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HOW TO PLAY PICKLEBALL

TIPS TO PLAY BETTER PICKLEBALL

STACIE TOWNSEND

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This book is dedicated to every Pickler that we have had the pleasure of playing with, playing against, and otherwise enjoying the sport of pickleball with.

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Introduction

How to Play Pickleball: Tips to Learn to Play Better Pickleball is a pickleball e-book created by Pickler and USA Pickleball that goes hand-in-hand with a video series on the same topics. This e-book and the corresponding videos are designed to help you play better pickleball. As you read this e-book, be sure to check out the pickleball videos by clicking the links in this e-book, which are in the upper right-hand corner of the cover page for each chapter or by visiting USAPickleball.org or Pickler's YouTube at YouTube.com/PicklerPickleball.

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CHAPTER 1

WHAT IS PICKLEBALL?

Have you heard about pickleball yet, which is the fastest growing sport in the country?

Pickleball is a paddle sport that is commonly referred to as a mix of tennis, badminton, and table tennis. Pickleball is played with a paddle and a plastic, perforated ball—kind of like a whiffle ball—on either an indoor or outdoor court that is the same size as a badminton court and a net that is four inches lower than a tennis net. This means that a pickleball court can be created, and pickleball can be played, just about anywhere—like a gym, a dedicated outdoor court, or a driveway.

Pickleball is a sport for all ages and skill levels, that can be played as either a doubles game or singles game, is easy to learn, and comes with an amazing and welcoming culture and community of people. Although pickleball may be played as both a doubles game and a singles game, it is most commonly played as a doubles game. So, there will be two people set up on each side of the pickleball court to start a game.

To start a pickleball game, one team will serve. The pickleball must be served crosscourt into the service box. Unlike tennis, the serve in pickleball must be underhand.

Also, unlike tennis, both the serve and the return of serve must bounce. This is called the two-bounce rule. After the serve and return of serve, either team may volley the pickleball. In other words, after the serve and return of serve, either team may hit the pickleball either in the air or after a bounce.

Each rally will continue until someone makes a fault—for instance, there is a double bounce, someone hits the pickleball out of bounds, the pickleball hits someone anywhere other than below their paddle-side wrist, someone hits it into the net, etc.

What makes the sport of pickleball truly unique is the part of the pickleball court called the Non-Volley Zone, which is also affectionately called the "Kitchen." The Non-Volley Zone or Kitchen is the 14-foot area in the middle of the court, which extends seven feet on either side of the pickleball net.

You may not volley (i.e., hit the pickleball in the air and without a bounce) the pickleball while making contact with the Kitchen. Contact with the Non-Volley Zone or Kitchen includes standing in the Kitchen, or allowing your momentum to carry you into the Kitchen after you hit the pickleball.

Singles pickleball generally has the same rules as doubles pickleball, except that each player only has one serve.

So, are you ready to play pickleball?! Jump on a court, and get ready to join a movement that is more than just a sport.

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CHAPTER 2

HOW TO PLAY PICKLEBALL

Your friends, the news, your co-workers, celebrities, everyone is talking about the fastest growing sport… pickleball! Now, I hope you are ready to join the fun.

As previously noted, pickleball is a paddle sport that combines elements of tennis, badminton, and table tennis.

Pickleball is played on a pickleball court. A pickleball court has two sides and is divided by a net. There are four lines—the baselines, the sidelines, the centerline, and the Non-Volley Zone lines. The area in the center of the pickleball court is called the Non-Volley Zone, which we also affectionately call the Kitchen.

In addition to the court, you will need a pickleball paddle, a pickleball and some friends to play with.

Now, that you know what pickleball is… let's breakdown how to play!

Pickleball can be played as a doubles game, where there are two players on each side of the court, or as a singles game, where there is one player on each side of the court. To start a game, decide who will serve first; any fair method will do. Once you decide who serves first, the player starting on the right-hand side of the court will serve from behind the baseline and between the centerline and sideline. Pickleball uses an underhand serve or a drop serve, and the serve must go crosscourt to the opposing service box and beyond the Non-Volley Zone line.

Pickleball has a two-bounce rule, which means the first two shots of a rally must bounce. So, both the serve must bounce, and the return must bounce. From there, you may hit the pickleball off the bounce or out of the air.

The rally will continue until someone makes a fault—for instance, there is a double bounce, someone hits the pickleball out of bounds, the pickleball hits someone anywhere other than below their paddle-side wrist, someone hits it into the net, etc.

All shots that are in the court, or on the lines of the court, are "in," except that the serve must be in the service box beyond the Kitchen line—if the serve hits the Kitchen or Kitchen line, then that is "out." Out balls are called by the player or team on the side of the pickleball court, where the pickleball bounces (or is supposed to bounce). Be sure to call out balls loudly, and only when you see the pickleball out of bounds.

Now, let's discuss scoring in pickleball—which we admit can be a little confusing.

You can only score as the serving team in pickleball. So, if you win the rally as the serving team, you win a point, you switch sides of the court, and the same server will serve, but in the opposite direction. If you lose the rally as the serving team, then the serve moves to the next player. If the serve goes to the other side of the court—which we call a "side out"—then, in doubles pickleball, the person on the right-hand side of the court will go first. In singles pickleball, you will serve on the side of the court based on your score.

In doubles pickleball, the first serving team only has one service turn (so if the serving team loses the first rally, then the serve goes to the other team). After this first side out, each side has two service turns—in other words, each player gets a shot at serving. This is why you start every doubles pickleball game with a loud 0-0-2!

Speaking of the score, be sure to shout it out before every serve. The first number is your score, the second number is the other side's score, and the third number is which service turn you are on in doubles pickleball. Singles pickleball, which is less popular than doubles pickleball, will only have two numbers—for instance, 0-0—because each side will only have one service turn. Most pickleball games are played to 11 points and you must win by two points.

One other unique rule to the sport of pickleball is that you cannot hit the pickleball out of the air—also known as a volley—while you are standing in the Non-Volley Zone (also called the Kitchen). This also

means that your momentum cannot carry you into the Kitchen on a volley. Reaching over the Non-Volley Zone line above the surface area of the court to hit the pickleball is permitted. Also, you may hit the pickleball in the Non-Volley Zone after the pickleball has bounced. You may even stand in the Kitchen (although, not recommended) as long as you are not volleying the pickleball. So, again, no volleys in the Kitchen.

To put it all together, we have an underhand serve, that must go crosscourt. Both the serve and the return must bounce. If the serving team wins the rally, they get a point and switch sides. Remember you only switch sides if you win a point as the serving team. If the serving team loses, then everyone stays put, no points are awarded, and the serve goes to the next person. First team to 11 points wins! At the end of the game, be sure to paddle tap and give kudos for a great game. And, lastly, remember… no volleys in the Kitchen!

Do you have it all down? If not, no worries—you will. Get out there, and join the fun on the court and the fastest growing sport… pickleball!

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CHAPTER 3

BASICS FOR SUCCESS

If you are just stepping on to the pickleball court, there are some basics to success that you should know. For instance:

1. Keep your paddle up when you are on the court;
2. Be in an athletic stance with your knees bent;
3. Take short, compact backswings;
4. Hit the pickleball out in front of your body; and
5. Exercise patience.

These quick tips will go a long way.

Another basic to success is court positioning. Being in the right place at the right time can win you a lot of points on the pickleball court.

With that said, the general rule of thumb on the pickleball courts is to work your way to the Non-Volley Zone line, or "Kitchen line," as soon as possible, as most points in pickleball are won there.

But remember, in pickleball, there is a "two-bounce" rule. In other words, the serve must bounce and the return of serve must bounce. After the bounce of the return of serve, you or your opponents may either strike the pickleball in the air (in other words, a volley) or off the bounce.

