

P I C K L E B A L L

T I P B I T S

Y E A R T H R E E

PICKLEBALL

TIPBITS

YEAR THREE

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FOREWORD

If you've had a chance to read one of our first publications, TIPBITS YEAR ONE or YEAR TWO, then you would know that these publications are the result of being encouraged by PB leaders in our community to *give back* to the sport, and then subsequently, recognizing that *giving back* can be a (better) way of life...

In other words, it's become even more evident to us that...
“when you *give back* you *get back* more than you *give back*”!

TIPBITS publications are provided to you and others as a *gift* and we hope that YOU too will feel the reward you get from *giving back* in some/anyway to others, especially those in need!

We encourage you, actually, we challenge you, to find your own way to *give back*...use your own resources, your own abilities or your own time to *give back*...some HOW!

We've created a website, TIPBITS.ORG, that presents its readers with numerous options to do just that, *give back*... It provides a description of options by category and a link to them...should you be unfamiliar with them or question their effectiveness, there is also a link to Navigator, a website whose sole purpose is to evaluate and critique each charity...

Or you may already know someone right now who is in need...don't put it off, don't waste another day...they can be your family, your friends, your neighbors or anyone in need...make it YOUR goal today...that's our goal...

“HELPING OTHERS HELP OTHERS”

...and to spark that same feeling in you to try it yourself!

So thank you for *giving back*!

See HOW to *give back* (or get books/articles) at TIPBITS.ORG!

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TIPBITS #105

THE YIPS in PICKLEBALL(1 of 2)

The YIPS is defined as a condition that causes **involuntary muscle contractions** while performing a specific task. The YIPS is most commonly associated with a golfer's putting stroke...however the YIPS can and does affect many other athletes and professionals that perform frequent repetitive motions...

CAUSES...Several causes for the YIPS are suggested...sometimes they are associated with performance anxiety...if this is the case, some players become so anxious and self-focused that their ability to execute is seriously impaired(choking is an extreme form of performance anxiety)... others suggest the cause is the result of overuse of certain muscle groups and yet others suggest it may be a form of “focal dystonia”, which is a neurological dysfunction affecting specific muscles...if, in fact, YIPS is determined to be caused by dystonia, the explanation becomes far more complicated then this article could hope to address...

SOLUTIONS/CURES...Information available for the remedy of YIPS lend themselves almost exclusively to the putting stroke in golf...and the most generic solution is to change something about the way the affected task(the putting stroke) is performed...

This can be done by changing the Mechanics or the Equipment...in golf, changing the Mechanics of the grip offers numerous solutions; changing from hitting right handed to left handed, hitting cross handed(reversing the position of the hands) and even separating the hands...all these approaches change the dynamics of the muscles being used and can correct the problem IF the muscle groups or dystonia are the source of the problem...similarly, changing the Equipment used may also eliminate the issue...various lengths of putters are now available and have been used successfully...different contours and (larger) grips sizes also provide a solution...

If the cause is anxiety and changes to Mechanics and Equipment are ineffective, then Mental Exercises such as relaxation,

visualization or positive thinking can help increase concentration and ease the fear of the YIPS...

FREQUENCY...no small problem...according to the studies conducted by the Mayo Clinic, the YIPS affects between one-quarter and one-half of all **mature** golfers and from one-third to one-half of all **serious** golfers have experienced the YIPS...

READER FEEDBACK REQUESTED...

Next time, we will discuss YIPS in Pickleball and some notable solutions BUT...

You, no doubt know of someone or have experienced the YIPS for yourself AND...

We'd like to hear from you so that we might add your input/insights into the next article...

TIPBITS #106

THE YIPS in PICKLEBALL(2 of 2)

The YIPS is defined as a condition that causes **involuntary muscle contractions** while performing a specific task. The YIPS is most commonly associated with a golfer's putting stroke...however the YIPS can and does affect many other athletes and professionals that perform frequent repetitive motions...AND in Pickleball, it starts with the Service Stroke and can progress to other shots/strokes if left unaddressed...

We last suggested that the most common CAUSES for all forms of the YIPS were performance anxiety, overuse of certain muscle groups and focal dystonia, a neurological dysfunction affecting select muscle groups...for the vast majority of the cases responding, anxiety and neurological dysfunction were the common thread, not overuse!...the muscle groups that affect the Serve are those that control the wrist and forearm... AND, finally, anxiety, if not the initial cause, becomes the primary cause of the YIPS if allowed to continue...

Just like the causes, the SOLUTIONS are varied since NO ONE SOLUTION works for everyone...however, there are some very common suggestions that appear over and over...first, the importance of dealing with the issue ASAP...that getting off to the side, getting onto a practice court and working on an alternative stroke(changing the Mechanics or Mental Exercises)...this usually means getting back to the basics of the Serve...visualizing the stroke's basic motion that mimics a bowling motion, a horseshoe toss or most simply, an under hand toss of a ball over the net...this last visualization should also be done literally but without a paddle...repeat this motion successfully ad infinitum, then do it with the paddle...

Still got issues...try these...a long backswing, stiff and extended arm, firm wrist, soft grip, place one or two fingers down the back of the paddle for support, release the ball much earlier in the stroke and UP, into the air more but let the ball drop and hit it closer to the ground, focus on the ball and nothing else, AND, if you find the

Serve always going just one way or the other, change your stance accordingly, and finally, add a much longer follow through...if all else fails, learn to hit your serve with the backhand stroke...this last suggestion should be strongly considered since you will never know when a case of the YIPS will re-occur...best to be prepared with some sort of alternative!!!

As to Equipment, the USAPA frowns on too much variance in paddles...but one option that will limit wrist movement(often the culprit producing the involuntary contraction) is a larger grip...the larger the grip, the less likely the wrist will be used during the stroke...further, the larger the grip, the less effort required to hold on and subsequently, less muscle fatigue...and the converse is also true!!!

Controlling the wrist movement may also be enhanced by another piece of Equipment, a wrist support, something similar to that used by bowlers or by folks suffering from carpal tunnel syndrome...not an expensive option, either...

In any event, deal with the YIPS immediately and aggressively...don't let it become an anxiety issue!

TIPBITS #107

THE 5TH SHOT

Funny name?...we are talking about 2 shots after the infamous Third Shot...if you were to describe the Classic Pickleball point, it would probably go something like this...1)hit a deep Serve, 2)hit a deep Return and get to the net, 3)hit a Third Shot drop and move to the net, 4)play out the point at the net...and this works...and it's truly Percentage Pickleball...BUT no mention of the Fifth Shot!

Of course, this classic description is not always the way the point plays out, though, either **by design** or because of circumstances **beyond your control**...LIKE, maybe the Serve is so effective you can't hit a decent Return, much less get to the net...OR, the Return is so effective you're scrambling just to put the ball in play, much less hit an effective Third Shot drop...these are circumstances **beyond your control**...

You can see how a point might become unpredictable when it starts out **beyond your control**...but being forced to veer from your game plan JUST happens...

Some players feel that this Classic Percentage Pickleball scenario may need to be altered, **by design**, to give themselves at least an equal or better chance to win the point...But as a caution, any and all alternative approaches that are not based on the consensus that getting to the net is imperative may not keep the winning percentages on their side...

Here is one “**by design**” scenario that offers some very good potential as an alternative...we've often discussed altering a safe, deep and, well placed Serve and/or Return with a more aggressive version, hoping to force a weak shot, an error or even an outright winner...BUT we have never discussed this sort of thinking for the Third Shot...yes, maybe there has been some discussion about the possibility that a hard drive **from the baseline** may have some potential hit down the middle or(heaven forbid), down the line...but these sort of Third Shot options have never been given much credence...until now!

By design, you may feel that hitting an effective Third Shot drop from the baseline is just not in the “cards” for you(at least not today OR against these opponents)...whatever the reason, you have decided to drive your Third Shot in hopes that the opponent's return will give you a better chance to hit an easier drop shot on your **Fifth Shot**, getting you to the net, just a couple of shots later...the risk, the opponent angles off your drive for an easy winner...BUT if he or she doesn't have a shot that can hurt you or they return your drive midcourt or with less pace, you are now in a much better position to take the net because your **(Fifth Shot)** drop is now going to be hit under your terms...and should be a whole lot easier to make!

