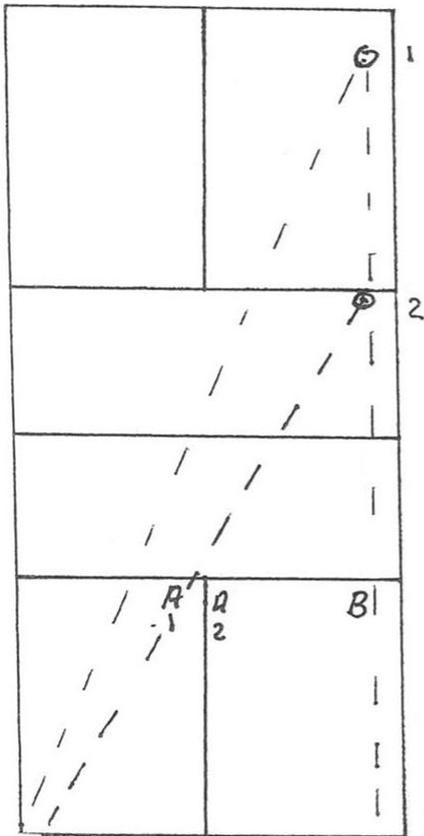
<b>SHOT SELECTION</b>	<b>DIFFICULTY</b>	<b>RISK</b>
Return of serve .....	2	2
Dink.....	2	2
Drop Shot.....	8	4
Volley.....	2	2
Serve.....	4	2
Lob from NVZ.....	5	6
Lob from baseline.....	9	9
Overhead.....	7	7

<b>TARGETS</b>	<b>DIFFICULTY</b>	<b>RISK</b>
Middle (between opponents) .....	2	2
Sidelines within 2 feet .....	7	7
Even with opponents feet .....	7	4

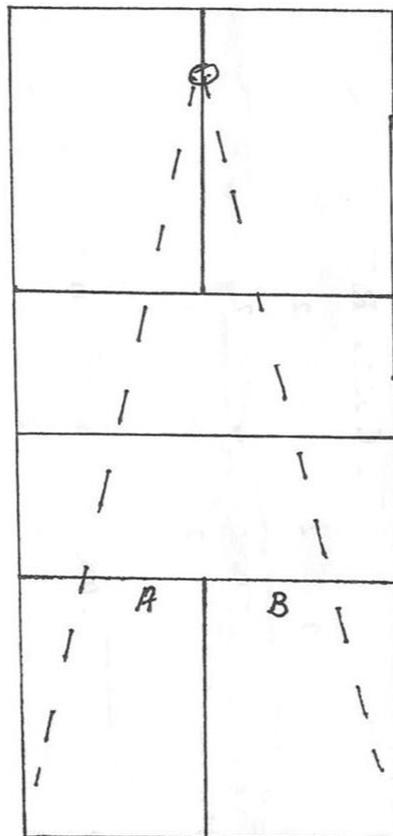
**HEIGHT OVER NET** (may vary, depending on opponents positions)

	<b>DIFFICULTY</b>	<b>RISK</b>
12 inches or less.....	6	5
1-3 feet.....	4	8
10 feet or higher .....	6	9

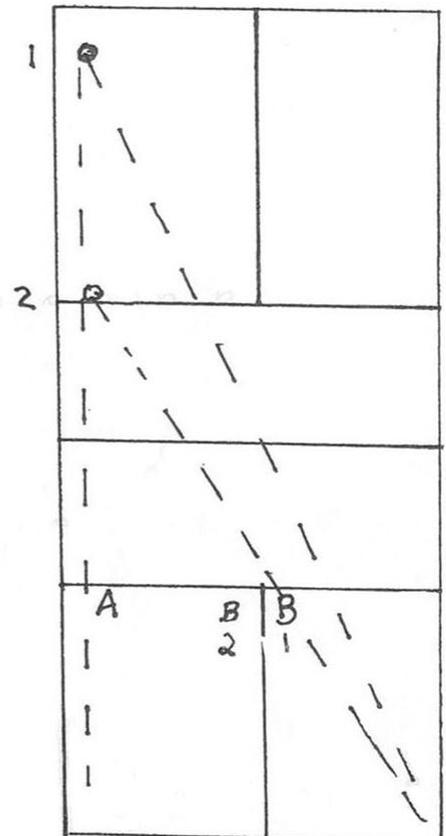
**Proper Positioning**



**Ball to right  
B covers line  
A covers middle**



**Ball to center  
A and B cover middle**



**Ball to left  
A covers line  
B covers middle**