This is why, when you are the serving team, you should stay back at the baseline to prepare for the return of serve, since you are not allowed to volley a return of serve. By staying back at the baseline, you will give yourself plenty of room for the return of serve to bounce. Then, after the third shot, you and your partner, as the serving team, should immediately work your way in to the Kitchen line.

Depending on your style of play, you can be aggressive and race all the way to the Kitchen line, as soon as you know who is hitting the third shot. Or, you can be more methodical and only move in when you know you hit a good shot.

Either way, be sure to do three things:

1. Follow the flight of the pickleball in order to cover the most likely shots from your opponents;

2. Split step before your opponents make contact in order to prepare for your shot; and

3. Stay linked with your partner (about six to eight feet away) to avoid leaving open holes on the pickleball court.

If you are the returning team, only the player receiving the serve should be behind the baseline. The non-receiving player should already be positioned at the Kitchen line, because the two-bounce rule does not come into play as this non-receiving player will not touch the serve or the return of serve. Once the receiving player strikes the serve, the receiving player should immediately join his or her partner at the Kitchen line.

Remember, most points are won at the Non-Volley Zone line, so it is imperative that you work your way there as soon as possible! And, while it is important to feel comfortable from any place on the pickleball court, you generally want to stay out of the area between the baseline and the Non-Volley Zone line, which known as the transition area, as it is too easy for your opponents to hit aggressive, winning shots.

So, know where to start on the pickleball court, remember to let the serve and return of serve bounce, do your best to get to the Kitchen line and out of the transition area, and then, hold the Kitchen line until you win the point!

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CHAPTER 4

SERVES

Every rally in a pickleball game starts with a serve.

Pickleball uses an underhand serve, which you can do by either hitting the serve off of the volley, or by dropping the pickleball and hitting the serve off of the bounce. If you hit the serve off of the volley, the rules of pickleball require the serve to be hit below your belly button with your paddle head below your wrist at the point of contact. And, whatever type of serve you hit—a volley serve or a drop serve—you must be behind the baseline and between the centerline and sideline at the point of contact. After contact, you are free to do whatever you want with your pickleball paddle and you are free to step into the pickleball court.

Although the serve in pickleball can be a very basic shot, it is a very important shot and can give you an edge to start a point. Not many points are won in a pickleball game off of an ace serve; however, many opportunities are lost by serves that are hit out of bounds.

So, what are the key pickleball serve techniques and strategies? Let's breakdown seven key techniques and strategies to know on the serve.

1. Use a pre-serve routine. It is important that you find a routine that you are comfortable with before you serve the pickleball. This pre-serve routine could be bouncing the pickleball with your hand or hitting the pickleball a few times with your paddle—whatever works best for you and whatever you feel comfortable with. This will help you tell your mind and body you are ready and also help you with your timing.

   Whatever your pre-serve routine is, be sure to say the score before you start any part of your serve. In other words, do not say the score and serve at the same time. This is because our bodies and minds are generally not built to "think" and "do" at the same time, and too many errors occur as a result of trying to say the score and serve at the same time. So, think, say the score, do your pre-serve routine, and then serve.

2. Stay loose, move from your shoulder, and finish your swing. During a serve, some pickleball players have a tendency to want to flick their wrist or bend at their elbow. This may cause inconsistencies for you and the goal on the pickleball serve is to perfect a consistent, reliable serve.

So, your pickleball service motion should be more like a pendulum swing from the shoulder, instead of from the wrist or elbow. The pickleball service motion should be fluid and loose, rather than stiff or tight, and it should continue all the way through the pickleball. The pickleball service motion should not stop at contact with the pickleball, but rather continue through contact, as if you were hitting several pickleballs in a row in the direction that you want the pickleball to go—which would be to the crosscourt service box.

3. Again, it is important to have a consistent, reliable serve on the pickleball court. This includes consistent placement, as you must hit the serve to the crosscourt service box. To help you hit your serve with some consistent direction:

a. Avoid over-rotating on your backswings;

b. Take relatively short backswings; and

c. Try using a semi-closed stance, which is a stance that is partially open to the crosscourt service box and partially closed to the crosscourt service box. A semi-closed stance will help deter backswings that are too big and help you keep your point of contract on your serve relatively tight to your body. This is important because you want a consistent point of contact that is repeatable, routine, and out in front of your body. A short backswing and a semi-closed stance will help you accomplish this.

4. Use your legs and core to help you generate your power. Be sure to look like an athlete and compress your legs on your serve. You can also generate some power by increasing your paddle speed through the pickleball on your service motion.

5. Set yourself up for success by giving yourself a consistent toss or consistent drop.

When using a pickleball volley serve, lift the pickleball before releasing it. If you simply drop the pickleball, the pickleball will be too low at the point of contact and create a more difficult shot for you.

When using a pickleball drop serve, drop the pickleball from a comfortable height above your head with your arm slightly out in front of your body and slightly toward the paddle side of your body. This will give you the highest bounce possible.

Lastly, it probably goes without saying, but one of the easiest mistakes to make on the pickleball court is not watching the pickleball to the point of contact. So, be sure to watch the pickleball hit your paddle on your serve.

6. One pickleball serving strategy is to serve deep to your opponent's backhand. This is because, a deep serve pushes your opponent back on their side of the pickleball court, making the return of serve more difficult. And, in most cases, your opponent's backhand shot will be weaker than your opponent's forehand shot.

With that said, when targeting a deep serve to your opponent's backhand, do not overplay the serve and aim too close to the lines of the pickleball court—whether it be the baseline, the centerline, or the sidelines. Instead, aim about two to three feet inside of the lines. And, do not forget to consider and factor in the wind if you are playing outside.

7. And, although we just said to target your opponent's backhands, be sure to mix up your serves. At a minimum, we all need one, consistent serve. Once you have that, you can elevate your game by incorporating different serves. For instance, a driving serve, a lob serve, an inside out serve, a serve with spin, etc. This will help you keep your opponents off-balance. So, perfect one consistent serve and then continue to evolve your pickleball game by adding other unique pickleball serves to your repertoire.

Now, get out onto the pickleball courts and master the serve with these tips!

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CHAPTER 5

RETURNS OF SERVE

If you are on the pickleball court, you will have the opportunity to be both the serving team and the receiving team. As the receiving team, you will have one partner starting at the Non-Volley Zone line, while the other partner is ready to receive the serve back at the baseline.

The general goal as the receiving team is to keep the serving team back by the baseline and not to let them come into the Kitchen line. By keeping the serving team back, you will make it more difficult for them to win the point.

To put yourself in the best position to win the rally as the receiving team, try these eight tips:

1. As the receiver, start in your ready position about two to three feet behind the baseline. By starting behind the baseline, you will give yourself more time to react to your opponent's serve.

2. Move your feet. Most players have a stronger forehand shot than a backhand shot. As a result, you will probably want to hit most returns of serve with your forehand (rather than your backhand). If a serve is hit to your backhand, try to run around the serve and hit the serve with your forehand. However, if the serve to your backhand is too difficult to get around with your feet, go ahead and hit a backhand return of serve, rather than forcing a forehand and putting yourself out of position.

3. Take short backswings and watch the pickleball all the way to your paddle. Short backswings will help you stay compact and in control out on the pickleball court, while watching the pickleball will help you avoid unnecessary unforced errors.

4. Like any shot on the pickleball court, mix it up. With that said, the majority of returns of serve should be played deep and back through the middle. The return of serve down the middle of the court may cause your opponents to fight over the pickleball and will reduce your opponents' angles of

attack on the third shot.

5. Play within a smaller court. As a reminder, do not aim for the baseline on your opponents' side of the pickleball court. Rather, aim for a few feet inside the baseline and sidelines to avoid any unnecessary unforced errors by sailing the pickleball out of bounds.

6. Get to that Kitchen line! After you hit your return of serve, you should be working in toward the Kitchen line. Remember, it is important to get to that Non-Volley Zone line and then hold that line.