Try this option to give yourself an easier path to getting to the net!

TIPBITS #108

FOURTH SHOT OPTIONS

Previously, we talked about the Serving team using a little different approach in order to advance to the net..it was suggested that a Fifth Shot replace the Third Shot...that is, in lieu of hitting a soft Third Shot drop shot on the Third Shot, try hitting a firm drive in hopes of setting up a much easier soft drop shot for the Fifth Shot...this certainly makes sense, it just postpones your trip to the net a little longer...of course, that's exactly the goal of your opponents(the Returning team), to delay your approach to the net for as long as possible...

Let's discuss this a bit...as the Returning team, you've received the Serve, returned it successfully and you are now BOTH at the net awaiting the Serving team's reply...their Third Shot options; Lob over your heads, drive the ball past you or hit a soft drop shot at your feet...while it's the hardest shot(to make) in the game, the Serving team MUST get on equal terms with the Returning team ASAP, so their shot of choice normally is to hit the Third Shot soft drop and get to the net...your goal, keep them away from the net, maintaining your distinct advantage for winning the point...

If the Serving team hits anything but the most successful soft Third Shot drop, you must make every effort to keep them back, basically by hitting deep AND forceful shots...either solid volleys off their shots that are above the net or deep smashes(overheads) off their attempts to Lob...in either case, the goal is NOT to win the point with this shot...only to keep them back in hopes that their next shot provides you with a put away opportunity...then, of course, you know what to do...this describes the most common response to the Serving team's Third Shot options...

But suppose they have chosen, **by design**, to drive their Third Shot and this is becoming a habit...the common response described above will pretty much counter this approach unless their drives become overwhelming...before this happens, try taking a more aggressive approach of your own...in other words, try winning the point right here and now...HOW?

Unless you have inadvertently hit your Return way to shallow, the Serving team is hitting their Third Shot drive from very near the baseline...your response could simply be a well placed drop shot of your own, just over the net and either hit forward slightly or angled in one direction or the other(preferably to the deeper player's side or the player who just hit the drive)...this shot is almost always impossible to get or if it is reached, only a feeble shot can be expected...

This shot strategy can(and should) be used against all of the other Third Shots...just do not become too predictable, because a less than successful shot will only draw the Serving team in, the exact opposite of your game plan...

Learning this shot IS going to require lots of practice...but once mastered, the results will more than pay for the time spent...Why not give this **FOURTH SHOT OPTION** a try?

TIPBITS #109

YOUR TURN?

Has Pickleball been a positive influence for you...more good than bad...met a new friend or two...if you're reading this, it almost seems impossible for you to say “no” to any of those questions...if that IS the case, why not consider giving back to the sport that's been of so much value to you?

Here is something EVERYONE can do, regardless of your skill level or years of experience...you can learn to be a referee...YES, anyone who simply knows the basics rules of the game CAN be a referee...YES, some of the best referees are beginner or intermediate players, guys and gals...being a referee will not only benefit you but will also benefit your local tournament organizers...there's just never enough referees at Tournaments that require them...

Learning to be a referee can actually be a do-it-yourself project...some referees don't go to classes or training clinics, they merely watch a refereed match and learn the procedure...this might not work for everyone(it does for some) but, if you still like the do-it-yourself approach, check out the volumes of referee insights on the USAPA website...you can print your own official score sheet, read the rules book(that'll keep you busy), and watch any number of videos on the subject...you'll get the idea!

Now, this is not to say you shouldn't take advantage of any referee clinic made available to you...they're usually free and you get to ask questions too..this is clearly your best option...but, even after the clinic, you'll need to gather SOME experience...

And that's true, regardless of the method you use to learn about the referee's responsibilities...to become a top notch referee, you'll need to try it for yourself...for starters, just ask a foursome where you play if you can “ref” there match...do a few and you'll get more and more comfortable...then, when the next call goes out for referees, **raise your hand and volunteer**...this does NOT mean that you will be thrown into the fire, cold and without tournament

experience...simply ask to “shadow” a few matches first...just stand beside or behind an experienced referee and quietly mimic his/her actions...you'll soon become plenty comfortable with the process and then you can try a match or two of your own, this time with that experienced referee watching/assisting you...SIMPLE!

Why not try this simple way to start giving back to the game?...you'll be doing yourself and others a favor..Isn't it YOUR TURN?

Actually, whenever you *give back* you *get back* more than you *give back*!

TIPBITS #110

TIME TO RECAP

As we have done after each multiple of 9 TIPBITS, it seems appropriate to continue to provide a review of the last 9...the rationale now is the same as it was then...many of the topics presented need to be made a part of every day play or simply warrant repeating...so, here goes...

#101 A 30 Minute Lesson..learn from playing not to lose

#102 Service Ace or Winner...take a more aggressive approach to hitting your Serve

#103 Back to Basics or The Big Three...watch the ball, bend your knees and move your feet

#104 Why Wear Protective Eyewear...why you should wear protective eyewear and some options

#105 The YIPS in Pickleball(1 of 2)...what it is and some solutions/cures

#106 The YIPS in Pickleball(2 of 2)...more solutions plus equipment changes that help

#107 The Fifth Shot...if you can't make an effective Third Shot, try this approach

#108 Fourth Shot Options...keep them back OR drop and angle it short

#109 Your Turn?...if you've benefited from Pickleball, why not give back by being a referee

Finally...Percentage Pickleball is not making mistakes... never over hitting, being under control, being patient and being in the right place at the right time... Percentage Pickleball, it's all about putting the percentages, the overwhelming likelihood that you will be successful, on your side!!!

TIPBITS #111

COURTESY AND SAFETY

Ever notice the spelling of “courtesy”?...it begins with “court”, where we play our game...it's part of our game...showing respect for others!!!

Where does courtesy start?...at home of course, but when you leave home to play Pickleball, it starts on the court...just as soon as you arrive...

Courtesy starts when you reach the gate..it means, you look to see no one is playing on the court by the gate...it means, if they're playing you wait until the point is over to open the gate...

It continues when you enter through the gate, when you head to the waiting area...that means you don't walk alongside OR behind a court when a point is being played...ever!

It continues when you're heading to your court and you need to pass by active courts...you NEVER walk alongside OR behind a court when a point is being played, either...you WAIT until the point is over...don't be the reason someone has to call a “let”!

Courtesy continues when you call the score...true, you don't need to wait until everyone is ready, it's just “common” courtesy that you do...and say that score loud and clear, all 3 components...it's the rule!

And courtesy and the rules go a lot further together as well...the rules say you call the balls on your side...they say you must see them CLEARLY in order to call them a”out”...that's common courtesy and its the rule...they also say that if you and your partner disagree on the call, the call goes in your opponents favor..that's the rule...and finally, if you can't make the call, you must ask your opponents and their call is final...that's the rule, too!

And now there's the foot fault call...it can now be called by either team...another time to be courteous, with a capital “C”!

Where does courtesy end and safety begin...well, they overlap! Walking behind or beside a court with active play is both discourteous as well as dangerous...NOT calling a ball entering your court is the same, dangerous and discourteous...call that errant ball loud and clear and immediately!

And while we're on safety, keep a couple of these thoughts in mind as well...get some court shoes if you don't have them...don't wear running shoes, you're more likely to stumble...

And stumbling you will if you resort to the NUMBER ONE reason for a fall..."back pedaling"...never do that on the court, always turn around and run forward...you wont stumble AND you'll get there faster!

Finally, consider those safety glasses discussed earlier...

Courtesy is showing respect for others...Safety is just plain smart...they're both part of our game!

TIPBITS #112

WELCOME!!!

Our previous article on Courtesy and Safety generated some feedback...we welcome feedback, it's always great and thank you for it!

A few folks shared some detailed experiences and others made their points in a very simple and pointed way...it seems that there may be two relatively distinct camps among us...***which one are you in?***

Following is a brief synopsis of a not so uncommon situation...

“a complaint was recently received from a couple who were eager to learn the game of Pickleball...they showed up to play but were unable to get onto a court...if our main goal is to promote the game, let's not turn anyone down...this is how the growth of Pickleball works...we do have some 4.0-4.5 players which means folks are learning new skills, but let's not turn people away from playing when they show up to learn the game...there are some people who wish not to purchase equipment until they have learned the game and see if it's a game for them...all of us were the same way...please, if someone wants to learn the game, make sure they are able to use some equipment and get some assistance...if people are turned down, then we have not done our job...***please be considerate to those in need***...and finally, if anyone would like to help others learn the game on a somewhat larger scale, ***consider volunteering your time to your Club to do just that***”

and then this message from someone who WAS on one end and IS now on the other...

“I live in Kentucky, across the river from Randy's home town...Randy gave my good friend Bob a copy of TIPBITS and Bob shared it with me...Bob started PB in our area about 18 months ago....I'd experienced a life threatening and life changing work accident in 2013...after extensive therapy and rehab, while touring my local YMCA, I was invited by Bob to give PB a try...I'm 57 and

I started playing in 2014 and was quickly hooked...I'm now a 3.5 rank and love studying, practicing, and the competitiveness of PB, ***but the fellowship of PB is right at the top of the list...***I've had the privilege of playing with some great players as well and Randy is always giving us tips to improve our game...we schedule play 5 days a week, indoors & outdoors, and I just started ***giving beginner lessons once a week!***"

and finally, the feedback most succinct and to the point about the previous article on Court Courtesy...

"All these are great but welcoming all and accepting everyone is the most Courteous!"

TIPBITS #113

BROUGHT YOUR KNIFE?

You may have heard the expression “Don't Bring a Knife to a Gunfight”...and you may have felt that way if you've ever been involved in a no-win situation at the net, trading blows in a rapid fire exchange only to come out second best the majority of the time...not the way to win a match...if you don't win the majority of these duels, you won't win the match...

It's a simple fact...most points are decided by volleys, one way or the other!!!

So, if that describes your game, perhaps you're playing against players that are just that much better than you and you should accept the inevitable results...of course you wouldn't be reading this article if that was/is your philosophy...

So what options do you have?...let's examine the situation...aside from simply being out gunned, what other factors are involved?...your opponents are better than you, your opponent hits with more pace and control, and your opponents are either younger than you or have quicker hands or all of the above...that pretty much covers most situations...what should you do about all this??

You could start by not getting involved in these situations, by avoiding them at all costs...more specifically, you do not want to EVER be the one that initiates a likely rapid fire gun fight...pick your battles, very carefully...

One example is trying to drive your baseline/midcourt shot through your opponents...simple solution here...just don't do it...don't be stubborn and accept the situation...try not to focus on the one great shot you did hit past them or caught them by surprise...that was/is not percentage pickleball...

Another example...you're in a soft game rally...as Tim Nelson would suggest, “don't go for the 80% shot, but wait for the 90% shot”...in other words don't go for that winner prematurely...wait

wait wait...and in the meantime be certain your soft game is sharp, that is, don't give those gunslingers the first (or any) chance to shoot...and when you've been given that 90% shot, "take it and make it!"

Another option...as soon as absolutely possible during a rapid fire exchange, take (all) the pace off the ball and drop it back into the NVZ just over the net...in other words, get out of the duel ASAP...

Remedies for having slower reaction times or simply being older are much harder to find...don't know of any pills just yet to help there...BUT you could consider one equipment change that might buy you some ammo...a paddle that is simply lighter than the one you're currently using will increase your hand speed(aka, reaction time) ...you'll clearly be able to react more quickly and get the paddle onto the ball more often...unfortunately, a lighter paddle will probably also reduce the pace you can apply to the ball(at least for the same amount of effort that you had to expend with your other paddle)...try to find a paddle that has proven better pop AND is lighter as well...

Getting as good as better players is not going to be easy...the best solution here is plenty of practice...try practicing your rapid fire volley exchanges with as many players as you can...have your partner(s) hit harder and harder...AND get closer and closer...

If you have access to a ball machine, stand at the NVZ line and have the machine pepper you with volleys from the shortest distance, pace and rate that you can handle...then move it closer...and closer!!!

So, the next time you get into a gunfight(on the court), you'll be ready with your MAGNUM 44!!!

TIPBITS #114

GUNFIGHT AT THE OK CORRAL

Yup, a movie patterned after a real life happening...the Earp's, Doc Holliday and some good and bad men, shooting it out in the wild west(which in real life only took some 30 seconds and took place at very close range)...it conjures up some very real images of battles on the PB courts!

Previously, we discussed what some players may experience when they begin trading blows in a rapid fire exchange, only to come out second best the majority of the time...they learned the hard way that you can't "Bring a Knife to a Gunfight"...they end up losing the majority of these duels at the net or even before they get to the net...

This dilemma is never more apparent than at a tournament, when the pressure is on to go for your shot or go for a winner long before its time...and, yes, if you watch the top players playing their soft games, all four at the net, it seems they are being very patient, just waiting for that perfect ball...then, bang!
Sometimes it works, sometimes it doesn't...but that approach works more often than not...

What are other players, of different levels, doing?...many mimic the top players, at least for a while...others just don't bother...often, in these soft exchanges at the net, many players will "shoot" early and with great "explosive" power...sometimes it works, sometimes it doesn't...unfortunately, this approach works less often than desirable...

In their defense, however, the early "shot" and/or the "explosive" power will have the benefit of the element of surprise(given that ball remains in play) and/or the mere explosive power will be overwhelming(again assuming the ball remains in play) that the point ends in their favor...surprise?!

Then there are players who just love to blister the ball ASAP, regardless of their position on the court or the "caliber" of their

opponents and take their chances...yet, always hitting the soft third shot may lose effectiveness...nothing wrong with some variety(don't be predictable)...still, you probably only have a 50/50 chance at winning the point with this “shotgun” approach!

But, for some, it's not so much about the results but more about the effort...

After all, the game is about enjoyment and exercise...about having fun with some old or new friends...

So, Play it Your Way, it's OK!

TIPBITS #115

CAN SIMON HELP?

You may remember the name SIMON from an earlier discussion about a new device that might revolutionize developing new and consistent shots for your PB game...SIMON is the name of the first real ball machine introduced specifically for Pickleball...while it's no where near as sophisticated as the many other ball machines on the market(for other sports), it works just fine for the majority of players...

Ball machines that parallel SIMON in tennis have been around for decades...and there are a multitude of manufacturers and a variety of designs...SIMON's basic design parallels the most popular and most reliable of the tennis ball machines...

Tennis coaches, tennis academies, teaching professionals and most tennis facilities all use or offer ball machines for their students and customers...in its simplest form, it provides its user with the ability to practice a specific shot or stroke for just as long as they'd like...whether its a handful of balls or hundreds...and this can be done without the need for a hitting partner...in other words, you can use it by yourself whenever you like...other than having a skilled teaching Pro feeding you hundreds of balls in the exact same position(probably not for free), what better way to improve a stroke...this is the way top players get to be top players...by hitting the same stroke/shot over and over again until they can do it in their sleep...this mentality applies to Pickleball in the exact same way as it does in tennis...

So, can you go to your local favorite PB spot and rent a PB ball machine?...well not yet...but these future options are likely not so far away...perhaps your local PB club has set aside funds for club benefits and could be your source...maybe some of the local municipalities that offer indoor or outdoor PB facilities might purchase SIMON(these machines require virtually no maintenance and last for years...easily justifiable financially)...perhaps your local private athletic clubs might offer the same benefit...it's a win win for everyone...

Can't wait...if you have the resources, you could certainly buy your own and have unlimited access and use...if that's beyond your reach or need, consider the co-op approach..many groups have been formed that have purchased SIMON together, essentially dividing the cost among themselves..both sharing the expense and its use(a half dozen players would pay less than \$200 each)...their scheme works like this...the first user stores the machine until one of the other co-op members wants to use it...they pick it up, use it and store it until the next person wants to use it...simple!

How do you get that co-op together?..contact your local club and send out an email to their members, put it on their website or contact one of your USAPA Ambassadors and ask them to spread the word...what are you waiting for?

TIPBITS #116

CAN SOMEONE HELP SIMON?

Previously, we discussed the value of the ball machine, SIMON...it could single-handedly change your game by providing you with your own personal drill sergeant to learn and/or perfect strokes and shots...AND you don't need a hitting partner...it's a great tool and worthy of consideration...