7. If you are having trouble advancing to the Non-Volley Zone line after you hit your return of serve, consider using more of a lob return of serve—in other words, a return of serve with more arc. Compared to a low, driving return of serve, the lob return of serve will give you more time to take the Kitchen line.

But, as with any other shot on the pickleball court, be aware of wind conditions. Wind will have more of an effect on a lob return of serve compared to a driving return of serve.

8. Target the weaker opponent. Another strategy is to target the weaker of your two opponents. In particular, target your opponent that has the weaker third shot. Find your opponents' weaknesses and isolate them.

Now, get out on the pickleball court and put pressure on the serving team using these tips for the return of serve.

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CHAPTER 6

THIRD SHOT DRIVES AND DROPS

Each pickleball point generally follows a particular sequence, which goes as follows: (1) a player serves the pickleball for the first shot; (2) an opponent returns the serve for the second shot; and (3) the serving team either drives the pickleball or drops the pickleball for the third shot. A drive will be a fast, hard shot, while a drop will be a soft shot—kind of like a long dink—that is designed to land in your opponents' side of the Kitchen. The goal with the third shot is to neutralize your opponents and help you and your partner get from the baseline all the way to the Kitchen line, as most points are won there.

The decision on your shot selection—whether to hit a third shot drive or a third shot drop—may come down to your individual style of pickleball play, your strengths as a pickleball player, and the effectiveness of the shot against your particular opponents. However, there are a few scenarios where one is likely more effective than the other. For instance, if your opponents hit a short return that has a high bounce, or you are off balance, consider driving the third shot at your opponents. Also, if you are more comfortable with your drive, consider hitting a drive as a third shot, which will oftentimes set you up for an easier drop on your fifth shot. But, if your opponents hit a return that stays low or keeps you back in the pickleball court, consider hitting a third shot drop, as your drive may be less effective in those circumstances.

Whether you are hitting a third shot drive or third shot drop, there are a few keys to success:

1. Stay back after you serve. Remember, the sport of pickleball has a two-bounce rule, meaning that the serve and the return of serve must bounce. So, it is important to stay back at the baseline and allow the return of serve to bounce.

   Plus, to hit the best shot possible, you want to hit any shot out in front of your body. By staying back at the baseline, you will follow the rules, as well as prepare yourself for the best shot possible.

2. Split step right before your opponents hit the return. This will help you get into your ready position, in a compressed, athletic stance, with your paddle out in front of your body.

3. Move your feet into your shot and stay low. You can't expect the pickleball to come to you, so it is important that you take a lot of little steps toward the pickleball and position yourself so that you make contact out in front of your body.

Also, most players have better forehands than backhands, so you may want to try hitting more forehand third shots than backhand third shots. But, with that said, it is important to be able to hit both effectively.

4. Pickleball is a compact game, so it is important to be compact yourself. This means taking short backswings. But, that does not mean you stop at contact. It is important to hit through the pickleball at the point of contact and finish your paddle swing. So, remember to take short backswings, hit through contact, and finish your paddle swing.

5. After you finish your paddle swing, move in to the Kitchen line as much as possible. Remember, most points are won there, so it is important to take ground when you hit a quality third shot. If not, hang tight and be ready to play defense, and hopefully your fifth shot will help you get to the Kitchen line.

When it comes to placement of your third shot drive or third shot drop, consider targeting:

1. Your opponents' backhands (which are usually their weaker sides);

2. The middle of the pickleball court (which gives you margin for error); and

3. The person that hit the return of serve (as that person is on the move making it more difficult for him/her to hit your shot).

Also, if you decide to hit a drop as your third shot, consider going crosscourt, which will give you the most margin for error, as your shot will go over the lowest part of the pickleball net in the middle of the court.

The third shot is one of the most important, yet one of the most difficult shots, to master in the game of pickleball. One of the best things you can do to help your pickleball game is to go out there and practice your third shot. If you can master the third shot, you will certainly put you and your partner in a position to get the Kitchen line and win more points.

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CHAPTER 7

DINKS

Your chances of winning on the pickleball court go up if you can get to the Non-Volley Zone line. We keep saying this because it is important. Get to that line!

But, once you get there, what do you do?

You have options, which is what makes the sport of pickleball a game of strategy. Generally speaking, you want to keep the pickleball low and unattackable. Then, once your opponents make a mistake and give you an attackable shot, you go on the offensive.

To keep the pickleball low and unattackable, you will likely want to hit a dink. A dink is a controlled shot in the sport of pickleball, where you hit the pickleball into the Non-Volley Zone on your opponents' side of the court. All four players in doubles pickleball will generally be at the Non-Volley Zone line when you are hitting a dink.

A dink can be both an offensive shot (where you put pressure on your opponents to make a mistake or pop up the pickleball for an easy put away shot) or a defensive shot (where you are trying to relieve pressure from your opponents' strong shot and neutralize the rally). In either scenario, again, the goal of the dink is to hit a shot that is low and unattackable, so that your opponents cannot hit down on the pickleball toward your feet, but rather must let the pickleball bounce or have to hit up on the pickleball to get the pickleball back to your side of the pickleball net.

Now, let's breakdown some keys to hitting the perfect pickleball dink:

1. Prepare Your Body and Paddle – To prepare your body:

    a. Compress into an athletic stance, with your knees bent and your feet about shoulder width apart;

    b. Keep your pickleball paddle out front of your body and with a relatively loose paddle grip; and

c. Be sure to take short, compact backswings with your dink.

2. Watch the Pickleball – This one goes without saying, but, too often, players mishit a pickleball simply because they do not watch the pickleball all the way to their paddle. Watch the pickleball!

3. Move Your Feet – It is important to move your feet on the pickleball court. This also holds true when dinking at the Kitchen Line.

To note, when dinking, try to keep your body parallel to the Kitchen Line. If you need to reach for a dink, take a lateral step with your foot closest to the pickleball, rather than a crossover step. A crossover step will take you out of your important ready position, so that you will not be prepared for the next shot.

4. Hold the Line – Try to keep your feet at the Non-Volley Zone Line. If you step back, you will:

a. Expose your feet, giving your opponents an easy target to apply pressure;

b. Give your opponents more court space to place dinks and more angles to hit better dinks; and

c. Make your dinks more difficult because you will be farther from the pickleball net.

So, try to keep your feet at the Kitchen Line.

5. Protect Your Feet – Try not to let the pickleball travel toward your feet when dinking. Dinks that travel near your feet are difficult to react to and hit an unattackable shot off of. So, protect your feet by taking the ball out of the air when

it is comfortable. But, at the same time, do not overextend yourself, which will result in unforced errors and less aggressive dinks.

6. Gently Lift Through the Pickleball – Once you strike the pickleball for a dink, gently lift up and through the pickleball. The lift comes from your shoulder, rather than from your wrist or elbow (in other words, think of this like a pendulum swing from your shoulder). Again, this should be a controlled motion with a firm wrist, rather than a sharp jerk with any wrist snap.

7. Respect the Net – The height of the apex of the dink is important. Give yourself some margin of error over the top of the pickleball net. While it is important to keep your dinks low and unattackable, if you hit the pickleball too low, you will hit your dink straight into the net and take yourself out of the point.

8. Finish Your Shot, Stay Low Through Contact & Get Ready for the Next One – Don't forget to finish your dink. Follow through the pickleball, but stay low and compressed, which will help you hit more consistent dinks. Also, after you finish your dink, quickly revert back to your ready position. You need to be ready for the next shot, whether it is another dink, a surprise fastball, or a lob.

These basic steps and fundamentals are the foundation of any great dinker on the pickleball court. Once you master the foundation, you can amp up your dinks and work on being more aggressive by slowly adding in speed, spin, placement, and angles, as well as improve your dinking strategy.

WATCH NOW

CHAPTER 8

VOLLEYS

A volley is where you hit the pickleball out of the air without the pickleball bouncing. Most volleys are hit when you are at the Non-Volley Zone Line.

There are a handful of volleys that you can hit on the pickleball court, which include (1) a block volley; and (2) a punch or swing volley. A block volley is more of a defensive shot where you may be caught off guard by your opponents and are trying to reset the pickleball softly into the Kitchen. A punch or swing volley is more of an offensive shot where you are playing aggressive and attacking your opponents.

To hit a volley, start in an athletic position, where you are compressed with your paddle out in front of you. Be sure that you have a relatively loose paddle grip. If your grip is too tight, you will likely hit the pickleball too hard. Volleys are all about touch and feel.

Then, find the pickleball with your paddle out in front of your body. It is important to be out in front, where you will have more control and more power.

At the point of contact, pay attention to the angle of your paddle face. Your paddle angle will dictate where the pickleball will go. If your paddle angle is too far open, you will be sailing the pickleball out of bounds, and too far closed, you will hit the pickleball into the net.

Then, if you are blocking the pickleball, absorb the pickleball with steady hands. Meet the pickleball with your paddle face and a loose paddle grip.

However, if you have time, go on the offensive and hit a more aggressive volley with a punch or swing. Generate some forward momentum through the pickleball.

Now, that you have the basic fundamentals of your volley, where should you hit it? You have a lot of options on placement when you are striking a volley (or any other shot), which include:

1. Down the middle;

2. Right at either of your opponents for a body shot;

3. At your opponents' weak side, which is generally their backhand sides; and

4. At your opponents' feet.

These placements are all good options, but each are really dependent on where you are, where your partner is, where your opponents are, and where the pickleball is on the pickleball court.

With that said, what will really hurt you is if you make unforced errors by hitting the pickleball out of bounds—in other words, by "going for" too much and aiming for the baselines and sidelines of the pickleball court. To reduce your unforced errors, shrink the pickleball court in your mind by two to three feet on each side and at the baseline, and play within the "smaller" pickleball court.

And, be sure to mix-up your shot selection!

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CHAPTER 9

LOBS

A lob is a shot in pickleball where you will put some height on the trajectory of the pickleball and send the pickleball relatively high into the air. There are two types of lobs:

1. Defensive Lob – A defensive lob is a lob with much more arc (think of a very high up and down trajectory), where you expect your opponents to be able to hit an overhead back at you; and

2. Offensive Lob – An offensive is a lob that has a flatter trajectory that is just above the reach of your opponents' paddle (think of a bridge or a rainbow trajectory just over the outstretched arms of your opponents), where you are trying to win the point.

The key differences between a defensive lob and an offensive lob are (1) the angle of the paddle; and (2) the direction of your follow through. A defensive lob requires an open paddle face toward the sky and a vertical follow through, while an offensive lob requires an angled paddle face with an up-and-out follow through.

With that background, let's get right to it… here are some tips for you to hit the perfect lob on the pickleball court:

1. Preparation – Prepare for the lob in a similar manner as a drop shot or a dink. It is important to disguise the lob, as it is most effective when the lob is unexpected. This means that you will move your body behind the pickleball with your paddle out in front of your body and below the pickleball. You will also be in a compressed stance, with your knees bent.

2. Forehands Preferred – Forehand lobs will generally be easier and more consistent than backhand lobs. As a result, as you are moving behind the pickleball, prepare your feet so that the pickleball is off to your forehand side.

3. Short Backswings – Compress under the pickleball and

take a short backswing similar to a drop or dink. Again, it is important to disguise this shot as much as possible, so try to limit your backswing.

4. Out Front & Follow Through – Strike the underside of the pickleball out in front of your body. To hit a strong lob, you must really get under the pickleball with your body and your paddle. If you let the pickleball drop too low, you will struggle to get under the pickleball. Hit the pickleball high enough off the ground to allow your body and your paddle to compress under the pickleball.

5. Court Positioning – Consider hitting the lob when you are at the Non-Volley Zone line (as opposed to at the baseline or in the transition area), as the lob will be easier to execute the closer you are to the Non-Volley Zone line.

Plus, it is generally easier to execute a lob at the Kitchen line when you are in a dink rally, as all of the players on the pickleball court will likely be leaning in over the Kitchen line and the lob may get your opponents moving and off-balance.

6. Use the Elements – Whether you are playing outdoors or indoors, use the elements to your advantage. Lobs can be especially effective if you use the wind, sun, lighting, and rafters (in indoor play) to your advantage. In particular, lob the pickleball so that your opponents have to look into the sun, lights, or rafters to find the pickleball. With respect to wind, be careful. The best rule of thumb is to lob into the wind, but not with the wind.

7. Aim for the Non-Paddle Side – Lob to your opponents' non-paddle sides. This will require your opponents to run around the pickleball to hit a forehand overhead or force your opponents to hit a high backhand (which is most likely your opponents' weaker side). If you lob to your opponents' paddle side, you could be setting your opponents up for an easy forehand overhead.

8. Target the Player with Weak Mobility – A lob is effective because you make your opponents move back on the pickleball court. So, consider targeting your opponent with the weakest mobility. Also, consider the height of your opponents. Is one of your opponents shorter than the other, making for an easier lob?

A lob can be an effective shot on the pickleball court. However, do not overuse this shot. Remember to remain unpredictable with your shot selection.

WATCH NOW

CHAPTER 10

OVERHEADS

One of the best feelings on the pickleball court is crushing an overhead shot for a winner. If you miss it, though, that can be one of the worst feelings—missing an easy winner. Let's help you avoid those bad feelings and hit the winner.

When a pickleball is sent up into the air—whether intentionally by your opponents with a lob, or unintentionally with a bad shot—you have two options: (1) try to take the pickleball out of the air with an overhead; or (2) let the pickleball bounce and hit the pickleball off the bounce. Typically, you want to keep the pressure on your opponents and hit the pickleball out of the air.

So, to crush the overhead:

1. Immediately rotate your body sideways to avoid backpedaling (which can be dangerous on the pickleball court);

2. Move your feet—by moving sideways and not backpedaling—to make sure you are positioned to hit the pickleball out in front of your body;

3. Raise your paddle up by your ear with your paddle laid back and elbow up, and point your non-paddle hand at the pickleball out in front of your body. To note, this is important to help guide where you will make contact with the pickleball and can also help block the sun on sunny days;

4. Bring your paddle square to meet the pickleball out in front of your body with full-arm extension (if you are right-handed, think about hitting at 1 o'clock (imagining a clock is in front of you); if you are left-handed, think about hitting at 11 o'clock (imagining a clock is in front of you)). Also, to note, it is important to accelerate up to the point of contact, rather than accelerating down after contact; and

5. Finish your overhead by following through the pickleball down and slightly across your body.

Also, be cognizant of your paddle angle. Your paddle angle will dictate where the pickleball will go. Be sure that your paddle angle is down into your opponents' side of the pickleball court, so as not to sail the pickleball out of bounds, but also not so far down that you hit the pickleball straight into the net.

To note, one reason your paddle angle could be down into the pickleball net is that could be collapsing your top half, or dropping your head or eyes, at contact. Avoid collapsing your top half and dropping your head or eyes at contact.

Lastly, consider adding angles to your overhead that take the pickleball off the court to the left or the right in order to make a more difficult return for your opponents. A strong overhead—especially a strong overhead with angles—will certainly discourage any lobs against you.