But, picking up all those balls...back breaking and time consuming, for sure...yes, you could bring a box or even buy a basket, maybe a shovel or a scoop...or a buddy...but consider this...

An enterprising fellow decided to make life a little easier for players who felt that there must be a better way...so the “original pickleball pic” was invented...while it's constantly being refined, it's exactly what's needed to load and reload your ball machine in the least amount of time AND effort...

With “the pickleball pic”, you don't just pick up 2 or 3 balls at a time, you can collect up to 35 with the “original” model...and the latest model will pick up 65 balls...that will get you back hitting balls just that much quicker..after all, the whole idea behind using a ball machine is to hit as many balls as possible so that you can more quickly master that shot/stroke...

Check out “the pickleball pic” on the link below...

<http://www.pickleballpic.com>

You might even give them a call, tell them you read about “the pickleball pic” in a TIPBITS article and see if there may be a discount available to you...

Either way, it's a great HELP for SIMON and you as well...

TIPBITS #117

INSIGHTS FROM A NATIONAL CHAMPION

(Presenting some Background and Insights from the Best Players in the Country)

CAROL LINDOW

Where were you born? I was born in Minneapolis, Mn and have spent most of my life here. I now spend the winters at Palm Creek in Casa Grande, AZ. I was a Physical Education and Health teacher in Prior Lake, MN for my entire career.

Did you play other sports? I love all racket sports but especially tennis, pickleball and platform tennis. I also love to golf, ski, bike, swim. I basically love activity (except running , unless I am being chased). I played field hockey and tennis in college.

Do you remember where and when you first played PB? I started playing pickleball 3 years ago because I wanted to find another sport I could play in the winter now that I was retired. I had always taught pickleball in my high school classes but had no idea how much fun it would be with the proper equipment and good competition. We taught it as a "filler" because we needed another indoor winter sport for our students and we already had badminton lines/ nets in place that we could use for pickleball.

What is your favorite shot and why? I feel that having a wide variety of shots is the key. I don't want to be predictable and I like trying to take away my opponents type of game style with various shots that can throw them off. I feel being consistent and keeping the ball in play (not giving away "free points") is the key to success in pickleball. I try to keep a calm disposition and not get too upset or frustrated when my opponents get "on a roll". When I get down in the game, I really try to concentrate harder to get the momentum back in our court and believe that we can still win the game or match no matter what the score might be. So much of this game is "mental" ! I also enjoy "setting" up the point for the offensive angle smash shot which I would say is my favorite shot.

What paddle(s) do you currently use? I just switched to the Manta Custom Pro paddle. I had been successful with the Legacy but tried the Manta paddle in Palm Creek during a tournament and loved the control and feel I got with it and have been using and winning with it ever since. It is very durable, doesn't break down, has nice pop when I need power but most of all, it gives me a consistent 3rd shot and great touch. I am now a Manta representative and sell their brand of paddles.

Do you have a shot you practice or a drill you like? As a teacher I definitely would promote practicing skills with specific drills!! If I were to pick which drills I feel are the most helpful, it definitely would be 3rd shot drills from the baseline and quick "pepper" volleys from the kitchen line aimed specifically at the body.

Do you have a warm up routine? My warm up routine is pretty basic: dinking, pepper volleys, 3rd shots, drives at the net, baseline ground strokes, serves; then lets play and have fun.

Would you care to add anything(suggestions/comments) you'd like the readers to hear? The real key to success in pickleball is having a great partner that complements your game.

TIPBITS #118

INSIGHTS FROM A NATIONAL CHAMPION

(Presenting some Background and Insights from the Best Players in the Country)

JACKIE FAEGRE

Where were you born? I was born in Great Falls, Montana.

Did you play other sports? I've played competitive tennis for many years and competed at a national level. I have also loved to run long distances and qualified and ran the Boston Marathon twice.

Do you remember where and when you first played PB? I first played pickleball at Champions Hall three years ago and was hooked on it from the start.

What is your favorite shot and why? My favorite shot is my backhand volley.

What paddle(s) do you currently use? My favorite paddle is the Venom, but I'm also playing with the Tempest by Paddletek.

Do you have a shot you practice or a drill you like? My favorite drill is to dink back and fourth until a ball gets a little too high and the fireworks start. It makes you really work on keeping the ball low and at your opponents feet and also improves your reflexes when the ball comes at you hard.

What do you think is the most important shot in pickleball? I think the most important shot in pickleball is the return of serve. If you miss it, it's an easy point for your opponent and if you hit it short, it gives the other team a chance to get into the net. It just sets the tone for the whole point. A deep return gives you a chance to get into the net, where most all of the points are scored.

Do you have a warm up routine? I like to start slow, hitting

dinks, but hitting deep grounds strokes is what really works for me.

Would you care to add anything(suggestions/comments) you'd like the readers to hear? What an awesome game pickleball is and I feel so fortunate to have it in my life!!

TIPBITS #119

WHAT'S YOUR TAKE AWAY(2 OF 2)?

Our area has been privy to a number of high level tournaments of late, both National and Local, USAPA sanctioned and otherwise...most had a number of factors in common...a ton of participants(many highly qualified), they came from almost everywhere, there were lots of observers and plenty of action...players of all skill levels and all ages; mens, womens and mixed doubles, even singles...whether you played or not, you saw a lot...whether you medaled or you were two and out, you still saw a lot...

BUT, if you played...did you walk away just one game short of moving on, one game short of a medal, or one game short of the gold?...if so, ...

The question is..."What did you learn from all this?"...

Clearly, it's going to be different for everyone...but, simply because there were so many participants, you saw many, many different techniques, different strategies, different strokes and different shots...certainly, some good, some great and some, maybe not so good ("what not to do!")...

Still, the point remains...What was your take away?...

Win or lose, you always can come away with something that will help you next time...that is, of course, if you take the time to go over just what it was that stood out for you...was it something YOU didn't do? Something someone did TO you? Or just something you observed? Where else could you get such an opportunity ?...here was a chance to see and learn from literally hundreds of matches and players, almost all at one time...

What technique did you observe that was obviously effective?

What strategy of play was used that produced winning results?

What stroke was often overwhelming?

What shot or placement created an opening or was an outright winner?

Recalling these observations, why not incorporate them into your game...wouldn't it be great if you could walk away(take away) just one thing that would make your game just that little bit better?...

And don't stop there..whenever you see something that could benefit your game, add it to yours...

Time to Get Started!!!

TIPBITS #120

TIME TO RECAP

As we have done after each multiple of 9 TIPBITS, it still seems appropriate to continue to provide a review of the last 9...the rationale now is the same as it was then...many of the topics presented need to be made a part of every day play or simply warrant repeating...so, here goes...

#111 Courtesy and Safety...Some basic etiquette for manners on the court

#112 Welcome...Being courteous on the court really means welcoming all and accepting everyone

#113 Brought Your Knife?...What to do if you're outgunned on the court

#114 Gunfight at the OK Corral...It's OK to play YOUR own way...it's all about having fun

#115 Can SIMON Help?...Yes and here's how to get a ball machine for you and others

#116 Can Someone Help SIMON?...Streamline your ball machine practice with the Pickleball PIC

#117 Insights from a National Champion-Carol Lindow...Have a wide variety of shots

#118 Insights from a National Champion-Jackie Faegre...Most important shot is the Return of Serve

#119 What's Your Take Away(2 of 2)?...Learning by watching and Learning by doing

Finally...Percentage Pickleball is not making mistakes... never over hitting, being under control, being patient and being in the right place at the right time... Percentage Pickleball, it's all about putting the percentages, the overwhelming likelihood that you will be successful, on your side!!!

TIPBITS #121

RECAPPING INSIGHTS

A few articles back, we shared some insights from two National Champions, Carol Lindow and Jackie Faegre, that have joined forces to claim several Women's Doubles National Championships...further, they have achieved similar results with their respective partners in Mixed Doubles, as well...it seems appropriate to re-iterate a few of their comments, putting more emphasis on some of them...