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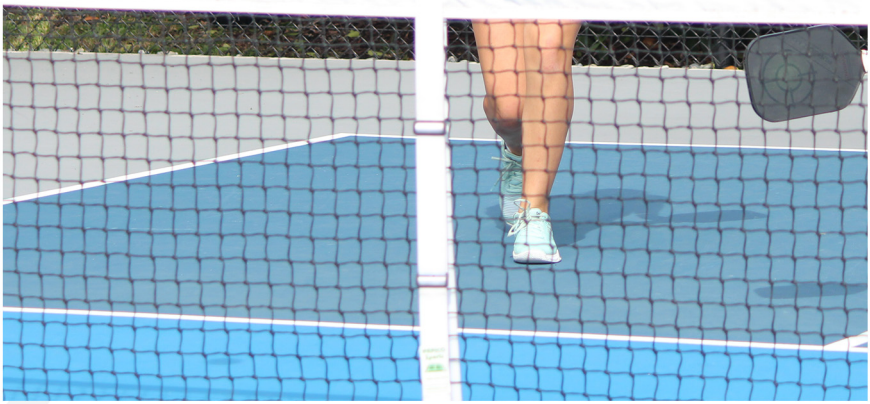
CHAPTER 11

TRANSITION AREA & RESETS



"No Man's Land"—also called the transition area—is the area of the pickleball court in between the Non-Volley Zone and the baseline. It is generally the space that is a foot or two behind the Kitchen, to a foot or two in front of the baseline.

This area is aptly named "No Man's Land" because it is a place that pickleball players try to avoid, as it is difficult to win points by playing in this area of the pickleball court. It is one of the most difficult places to be on the pickleball court because your opponents are able to hit the pickleball down at your feet.

This area is also aptly called the transition area, as it is the space where you transition from the baseline for the start of a rally, to the preferred space of the Kitchen—remember, most pickleball rallies and points are won when playing at the Kitchen line.

Although "No Man's Land" is a place to avoid, oftentimes, the player or team that is better in transition will be the deciding factor between a win and a loss. To improve your pickleball game in "No Man's Land," try the following tips:

1. Stay Under Control – Since most points are won at the Non-Volley Zone line, it is imperative that you work your way to there as soon as possible! However, make sure you are moving in to the Kitchen line under control, which may mean that you could be forced to split step in the transition area. This is okay! Pickleball players generally make errors in "No Man's Land" because they are trying to move in too much or too quickly. Reduce these errors by moving in under control and remaining calm in the transition area.

2. Stay Linked with Your Partner in Doubles Pickleball – When you are in the transition area, be sure to stay linked with your partner. When you become unlinked with your partner (in other words, you and your partner are at different depths of the pickleball court), then more gaps open up on the pickleball court for your opponents to hit winning

shots in. Stay linked with your partner and move together.

3. Get LOW! – When in "No Man's Land," it is important to bend your knees and get low. This is especially true when your or your partner's shot is high. When the ball goes high, get low! Your defense and reset skills will improve when getting low and bending your knees.

Also, consider having a slightly wider stance with your feet and legs. A wider stance will help you get lower and feel more stable, with more power.

4. Practice Good Paddle Control – Your paddle should be out in front of your body, as you will likely not have much time react to your opponents' shot when in "No Man's Land." You should also take short backswings and have a loose paddle grip, which will help you have better control over the pickleball.

5. Once You're Comfortable, Take Advantage of "No Man's Land!" – Imagine that you or your partner popped the pickleball up so that your opponents are able to hit an offensive shot. It may be a good idea to take a step back off of the Non-Volley Zone line in order to buy yourself a fraction more reaction time. If you choose to step back into the transition area, be sure that you are not moving when your opponents are hitting the pickleball. Remember, moving while hitting will likely result in more unforced errors. So, only take advantage of this step back when you have time.

And, if you choose to step back into "No Man's Land," be sure to immediately step back up to the Kitchen line, as your chances of winning the rally increase when you are hugging the Kitchen line!

Try these pickleball tips to improve your skills in "No Man's Land" on the pickleball court. Master the transition area and you will certainly win more pickleball games!

WATCH NOW

CHAPTER 12

IMPROVE YOUR BACKHAND

Most pickleball players will admit that their backhand shots are not quite as good as their forehand shots. If you are like most players, although your backhand may not be your best shot, your backhand does not need to be your enemy either.

Weak backhands are oftentimes a result of not enough "practice." Players will commonly run around their backhands in order to hit a forehand, a shot they feel more comfortable with. Generally, it can be a good strategy to run around to hit a forehand and avoid your backhand. But, sometimes, this isn't possible.

The good news is that developing a good backhand is easier than you think.

If you want to improve your backhand shots, keep it simple, compact, and use these basic mechanics:

1. Start from Your Ready Position – The ready position is your starting point. Remember, to have your paddle up and out front of you, your knees bent, and your weight on the balls of your feet. Also, remember to always go back to the ready position after you hit the pickleball.

2. Move Your Feet – Move your feet so that you are in a position to hit the pickleball at a consistent contact point. Your contact point will be out in front of your body.

3. Prepare Your Body and Paddle – Start preparing for your backhand shot by rotating your body slightly toward your non-paddle side, and pulling your paddle back by your waist.

Also, try bringing your hands together on the pickleball paddle prior to contact.

4. Find Contact Point – With both of your hands together, it is now time to find contact. Move your paddle forward through the pickleball, making contact with the pickleball out

in front of your body. At the same time (assuming you are using a one-handed backhand), throw your non-paddle hand backward in the opposite direction. Think of this like you are spreading your arms at contact (with a light bend in your elbow). By throwing your non-paddle hand backward in the opposite direction, you are balancing your body out and you will likely have less mishits.

5. Finish! – Upon contact, hit forward and through the pickleball. Do not stop at contact, but rather finish your paddle swing through the pickleball.

Your finish is so important, as it may dictate where the pickleball will go, as well as if you have enough power on your shot.

Do not flick your wrist or rotate too much upon contact, which can send your backhand shot flying in a wrong direction.

The backhand shots do not come overnight. It is important to practice—whether by drilling or game play. Stay patient with your backhand and, eventually, your backhand may just become your best shot!

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CHAPTER 13

DETECT OUT BALLS

Whether you are playing singles pickleball or doubles pickleball, one of the best skills that you can have on the pickleball court is the ability to let the out balls go. This is especially true when you are playing against players that like to drive the pickleball.

Detecting out balls and letting them go is one of the hardest skills in pickleball. Who would have thought that one of the hardest shots in pickleball is the one that you don't even hit!

To improve your detection of those out balls, try the following:

1. Communicate with Your Partner – Two heads are better than one, so work with your partner to detect out balls. If you see an out ball, scream and yell at your partner—"NO!" or "LET IT GO!" or "BOUNCE!"

2. Let the Shoulder Height Drives Go – If your opponents drive a pickleball at you with pace (and particularly, a drive with no top spin) that is about shoulder height, let it go. Your opponents' drive is probably out. This is especially true if your opponents drive the pickleball from the Non-Volley Zone line.

3. Pay Attention to the Height at Contact – If your opponents drive a pickleball that sits below the net, consider letting it go. This is because your opponents will have to hit up on a low-sitting pickleball to hit it over the net. By hitting up on the pickleball, your opponents will send the pickleball on a trajectory that is probably going out of bounds.

4. Patterns of Play – As you play a few points with your opponents, try to analyze their patterns of play. Do your opponents consistently drive the pickleball on every shot? Once your opponents get to a certain place on the court, are these drives too high and going out of bounds? Try to pick up on any patterns to help you anticipate and detect out balls.

5. Body Language – In addition to patterns of play, pay attention to your opponents' body language and paddle face. For instance, a big backswing and flat or closed paddle face will indicate a drive is coming your way. Use these clues to help you anticipate shots, including out balls.

Remember to the let the out balls fly out of play. Out balls are easy points for you and your partner. Hitting an out ball keeps your opponents in the point, which is obviously something that you want to avoid. So, let those out balls go!

WATCH NOW

CHAPTER 14

PICKLEBALL FUNDAMENTALS

Pickleball can be a simple game—keep the pickleball over the net and between the lines of the court one more time than your opponents. And, to accomplish this there are some basic fundamentals that are an absolute must on the pickleball court. These pickleball fundamentals include:

1. Move Your Feet & Bend Your Knees – This sounds simple, but it is more difficult and more neglected than you think. Consciously tell yourself to move your feet and bend your knees. You'd be surprised with the difference in your shot execution!

2. Watch the Pickleball & Hit the Pickleball Out in Front – How can you hit the pickleball if you are not watching it? Watch the pickleball hit your paddle and ignore everything else—the opposing players, spectators, your partner, your next shot, etc. And, to help you watch the pickleball, be sure that you are hitting the pickleball out in front of your body.

3. Be in "Pickleball Ready" with Your Pickleball Paddle Up – The game of pickleball can happen so fast. To give yourself the best chance to react to a fast-moving pickleball, your paddle should be up in front of your body. This will cut down on your reaction time, as it is one less thing to do.

Also, always anticipate that the pickleball will come back! Do not let your guard down because you think you hit a good shot. Expect the pickleball to come back.

4. Stay Patient – Patience is so important in the sport of pickleball. Exercising patience as a player on the pickleball court is a skill that too many players do not have. Many times, the player who first speeds up the pickleball will lose the point, as the counterattack by his or her opponents is better than the initial speed up. So, be patient! Only attack attackable pickleballs at or above the top of the pickleball net, rather than unattackable pickleballs below the net.

5. Keep the Pickleball Low (While Still Over the Net) – A low pickleball will prevent your opponents from being able to go on the offensive with an aggressive shot. So, pay attention to your paddle angles and the pace of your shots in order to keep the pickleball low, but above, the pickleball net.

6. Communicate, Communicate, Communicate – You and your partner should communicate during a rally and between shots. For instance, communicating who takes pickleballs that land in the middle, who is running down the lob, and whether or not to let certain shots go by that will be landing out of bounds. And, don't forget to communicate strategy and some words of encouragement—like "Go partner!"—between points.

7. Let the Out Balls Go – One of the hardest shots in pickleball is the one that you shouldn't hit—the out balls! Be on the lookout for out balls! Duck and dodge those out balls, so you do not help your opponents stay in the point.

Master these fundamentals and you will be on your way to better pickleball!

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CHAPTER 15

DOUBLES PICKLEBALL STRATEGY TIPS

Strategy is so important in the game of pickleball, as pickleball is not only a physical game, but also a mental game. Some say pickleball is like chess—easy to play and hard to master. With that said, we will give you some pickleball strategy tips to get you started on the right track for your road to mastery.

1. Consistently Serve Deep, to Backhands & in the Court – The first pickleball strategy tip starts with the first shot of every pickleball rally—the serve. The serve is the one shot in a pickleball rally that you have complete control over (but for, maybe, wind), so it is within your control to have a great shot to start a rally.

When hitting your serve, try to target your opponents' weaker side, which is usually their backhand side (as most pickleball players have stronger forehand shots than backhand shots), and hit your serve deep into the service box, which will make for a more difficult, longer return for your opponents. However, avoid hitting your serve out of bounds by giving yourself a little margin for error and aiming about two to three feet inside the boundary lines of the court.

2. Return Deep, to Backhands & to the Opponent with a Weaker Third Shot – The second pickleball strategy tip relates to the second shot of every pickleball rally—the return of serve. Like the serve, the return of serve should be deep in your opponents' side of the pickleball court. And, again, give yourself a margin for error because a missed return is an easy point for your opponents. Consider hitting most returns in the middle of the court to give yourself the most margin for error.

The return of serve should also target not only your opponents' weaker sides (which is often their backhand sides), but also the player of the opposing team that has a weaker third shot.

3. Get to the Kitchen Line – Most points are won at the

Kitchen Line. So, as soon as you oblige by pickleball's two-bounce rule by letting both the serve and return of serve bounce, you should be trying to make your way to the Kitchen line.

4. Make a Decision on Shot Selection & Commit to It – Where pickleball players often make mistakes is by second guessing themselves or changing their mind on their shot selection. The time to make a decision on a shot and execute that shot is only fractions of a second. As a result, if you change your mind, you will likely make a mistake because you will not give yourself enough time to execute the change. So, make a decision on your shot selection and commit to it!

5. Play to Your Strengths & Your Opponents' Weaknesses – The basic cornerstone of pickleball strategy is to play to your strengths and your opponents' weaknesses. For instance, if you have a great drive and power game, while your opponents have a great soft game and dinking game, then drive the pickleball more often and try to speed the pickleball up. Avoid the dink rallies. If you have a great lob and your opponents have a terrible overhead or have poor mobility, then try to lob your opponents. If your opponents have amazing forehand drives, but weak backhand drives, hit to their backhands.

Know your strengths on the pickleball court and use them! Figure out your opponents' weaknesses and exploit them!

6. Dink Crosscourt (Most of the Time) – One tip for strong dinking is to hit most dinks crosscourt (as opposed to straightforward or in the middle of the pickleball court). This is because a crosscourt dink gives you the most margin for error, as a crosscourt dink will travel over the lowest part of the pickleball net—which is in the middle.

However, not all dinks should be crosscourt. Like any shot,

mix it up to stay unpredictable in your pickleball strategy.

7. Over the Pickleball Net, Between the Lines & Mostly Down the Middle – Whether you are playing doubles pickleball or singles pickleball, the key to winning at pickleball is hitting the pickleball over the pickleball net and between the lines of the pickleball court one more time than your opponents. One tip to help accomplish this is to hit most of your shots on the pickleball court down the middle—with the exception of dinks, which most of your dinks should go crosscourt. As the saying goes, "down the middle solves the riddle." This is usually true because the middle part of the pickleball court provides you with the highest margin of error to keep the pickleball in play. And, if you can target your opponent with his or her backhand in the middle (since backhands are usually weaker for most players)… even better.

With that said, the most important tip is to have fun. Pickleball is America's fastest growing sport and soon to be America's favorite pastime for a reason—because it is fun!

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CHAPTER 16

DINKING STRATEGY TIPS

Dinking generally happens when all four players in doubles pickleball are at the Non-Volley Zone line. You and your partner worked so hard to get to the Kitchen line (as most points are won there!), but now how do you win the point?

1. Take the Pickleball Out of the Air When You Can – When possible, try to hit the pickleball out of the air when you are dinking at the Kitchen line. This will help you apply pressure on your opponents, as it will cut down on their time to react to your shots and give your opponents less space to place their shots.

2. If You Need to, It's Okay to Step Back – Try to keep your feet at the Non-Volley Zone line, which will help you take the pickleball out of the air. However, if your opponents hit a quality shot at your feet, or maybe even a fastball that you need more time to react to, it is okay to take a small drop step back off of the Non-Volley Zone line. This will give yourself more time to react to your opponents' shot. Plus, you may be able to hit a more aggressive shot off of a dink that bounces, especially one that bounces relatively high.

If you do step back, be sure to immediately step back in to the Non-Volley Zone line after you hit your shot.

3. Be Aggressive and Apply Pressure When Possible – There are several types of dinks when you are at the Kitchen line. You have non-purposeful dinks, which are simple dinks to get the pickleball back over the net. You also have purposeful dinks, where you are trying to be more aggressive and put pressure on your opponents. These aggressive dinks can be in the form of dinks with spin, pace, strong angles, or good placement.

When you have the chance, try to be aggressive and apply pressure with your dinks. As noted above, you can do this by adding spin, whether it be slice or backspin, top spin, or

even side spin, by adding speed or pace, or with aggressive angles or placement.

4. Don't Go for Too Much When Your Opponents Hit an Aggressive Dink – If your opponents hit an aggressive dink to you and your partner that puts you in a compromising position, then you may need to hit a more passive or defensive dink back to your opponents in order to try to relieve pressure. Your goal with a passive or defensive dink is to hit a shot that is unattackable by your opponents. In other words, keep your dinks low, so that your opponents have to hit up on the pickleball to get the pickleball back to your side of the net.