Carol seems to have been one up on many entry-level Pickleball players, having played sports her entire life, and, even more specifically, a number of different racket sports...take that one step further, she taught Pickleball in High School before taking it more seriously...that's what you call a head start...perhaps all this experience is what has given Carol such a command of the sport in such short order...one need merely watch her play one time to get that sense of her grasp of the game...

all this background is what makes her comments of so much value...when asked the following question...

What is your favorite shot and why?

her answer was... “I feel that having a wide variety of shots is the key. I don't want to be predictable and I like trying to take away my opponents type of game style with various shots that can throw them off.”...interesting...in an earlier Insight article, Marc Bock suggested having “a full Quiver” of shots made his game far more effective...of course, neither one of these players just happened upon these shots...and they didn't just start hitting them one day...so, we shouldn't expect them to come to us easily, either...sounds like practice time?!

Carol goes on to add this comment...” I feel being consistent and keeping the ball in play (not giving away "free points") is the key to success in Pickleball.”

...that statement is a great lead-in to some of Jackie's comments..

Jackie, of course, is a very talented athlete..having spent much of her adult life playing tennis at the highest level in venues across the country, and being so light of foot(you don't qualify for the Boston Marathon by being your every day runner...you've got to have something special), doesn't hurt either...

So when Jackie was asked this question...

What do you think is the most important shot in Pickleball?

Her answer was..."I think the most important shot in Pickleball is the return of serve. If you miss it, it's an easy point for your opponent and if you hit it short, it gives the other team a chance to get into the net. It just sets the tone for the whole point. A deep return gives you a chance to get into the net, where most all of the points are scored."...

This is an incredibly succinct series of statements...take just a few minutes to read each phrase, let it sink in and then move on to the next...we'll talk about this in more detail, soon...but for now, you just can't go wrong if you apply each phrase to your return...**and be consistent!**

TIPBITS #122

THE WORST MISTAKE

In a previous article (#75), the Seven Deadly Sins in Pickleball were presented...here it was suggested that the worst sin was to make a mistake(error) on an easy shot...that still makes sense...

Yet, when considering Jackie Faegre's comment about the Most Important Shot in Pickleball...that, in fact, the most important shot is the Return, because(again) in her words...

”if you miss it, it's an easy point for your opponent and if you hit it short, it gives the other team a chance to get into the net”...and “ a deep Return gives you a chance to get into the net, where most all of the points are scored!”...

Jackie's comments are in line with the majority of the Seven Sins, including #2, Never miss your Return, #3 Always follow your Return to the Net, #4 Never hit a short Return and #7 Never make a mistake on an easy shot...these ALL substantiate the importance of the Return!

So, what is the Worst Mistake? Previously, it was suggested that #7 was the Worst, making a mistake on an easy shot...BUT, simply making a mistake on an easy shot may or may not cost you a point...in probably half of the cases, you simply lose your Serve...that's exactly why the new Worst shot should be “missing your Return”...because you ALWAYS give your opponents a FREE POINT...

Yes, you can be aggressive on your Return but that should simply mean placing it deep and making it difficult for the Serving team to make their Third Shot in an effective way...and nothing more; that is, don't go for a winner on your Return...the odds are NOT in your favor and the result (an error) is inexcusable and surely...

THE WORST MISTAKE!

TIPBITS #123

RETREAT OR HOLD YOUR GROUND

You often find yourself and your partner up at the net(where you belong) facing your opponents who are also at the net...both teams are playing defensively by keeping the ball low and moving it around, constantly being vigilant in anticipation of errant (high) ball to kill...this is all good!

You (or more likely your partner) decides to be deceptive and hit a short lob over your opponent's head...great idea but this one is just a little too low...and to make things worse it's within easy reach of your opponents BIG overhead...the only good news is that both you and your partner have enough time to realize the probable consequences...what should you do?

You've got a little time (with the emphasis on LITTLE) to do something...What?

Here are your options (aside from simply turning your back and hoping they don't hurt you too much)...You could back pedal in hopes of buying yourself more time to react or just hunker down and prepare for the worst...here are the pros and cons...

Either way, one thing is for certain...if you are going to recover from this situation, you are going to have to up your level of focus immensely...

Now, suppose you back pedal one or two steps...you've bought yourself a little more time(because it will take the ball longer to get to you now) and this will give you more time to see the flight or path of the ball and to react accordingly...alternately, you decide to sit it out right where you are(at the NVZ line), hunker down and get ready...here are two points to ponder...1) does moving back really save you that much time, after all the ball is probably going to be moving upwards of 100 miles per hour (you do the math)and more importantly, 2) having moved back some 4 to 6 feet, you have now opened up much more court for your opponent to aim for (and for you to cover)...make sense?

Wouldn't you rather be right at the NVZ line where the net prevents any ball from being hit below your knees or any ball hit above your shoulders being out?...in other words, staying at the net requires that you now only need to cover the area above your knees and below you shoulders...

Give that some thought...and while you're at it, think about wearing some safety eyewear...it'll not only protect you, it will give you added courage to **HOLD YOUR GROUND!**

TIPBITS #124

ARE LEAGUES FOR YOU?

Not familiar with League play?...leagues or team sports are offered or are available in many sports, either at the amateur level or the professional level...one only need look at your TV, newspaper or smart phone to hear or see them...PB is no different...in many organized PB communities, leagues (or team play) have been available for many years...

COMPOSITION: A league is composed of several (3 or more) teams...each team may be made of anywhere from 2 to 12 players, often times including both men and women AND each team may have varying levels of playing skills represented...formats are available for either men and/or womens doubles, mixed doubles and mens and/or womens singles or all of the above...in other words, there are leagues/teams for everyone that plays...both regular players and substitutes are used so you don't need to commit to the whole schedule...

SCHEDULE/LOCATION: Often the teams may be organized or represent a community, a neighborhood, a facility, a club or be totally random(drafted from anywhere/everywhere)...they compete against one another and these competitive events(matches) are almost always on a predetermined day and location(s)...scheduling is usually on a specific day of the week, time of day and location ...locations may vary if multiple sights are available (home versus away) but generally all matches are scheduled at one sight...

FREQUENCY/DURATION: Play is most commonly scheduled on a weekly basis but may be less often as well(such as bi-weekly; first and third Thursday, etc.) and can be played either during the day or in the evening, depending on the desires of the players...the duration of the league can vary also...it can range from 4 or 5 weeks to up to 12 weeks...the length of time/duration of the season is usually based on how many teams are involved so that each team may play one another either once or some multiple of times...

TIME/RESULTS: The time required for each match (event) is

often dependent upon the league format or the time and number of courts available from the facilities...matches generally take from one to two hours...results are tallied for each event for all the teams(just like football or baseball, etc) and after the last scheduled match is completed, playoffs may be scheduled as well...and of course, you'll need a team name and color...you get the picture!

SO, Why play leagues?...

They add another dimension to your PB play...as far as intensity and competitiveness, they fit in somewhere between open play and tournament play...

Yet, they still offer all the very same reasons we enjoy PB in the first place...

a chance to meet new people, to get exercise, to compete, to get better, to enjoy the camaraderie and fellowship, the team spirit and it's just plain FUN...Did we mention going out to eat after?

ARE LEAGUES FOR YOU? The answer should be YES!

TIPBITS #125

START A LEAGUE!

Leagues are an extension of the good things we love about Pickleball...a chance to meet new people, to get exercise, to compete, to get better, to enjoy the camaraderie, the fellowship and the team spirit, the refreshments together afterward and, of course, all the just plain FUN!

Anybody can start a league...you'll need to have a place to play, so you might start by making overtures to PB facilities as to their court and time availability...this should include their various options as to the number of courts and what days, what times and the duration of their availability...

Next, and most importantly, decide on a probable format...keep in mind that flexibility with the format may mean the difference between being successful or not...

Your format could be all inclusive (as “wide” as you can imagine) or highly limited (as “narrow” as you'd like)...keep in mind, the narrower your criteria for a format, the fewer players may be interested...your goal should always be to form a league that will be successful...and, to be successful, you must have enough players and enough teams...

Let's discuss format a little...a very “wide” format would be an effort to include ALL players...an example of such a format would be one that includes all ages and all skill levels and both men and women and a playing format that includes mens doubles, womens doubles and mixed doubles(maybe even singles)...this is clearly very ambitious but because it does encompass ALL players, the chances of attracting the needed number of players is very likely...

Conversely, you could take a very “narrow” option...if YOU are taking a lead role in starting the league, you can make this decision yourself....if your goal is simply to form a Tuesday morning doubles league of intermediate ladies, you've eliminated all the men, all the beginner and advanced players and perhaps many of

the younger players that work during the day...but, here is the beauty of setting up a league....you can do anything you want, just as long as there are enough players in the end...

More next time on what's next...but, for now, let's starting thinking "League Play"!

TIPBITS #126

MORE ON STARTING A LEAGUE!

Last time we asserted that leagues are an extension of all the good things we love about Pickleball...

And we went over the first two components of starting a league...getting and scheduling a place or places to play and determining the format of the league...

If, in fact the format of your league will be organizing teams from different clubs or areas to compete against one another, then your next task will be to get organizers from each entity on board...it will be there responsibility to attract players and structure their teams...

If the league format is open to all players (that you can attract) and that you plan to divide the players(via a draft or drawing), then your next task is getting the word out there...that is, attracting players to and determining the number of players interested in playing, either as regulars or as substitutes...obviously, the more players you can reach, the more players you'll attract...use whatever resources you have available...there are PB mailing lists almost everywhere you turn...

Make your plea as clear and as detailed as possible, providing as much information as you know right up front...consider asking for players that might take a lead role by helping you organize, become a captain or co-captain or contact person...set a deadline for their reply...

Once the deadline has passed, determine if you've reached or exceeded your needs in terms of the number and make up as it relates to your needs...if not, reach out to your on board players, look to them for other friends they might suggest...keep going until you reach your goal...

With this effort completed and with a sufficient number of assistants(captains) identified, you can begin the formation of each

team... as mentioned above, you can use a draft approach or simply draw names from a hat...if all players are of the same level(and perhaps gender), this latter approach is fine...if not, your best approach would be the draft...prepare for the draft by organizing all players by their perceived rating or skill level and order them from top to bottom as you envision them...this list will serve as a starting point for a draft....other factors may enter into how players are chosen, such as prior results, partnerships, etc....once the draft or drawing has been completed, consider a review of the results...when doing this, keep in mind the overall goal of the league...to have FUN...if the teams are clearly out of balance, do NOT sign off on it...make changes that will balance the teams so that all will enjoy the experience and look forward to subsequent league play...perhaps your main goal!!!

Now, how will you configure each match?...this is your last step before making up the schedule...this will be based solely on the format you have chosen and the time and courts available for each match...decide on the length of each game and match (perhaps games to 11, 2 out of 3 or 1 game to 15, rally scoring, etc.)...if numerous matches will be played, you may need to play in shifts...in that case, decide on what teams will play first (mens and womens doubles, then mixed doubles, etc.)...

Next, put the league schedule together...the schedule will become nothing more than a juggling of numbers...factors include the duration (length of the season, eg., number of weeks) of play, how many teams are involved and the amount of time and number of courts available...be certain each team plays one another at least ONCE and, within the scheduling constraints, that they play each other the SAME number of times, by the end of the schedule...if you are playing outdoors, you may wish to factor in weather concerns or make up matches...

Finally, publish the schedule along with a listing of all the teams, their captains (with contact information) and the players on each team...include the team's and/or the league's substitution list and their contact information...There you go...WELL DONE...and THANKS for doing this!!!

AN INTRODUCTION TO RATINGS

Pickleball ratings were introduced in order to help players determine their skill level of play...having a rating helps the player determine where he or she fits best into local open play, league play or tournament play...players that play with other players with similar skill levels (or ratings) tend to enjoy a better playing experience.

Initial ratings simply categorized players, as in any sport, into three basic categories...Beginner, Intermediate and Advanced...this, then, evolved into a slightly more elaborate or fine tuned method that added the term “advanced” to the first two categories...so now, you could be an “advanced” beginner or an “advanced” intermediate...this became cumbersome, so the lengthy descriptors were soon swapped for a numbering system, basically identical to the Tennis Rating skill level number scheme...they start at 1.0 (a player new to the game), are incremented by “.5” and go all the way up to 5.0 (a National Championship level player).

The IFP (The International Federation of Pickleball) has established a guideline that associates a description with each skill level rating...they can be seen by accessing the USAPA website...the Pickleball-Community of The Villages has adapted the IFP guidelines by converting their phrase or bullet structure into sentence form and have added some additional detail for clarification where needed...see below for these descriptions.

The system continues to be refined but it remains subject to criticism as it is no way a perfect system...this, is perhaps, mostly true because of the way that ratings are assigned to players...they are subject to the short comings of the raters, the often limited amount of time during a typical rating clinic or the results of tournaments that may be skewed by the level or numbers of competitors...with all this said, RARELY are assigned skill level rating numbers EVER off by more than half (.5) a point.

If you don't as yet have a rating or are not sure of your rating, read

on...if your club offers a rating service, ask to get rated...if they don't offer that service, ask them to start one!

YOU NEED TO KNOW WHERE YOU FIT IN!!!

PICKLEBALL RATINGS, courtesy of The Villages Pickleball Community

1.0 BEGINNER: New to pickleball. These players keep some short rallies going but often fail to return balls. They have played a few games, know how to keep score and know the basic rules of the game.

1.5 BEGINNER: These players are learning to judge where the ball is going, and can sustain a short rally with players of equal ability. They have obvious weaknesses in their strokes and are working to improve these weaknesses.

2.0 BEGINNER: These players are able to keep quite a few balls going with their forehands, make most easier volleys, and are beginning to make more backhands, but need to work more on developing their strokes. They are thinking more about coming up to the non-volley zone to hit volleys and are making an effort to be more aggressive. They are thinking more about the use of dinks and lobs.

2.5 ADVANCED BEGINNER: These players are fairly consistent when hitting medium-paced shots, but are not comfortable with all strokes and lack control when trying for direction, depth, or power on their shots. They are using dinks and lobs on a regular basis as an important part of the game.

3.0 INTERMEDIATE: These players have achieved improved stroke dependability with directional control on most medium balls and some harder hit balls. They still need to develop more depth and variety with their shots, but are exhibiting more aggressive net play, are anticipating their opponents shots better, and are developing team-work in doubles. They use lobs and dinks on a regular basis with more success.

3.5 ADVANCED INTERMEDIATE: These players have dependable strokes, including directional control and depth on both forehand and backhand sides. They can use lobs, overheads, approach shots and volleys with success and occasionally force errors when serving. Rallies may be lost due to impatience. Teamwork in doubles is evident. They are beginning to use Third Shot drops, dinks, and a mixture of pace and angles and lobs in their games.

4.0 ADVANCED: These players have developed their use of power and spin, can successfully execute all shots, can control the depth of their shots, and can handle pace. They have sound footwork and move well enough to get to the non-volley zone whenever required. They understand strategy and can adjust according to opponents strengths and weaknesses and their position on court. They can hit serves with power and accuracy and can also vary the speed and spin of the serve if desired. Successful Third Shot drops, dinks, and a mixture of pace and angles and lobs are a regular part of their games. They have begun playing in advanced and open level tournaments.

4.5 ADVANCED TOURNAMENT LEVEL: These players have mastered all the skills, all shot types, touch, spin, serves, control and can use them as weapons. They have excellent shot anticipation, extremely accurate shot placement and regularly hit winning shots. They can force opponents into making errors by “keeping the ball in play.” They have mastered the dink, drop shots and the Third Shot choices and strategies. They use soft shots, dinks, a mixture of pace and angles and lobs to set up offensive situations. They have mastered pickleball strategies and can vary strategies and styles of play in competitive or tournament matches. They are dependable in stressful situations as in tournament match play. They keep their unforced errors to a minimum and take advantage of their opponents errors. They are always competitive at advanced and open level tournaments.

5.0 NATIONAL CHAMPION LEVEL: These players have all the skills and experience to compete at the highest level and have proven to have those abilities at the National level. They have athletic ability, quickness, agility and raw athleticism which separates them from those near the top. They are always competitive at the highest level of State, Regional or National competition.