5. Move the Dink Around and Mix It Up – It is critical to move the dink around, mix it up, and remain unpredictable. This means mixing up spins, speeds, angles, depths, and placement of your dinks. The more unpredictable you can be, the more you will catch your opponents off guard and confused on their side of the pickleball court. With that said, there are a few common places to hit your dink:

a. Crosscourt Dinks – A dink is most commonly hit crosscourt (as opposed to straightforward or in the middle of the court). This is because the crosscourt dink gives you the most margin for error, as you will be hitting your dink over the lower part of the net and into the widest space on the court.

b. Down the Line Dinks – Down the line dinks are also generally easier shots to hit successfully than crosscourt dinks if you find yourself under pressure. However, be aware that down the line dinks will be going over a higher part of the net, so be sure to give yourself enough room for error.

c. Middle Dinks – Middle dinks are great options to

cause confusion between your opponents, or even cause your opponents to fight over the pickleball. This is especially true when you are playing opponents that are relatively new to playing with each other.

d. Dinks at Your Opponents' Feet – Dinks to your opponents' feet, whether crosscourt, down the line, or down the middle, are great ways to apply pressure because it is difficult for your opponents to aggressively hit a pickleball at or near their feet.

e. Dinks to Backhands – Most pickleball players have weaker backhand shots than forehand shots. So, dinks to players' backhand sides is a common and effective dinking strategy on the pickleball court.

Again, above all, mix it up and remain unpredictable!

6. Exercise Patience – Dink battles require patience in order to be successful. Only attack shots that are attackable. Avoid the urge to attack an unattackable shot from your opponents. Rather, be patient and continue to build the point.

7. Work with Your Partner as a Team – When playing doubles pickleball, you must work with your partner as a team. If you do not work with your partner as a team, then you will not win. To work as a team, there are two critical things that you and your partner will need to do: (a) stay in tandem and (b) communicate. So, move together and talk with your partner to avoid mistakes in the middle of the pickleball court.

Make the most of your dinking, and win more dink battles, with these pickleball dinking strategies!

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CHAPTER 17

HOW TO DEFEAT THE BANGER

The sport of pickleball is becoming faster and there are more drives than ever on the pickleball court. As a result, there are more "bangers" in pickleball, which are players that like to consistently drive the pickleball.

In light of the "rise of the banger" on the pickleball court, it is important to understand how to diffuse and defeat the banger, especially if you are a player that prefers the soft game. So, let's breakdown some strategies on how to defeat a banger in pickleball.

1. Always Be Ready – Bangers like to bang and drive the pickleball. So, always expect the drive from the banger. If the banger decides to mix it up and dink or drop the pickleball, you will have plenty of time to react. So, be ready and anticipate the fast-paced drive.

2. Avoid the Banger – Sometimes, a banger will have a "dinker"—a player that does not drive the pickleball as frequently, but rather prefers the soft game—as a partner on the pickleball court. In this case, to diffuse the banger, hit the pickleball to the dinker. Or, if you are playing two bangers, then hit to the one with a less effective drive.

3. Hit a Deep Return of Serve – With bangers, it is particularly important to keep them back toward the baseline with a deep return of serve. This will require the banger to hit a better, stronger drive, and give you more time to react to the pickleball.

Also, consider hitting your return of serve, so that it has a relatively low bounce off of the ground (which can be accomplished with a slice return), or to the banger's backhand side, which will make for a more difficult drive.

4. Be Wary of Out Balls – When playing bangers, it is important to be wary of shots that are traveling out of bounds. Any shot by the banger that lands out of bounds results in a

winning rally for you and your partner. So, do not give the banger any free opportunities or keep the banger in the rally by hitting the banger's out balls.

5. Be a Wall – Be a wall and block the drive. Good blocks require:

a. Little to no backswing;

b. A loose paddle grip (if you have a tight grip, you will likely hit the pickleball too hard, as a tight grip will cause your paddle to act as a stronger backboard for the pickleball to bounce off of); and

c. Quiet hands.

This will deaden the pickleball and help you to avoid hitting the banger's drives inadvertently beyond the baseline and out of bounds.

Once you have the feel for generally blocking the pickleball, the goal is to block the banger's drives down at your opponents' feet.

6. Keep the Banger Back – Generally speaking, always keep the banger back near the baseline when possible. Do not invite the banger into the transition area or the Kitchen line. If you invite the banger in toward the pickleball net, you are giving the banger an opportunity to move his or her feet in toward the pickleball in an offensive manner, and possibly hit a more aggressive shot than if the banger was back near the baseline.

With that said, there may be opportunities where you could drop or block the pickleball into the Non-Volley Zone. These opportunities would notably be when the banger is not very mobile. In those instances, a short shot would be very difficult

for the immobile banger to get to.

7. Engage the Soft Game – Most pickleball players have either a strong hard game or a strong soft game, and are not likely strong in both areas. As a result, if you are good at dinking, engage the banger in a dink rally and try to make the banger uncomfortable (in other words, make the banger uncomfortable by doing something the banger does not like to do).

If you find yourself across the net from a banger, try these strategies to diffuse and defeat that banger.

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CHAPTER 18

WHAT IS THE "SHAKE AND BAKE"?

The "Shake and Bake" is a nickname for a particular set play or strategy in doubles pickleball that is popular amongst aggressive-style pickleball players. This set play or strategy is when one partner of the serving team in doubles pickleball drives the third shot, while the other partner crashes (in other words, runs to) the pickleball net. The partner that crashes or runs to the pickleball net is trying to put away the fifth shot if the opposing team pops the drive up into the air. This strategy is extremely effective for pickleball players with strong drives and quick footwork, and can put a ton of pressure on opposing pickleball players.

Executing the perfect "Shake and Bake" on the pickleball court takes some practice and also some chemistry and communication with your partner. However, if you can master this strategy, you will certainly have more success on the pickleball courts.

When executing the "Shake and Bake" on the pickleball court, it is important to:

1. First and foremost, have a strong, consistent third shot that is low over the pickleball net. This is because, if the third shot is poor quality (for instance, high above the pickleball net), then the opposing team will be able to hit an aggressive shot targeted at the player that crashed the pickleball net. As a result, the crashing player will likely be in trouble and will be a "sitting duck." The crashing player is placing a lot of trust and confidence in his or her partner to hit a quality third shot.

With that in mind, consider hitting the third shot drive to attack:

a . The middle of the pickleball court;

b. The player that is in motion (for instance, the one that hit the return);

d . Awkward locations like the "chicken wing" location near the paddle-side shoulder.

These spots will help induce a pop-up on the fourth shot.

2. Remember the "Shake and Bake" is a set play. This means that the partner that is not hitting the third shot needs to immediately crash or rush the pickleball net. So, if you are the crashing partner, be sure to move your feet and get to the Non-Volley Zone line as quickly as possible.

With that said, if you are the crashing partner, and as you are running to the Kitchen line, you notice, or your partner alerts you, that the third shot is poor quality, then stop your forward momentum and prepare to be on the defensive.

3. Some pickleball players have tremendous third shots—in particular, third shot drives—while other pickleball players have fast feet and quick reaction at the pickleball net. As a result, it is important to try to set up the "right" partner.

Also, be aware that it is typically easier to be the crashing player when his or her forehand is in the middle of the pickleball court. This is because most players have stronger forehand and more reach with their forehand.

4. Lastly, be sure to communicate with your partner on the pickleball court. Prior to starting a pickleball game, communicate with your partner on situations when you may "Shake and Bake." By communicating in advance of a rally, you will likely avoid any confusion or hesitation on the pickleball court.

If your style of play is to be aggressive on the pickleball courts, go ahead and go for that "Shake and Bake!" A well-executed "Shake and Bake" is one of the best feelings in pickleball.