THE NEED FOR RATINGS

Last time we introduced Ratings...suggesting that they help players determine their skill level of play...that having a rating helps the player determine where he or she fits best into local open play, league play or tournament play...and that players that play with other players with similar skill levels (or ratings) tend to enjoy a better playing experience.

Currently, across the country, more and more emphasis is being placed on ratings...facilities are setting aside days, times or courts for specific levels of players...and these assignments are being imposed on the players...and that's just for open play.

We've discussed the many benefits of League play in previous articles...joining a League requires a rating...and the ratings must have been assigned by a qualified rating group or organization...and these ratings must not be a self-rating...now, more and more leagues are being organized....there are Fall leagues going on right now, Winter leagues being formed and the Summer leagues will be bigger than ever...you don't want to miss out on this FUN, especially because you simply don't have a rating!

And we haven't even talked about Tournaments...yes, there are tournaments that offer just two rating categories, such as Advanced and Recreational...but if you've ever played in one of these, you've noticed there is a very wide range of player skill levels...not FUN!

Then there's our sports Nationals...here multiple levels and many categories of play are offered....guess what you need?...and then there is the first ever, upcoming US OPEN, again with multiple skill levels...this is gong to be one event you don't want to miss...if you don't enter or don't plan to attend(certainly a one time opportunity), you'll be able to watch it, live, on your TV...maybe, they'll even show various levels of play...that's of course because all those players have been rated...

Sign up for the next chance to get rated...you're going to need it!

TIPBITS #129

YOU AND YOUR PARTNER

Are you on the same page with your partner? Do you move together? Do you talk before hand about lobs and overheads and about who covers what? To be successful, you should be able to say “yes” to these questions... Why?

Moving in sync with your partner is the first step(no pun intended) to being on the same page with your partner...it starts with the Serve...

Both players should be aligned before the Serve, both behind the baseline...after the Serve, both players await the Return together...as soon as the Return is hit, if it's not obvious as to whose ball it is, someone's got to make the call(did you talk about this before hand?)...so, one of you takes the ball...what's the other player doing?...this is the next time to be in sync...if you are taking the ball(hitting the Third Shot), is your partner rushing the net or staying close to you?...again, you need to be in sync, close together and ready to move forward together or stay back together (depending on the level of success of the Third Shot)...sooner or later, you should both progress all the way to the net and stay there together(in sync)! If you do, Well Done!

So, what happens when a lob goes over your head AND out of your reach with your overhead? Have you talked before hand?...Does it make any difference which side you are on or whether you're right handed or not?...Of course it does! But, if you've talked before hand and have agreed that you will each handle all lobs over you on your side, then there is no issue...you shag your own lobs and never cross over to your partner's side...

This may not always be your best choice...consider these situations/responses...1) the lob goes over the player on the right side, the player on the left side may be able to more easily chase down the lob and hit a more effective defensive shot(having reached the ball more quickly than his partner)...2) the lob goes over the player on the right side, but the player on the left side is

able to hit it in the air with an overhead(perhaps the most desirable response)...further, lobs hit beyond the reach of the player on the left side offer option 1 above but unless your player on the right is left handed, option 1 is really your only viable option...

Covering lobs for your partner is clearly something you must discuss before hand (or certainly as soon as its occurs the first time in your match)...the reasons for this are quite straight forward...one of the players may have a significantly more effective overhead and you'd want that player taking lobs whenever possible...or perhaps one player has significantly greater foot speed, in which case that player can track down most any ball...or perhaps one player is simply the taller of the two players...all reasons to discuss before hand...

Be in SYNC and talk BEFORE HAND!!!

TIPBITS #130

TIME TO RECAP

As we have done after each multiple of 9 TIPBITS, it still seems appropriate to continue to provide a review of the last 9...the rationale now is the same as it was then...many of the topics presented need to be made a part of every day play or simply warrant repeating...so, here goes...

#121 Recapping Insights...Analyzing 2 National Champions' best tips for improving your game

#122 The Worst Mistake...A discussion of some of the worst mistakes you can make

#123 Retreat or Hold Your Ground...Options to consider when you hit a short lob

#124 Are Leagues for You?...Some great reasons why you should join a league

#125 Start a League...An introduction to considerations required to start a Pickleball league

#126 More on Starting a League...Some particulars on formats, recruiting, drafts and scheduling

#127 Introduction to Ratings...Definition of, evolution of, and current rating guidelines

#128 The Need for Ratings...Why ratings are of so much value for open play, leagues and tournaments

#129 You and Your Partner...the importance of being in sync or on the same page as your partner

Finally...You've read this before but absolutely nothing is more important than these next few sentences...Percentage Pickleball is not making mistakes... never over hitting, being under control, being patient and being in the right place at the right time... Percentage Pickleball, it's all about putting the percentages, the overwhelming likelihood that you will be successful, on your side!!!

TIPBITS #131

INDOORS OR OUTDOORS

Many of you may be transitioning to indoor play, either for an upcoming season or a series of indoor tournaments or you'd just like to get some insights on what to expect WHEN the time comes...with that in mind, it seems appropriate to spend some time noting the differences and similarities between indoor play and outdoor play...

This article will address the differences and similarities with just a cursory view initially and then look at some factors in more detail in subsequent discussions/articles...

First, the similarities(alphabetically)...

COURT SIZE...indoor and outdoor courts are identical in their dimensions...

RULES...the rules are identical for both indoor and outdoor play...

Now, the differences(alphabetically)...

AVAILABILITY...there are generally many more outdoor courts available and they tend to be available for greater periods of time...

BACKGROUND...walls and backgrounds in indoor courts tend to produce more difficulty in seeing the ball and can be different from one side to the other...

BALL...the ball used indoors is quite different from the outdoor ball both in its playing characteristics and its overall appearance...

HEIGHT...the height of the indoor courts may be restrictive but, at the least, are considerably lower than outdoor courts...

INSECTS...ok, a bit of a stretch BUT outdoor play can be affected adversely by pesky gnats and mosquitoes...

LIGHTING...indoor play has dimmer lighting and it may cause visibility issues due to the positioning of the lights but they are not as blinding as that of the sun(on sunny days)...

NETS...indoor(temporary) nets are clearly far less superior than outdoor permanent nets...

NOISE...indoor noise levels can become distracting due to little or no sound deadening features...

PRACTICE OPTIONS...little or no time is available indoors versus almost limitless time outdoors for practice...

PRICE...indoor time is only available for a fee and outdoor courts are virtually all free...

SPACING...indoor courts are generally constructed in tighter quarters and spacing between courts is often compromised...

SURFACE...indoor court surfaces vary significantly from sight to sight while outdoor courts are generally quite similar from one to the next...

WEATHER...the last and the most variable of all the factors...indoor courts control most weather issues, in particular, rain, snow, wind, cold, heat and humidity...outdoor courts do NOT...

Next, we'll see how these factors impact your play and what you might do to counteract them...

TIPBITS #132

WHAT'S YOUR PREFERENCE?

Let's continue our discussion of the similarities and differences of playing Pickleball indoors versus outdoors...while there were very few similarities(in number), there were a bunch (13) of categories or factors identified as differences...let's take the least consequential categories and see how they might impact your play...

Actually, those factors that were close to being inconsequential are really in the minority...for most, INSECTS are not that prevalent of an issue, so that's 1...NOISE(2) could be considered a minor distraction(at least to those folks who are able to tune out the distractions and focus on their game) and, remarkably, SPACING (3) seems like it could often be a more serious problem but, in reality side spacing, the most prevalent situation, seems like it might be an issue far more often than it really is(it's spacing in the back that can be detrimental or hazardous)...that leaves 10 factors that could be a factor between your play indoors versus outdoors...

We'll leave off some of the most significant factors until next time but here are some thoughts on the rest(alphabetically, again)...

AVAILABILITY, PRACTICE OPTIONS and PRICE are really all tied together...in areas where indoor play is a weather-related requirement, it really seems that the Sport of Pickleball must come of age in order for the numbers of courts and hours of availability to come in line with many other racket sports that can be played indoors...the obvious are Tennis, Racquetball, Squash and to a lesser degree, Badminton...yet, even for those sports, PRICE remains the key to their availability...it's never going to be FREE(you may get to play for free but you'll need to join a club or pay a monthly or annual fee)...so the best that can be done for now is to just accept the way it is and promote the Sport every chance you get!!! So, outdoors wins this comparison, hands down!...Why?...because your court availability is way down, your practice time is almost non-existent and you're not getting anything for free...so, improving your game indoors is not too likely and, in

the meantime, your pocketbook suffers...