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CHAPTER 19

SINGLES PICKLEBALL STRATEGY TIPS

Singles pickleball is a very different game than doubles pickleball. In singles pickleball, you are alone on your side of the pickleball court—it is only you versus your opponent. You do not have a partner. This means that you have to rely on yourself—both physically and mentally—to cover the entire court, make every shot, and spot the right strategy on the pickleball court. And, the strategy in singles pickleball is what makes singles pickleball so different than doubles pickleball.

So, what is the strategy in singles pickleball? Whether you are looking to try your first singles pickleball game, or an old pro, these pickleball tips will help you improve your singles pickleball strategy.

1. Consistently Serve Deep in the Pickleball Court – Although a deep serve is an important strategy for doubles pickleball, a big, deep serve is even more important, and absolutely essential, in singles pickleball. You should hit a big, deep serve to push your opponent back beyond the baseline and make for a more difficult longer return for your opponent.

Although a deep serve is the rule of thumb, be sure to avoid hitting your serve out of bounds due to giving yourself too small of a margin for error.

2. Serve Near the "T" on the Pickleball Court – Another singles pickleball strategy tip on the serve is to consider hitting your serve towards the middle of your opponent's side of the pickleball court, but still within the correct service box. In other words, serve near the "T" on the pickleball court (which is the intersection of the baseline and the centerline on the pickleball court). By serving near the "T" on the court, you will reduce the amount of time that it takes you to prepare for your next shot after the serve and you will also cut down on your opponent's ability to hit a lot of angles with the return of serve. Although serving near the "T" on the pickleball court is a good rule of thumb, be sure to mix up the placement on your serves.

3. Consistently Hit a Deep Return of Serve – A big, deep return of serve is important in singles pickleball. The return of serve should be deep in your opponent's side of the pickleball court (in other words, close to the baseline, but within the court). By keeping the pickleball deep in the pickleball court, you will make for a more difficult third shot for your opponent and give yourself more time to react and get in toward the pickleball net.

Also, consider hitting to your opponent's weaker side—oftentimes, the backhand side—and give yourself enough margin for error.

4. Know What to Do When You Hit a Bad Return of Serve – Now, we know a big, deep return of serve is the preferred singles pickleball strategy. However, what if you hit a bad return of serve? What should you do? You generally have two options:

> a. Stay back at the baseline and play defensively to get yourself back in the rally; or
>
> b. Move in, but stop a few feet behind the Non-Volley Zone line in order to prepare for your opponent's third shot. By moving in, you are playing more aggressive and your goal is to reduce the angles created by your poor return of serve.

The correct decision of these two options may depend on your strengths, your opponent's strengths, and, maybe, just how bad your return of serve was.

5. Momentum Is More Important than Space – Momentum is oftentimes more important than open court space. Although open space on the pickleball court is definitely a great spot to hit a shot, sometimes your opponent's momentum is more

important than how much court that he or she leaves open. It is very difficult to stop momentum and change directions. As a result, consider where your opponent's momentum is taking him/her and hit shots in the opposite direction that your opponent's momentum is taking him/her.

6. Track Your Shot on the Pickleball Court – After you hit your shot, follow the flight path of your shot. By following the flight of the pickleball, you will be between your opponent and your side of the pickleball court that is closest to your opponent. In other words, you will be standing in the middle of the shortest distance between your opponent and your side of the pickleball court. This is important because this forces your opponent to hit the pickleball either (a) to the side of the pickleball court that you are already covering, or (b) crosscourt, which is a much more difficult shot for your opponent. So, follow the flight of the pickleball and track your shot to put pressure on your opponent!

7. Come In to the Kitchen Line! – One common theme between doubles pickleball and singles pickleball is that the overwhelming majority of points are won at the Non-Volley Zone line. As a result, it is important to move in and get to the Non-Volley Zone line. This is especially true in singles pickleball because, by coming in to the Kitchen line, you are able to cut off your opponent's angles on the pickleball court.

To note, with this pickleball strategy tip, you may get burned a time or two—meaning that your opponent may win a few rallies with a good passing shot. However, the overwhelming majority of points are won at the Kitchen line, so it is important to put yourself in a position to win by moving in to the Kitchen line.

8. Let Your Opponent Make the Mistake –Sometimes pickleball players—especially singles pickleball players—go for "too much." In other words, they try to hit winning shots.

One strategy in singles pickleball is to put pressure on your opponent and allow your opponent to make the mistakes. Force your opponent to make a bad shot by going for a "winner," rather than making those mistakes yourself.

9. Up Your Cardio! – Singles pickleball is a one-yard sprint to each shot, as you are the only one on your side of the pickleball court. Sometimes, the player that wins in singles pickleball is simply the player that can last the longest on the pickleball court! You do not want to lose a singles pickleball game just because you are too tired to carry on. Be sure to work on your cardio and endurance off the court, so you can play better pickleball on the court.

Although singles pickleball is less common than doubles pickleball, it is just as loved. And, with these strategy tips, you will be on your way to love it even more.

About Pickler

Pickler is a pickleball content and media brand that was launched in November 2017 and can be found online at ThePickler.com. Pickler's mission is to promote the sport of pickleball and inspire others to play pickleball. Pickler also strives to help pickleball players improve their game and play their best pickleball, whether it is (1) through Pickler's free pickleball newsletter, blogs, and podcast; (2) through Pickler's pickleball videos and e-books that focus on every aspect of the sport; (3) by helping pickleball players show off their love of pickleball with some Pickler gear; or (4) by otherwise promoting and growing the game.

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About USA Pickleball

The USA Pickleball Association (known as USA Pickleball) is a non-profit 501(c)(3) that was established in 2005 to further the advancement of the sport on a national level. As the official governing body of pickleball in the United States, USA Pickleball promotes the growth of pickleball by maintaining the rules, setting player ratings, advancing the sport through its national network of 2,000+ ambassadors, and sanctioning tournaments. Since 2013, USA Pickleball's membership has grown 1,250%, to over 54,000.

More information can be found at USAPickleball.org.

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HOW TO PLAY PICKLEBALL

TIPS TO PLAY BETTER PICKLEBALL

STACIE TOWNSEND IS A PICKLEBALL ENTHUSIAST AND FOUNDER OF PICKLER. SHE IS ALSO A PARTNER AT HER LAW FIRM, WHERE SHE SPECIALIZES IN BUSINESS LAW FOR ENTREPRENEURIAL AND TECHNOLOGY COMPANIES, AS WELL AS BUYING AND SELLING BUSINESSES AND OTHER COMPLEX TRANSACTIONS.

BEFORE FINDING PICKLEBALL IN 2017, STACIE WAS A PROFESSIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL SOFTBALL PLAYER, WHO, AFTER PLAYING FOR THE GREAT BRITAIN NATIONAL SOFTBALL TEAM FOR EIGHT YEARS AND PLAYING AT THE COLLEGIATE LEVEL FOR THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT EL PASO (UTEP), WAS INDUCTED TO BOTH THE BRITISH SOFTBALL FEDERATION HALL OF FAME AND THE UTEP ATHLETICS HALL OF FAME. SHE ALSO HAD HER NUMBER RETIRED FOR UTEP SOFTBALL AND WAS NAMED TO THE ALL-WORLD SOFTBALL TEAM AFTER THE 2012 WORLD CHAMPIONSHIPS.

STACIE CONTINUES HER COMPETITIVE ATHLETIC CAREER ON THE PICKLEBALL COURTS, AS SHE HAS WON GOLD MEDALS AT THE USA PICKLEBALL NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIPS AND US OPEN PICKLEBALL CHAMPIONSHIPS. STACIE STRIVES TO CONTINUE HER PICKLEBALL JOURNEY, AND, ABOVE ALL, SPREAD, GROW, AND FURTHER THE SPORT OF PICKLEBALL THAT HAS CAPTURED HER HEART IN RECENT YEARS.

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