BACKGROUND...walls and backgrounds in indoor courts tend to produce more difficulty in seeing the ball and can be different from one side to the other...we said this previously but on behalf of indoor proponents, it's equal for all players...many players recognize that there is a difference from one side to the other and when this is the case, players should change sides either after each game or midway through, as if playing a tournament match...

HEIGHT...while the height of the indoor courts may be restrictive, once again it is the same for all players...a notable consideration would be for the player(s) who uses lobs frequently and effectively...clearly indoor height restrictions would be a negative but a positive by product would most likely be more controlled and less frequent lobs...

That addresses half of the remaining differences...the other 5(the BALL, LIGHTING, NETS, SURFACE and WEATHER) have a greater bearing on the game and they will be addressed next time...

So, if you find yourself transitioning to indoor play or vice versa, keep these differences in mind!

TIPBITS #133

POSITIVE OR NEGATIVE IMPACT?

Our discussion of the similarities and differences of playing Pickleball indoors versus outdoors has led us to this point...narrowing down to the real key factors, the most obvious or significant differences...they are the BALL, the LIGHTING, the NETS, the SURFACE and the WEATHER...these all have a greater bearing on the game than any of the other elements discussed so far...so, as we originally intended, the purpose of this discussion is to present both the differences and the ways to cope with those differences...

WEATHER...the factor that has the greatest number of elements that differ...and clearly, indoors has it all over outdoors when you consider the elements of the WEATHER...so how do you compensate for WEATHER related issues...clearly, no playing in snow and rain...but cold, heat, humidity and wind are common factors outdoors...common sense must prevail in each of these circumstances...

In COLD, your clothing(light layers) must be considered but more importantly, your attention to your warmup is key...NOT your stroke warm up BUT your muscle, tendon and ligament warm ups...far more crucial than in the heat...

In HEAT and high humidity, again your clothing can play a key role in maintaining proper body temperature...WATER is your friend and maintaining your hydration is key...drink before, during and after...

In the WIND, you have a continual additional factor to consider on every point...to deal with the wind, you first need to be on the same page as your partner...you do this by reminding your partner before each point of the direction and force of the wind...you discuss who will take what ball or cover lobs depending on that wind...you constantly advise your partner of the likelihood of a ball being in or out...something you'd do normally but more importantly in the wind...lastly, and most importantly, you need to keep your eye on

the ball THROUGH contact!!!

SURFACE...indoor court surfaces vary significantly from sight to sight while outdoor courts are quite similar from one to the next...so, which is better...that depends on your style of play...**BUT**, clearly adapting from one outdoor court to another is of no consequence...indoor courts, on the other hand, can vary from one court to the next inside the very same facility...the surface differences have the greatest impact on the ball and its **BOUNCE**...whether it skids on the surface or whether it grabs the surface(or has a neutral bounce)...with the exception of a volley or overhead, you must factor this bounce into every shot you will make...this means you must evaluate the impact of what spins and pace have on every one of these shots...and you must do that during practice because it may be too late once you begin play!!!

NETS...indoor(temporary) nets are flimsy, at best, compared to outdoor permanent nets...they will rarely deflect, much less prevent a well hit ball from reaching the other side...this, you need to prepare for...and it's not the least bit uncommon...so take your stance at the net and expect that the ball will **NOT** be impacted by a touch from the net...in other words, be ready!!!

LIGHTING...indoor play generally has dimmer lighting than outdoors or may cause visibility issues due to the positioning of the lights...but rarely are indoor lights as blinding as that of the sun...of course overcast days outdoors are the best(no blind spots, no shadows, no complaints)...the **SUN** (and the wind) are major factors when playing outdoors...so much so that league and tournament play require side changes to offset this affect...what else can you do?...just like the **WIND**, you must discuss the sun's position with your partner(frequently) and decide who will be taking each ball in question (ahead of time, when possible and if not then, ASAP and audibly during play)...in any event, you may need to bounce many lobs you might normally take in the air **OR** at the least, take a lot of **PACE** off your shot in favor of **PLACEMENT!!**

Kick these differences around, for now and we'll discuss a hot topic, the **BALL**, next time...

TIPBITS #134

THE BALL

Our discussion of the similarities and differences of playing Pickleball indoors versus outdoors has led us to the last factor...the BALL...we even went so far as to say that the BALL is responsible for the biggest playing difference between indoors and outdoors...

And last time, we said this was going to be a hot topic...not because of this article but because of recent developments...in the last few months, a number of new balls have been introduced...some widely acclaimed and well received by many players...but not received so well by everyone AND not always the case with the governing body(USAPA)...so much so that the USAPA has decided to adjust(tighten) its guidelines/specifications for approval...

What do they consider, anyway?...for starters, the DIAMETER...easy to test; the WEIGHT...also easy to test; the BOUNCE...pretty easy to test(ala tennis balls); the HARDNESS...not so easy...these factors all impact the ball's playing characteristics....that's something the Founding Fathers want to keep under control for numerous reasons...primarily, to maintain a relatively “equal playing surface” for all players and keep the original intent of the game in place...

So what does this all have to do with the differences the BALL makes when playing indoors versus outdoors?...well, the playing characteristics of the ball is the very reason the BALL does have such an impact...the BALL used indoors is almost always a ball designed specifically for indoor play...it looks different and it plays different...

The BALL used indoors is the great equalizer...it extends the length of most points and puts more emphasis on placement, control and consistency...the outdoor ball used for outdoor play lends itself to more pace and bigger hitters...see the difference?

It's a big difference...the indoor ball will not travel as fast and as far as the outdoor ball...more balls will stay in play (won't go wide or

deep)...it will bounce (grab the surface) differently than the outdoor ball...it won't skip but set UP for the player...all leading to longer points, all robbing the power hitter of points that come FREE outdoors...the indoor BALL requires the player to possess a more highly refined game, not limited exclusively or slanted toward the power game only!!!

Now, the reason there has been so much to-do about changing the ball's characteristics is that these changes can slant the previously“equal playing surface” towards one style of player versus another...as an example, the BOUNCE...if an outdoor ball bounces higher, say on a Third Shot dink, a more aggressive power player will jump on that high bounce every chance they get, almost totally eliminating the SOFT game...this is just one of many examples that could change the dynamics of the game...

Keep your eye on these changes...the new BALL specifications were put into place on November 1st, 2015 and will be effective/enforced on May 1st, 2016... or perhaps October, 2016?!

HIGH ROAD OR OPEN ROAD?

Our articles are always slanted toward playing the game by putting the percentages on your side...here's another installment...getting into that position is different for everyone, each player having their own skill set...it's up to each player to use only their most reliable shots, never exceeding their comfort zone...but the RESULTS should always mean the same thing...hitting only high percentages shots, time after time...putting all of your efforts into keeping the ball in play and winning the point...

To do this you must make choices on each shot that will result in the desired outcome..that's the bottom line here, making the best choice every time!

The article title eludes to one such scenario...taking the high road or the open road..in this case we are speaking about your shot selection when given two options; hitting HIGH into the body of your opponent or hitting to one side or the other, into the OPEN...

Let's set the scene...you are rallying back and forth at the net, probably dinking from side to side, looking for the opportunity to go on the offense...when you get that chance, what should you do? Pop or bang it at your opponent or slap it through the open court(either up the middle or to the side)...this is where the percentages come in...What is the shot with the greatest potential for being successful?...if you want the percentages on your side, you'll need to consider the possible results of these two options...you go for your opponent, hoping to surprise or overwhelm them? OR you place that ball carefully into the opening?.

What could happen?...If you decide to go HIGH and aim for the opponent, you better expect that ball to come back...after all, you are hitting at them and they do have a paddle and they could just get lucky...sound like the highest percentage approach? Why not consider the OPEN shot...at the worst, you are not aiming at a paddle, you're aiming at an opening...a much higher percentage for

success!

In summary, why go for a shot that is only likely to be successful 60-70 percent of the time versus taking the 80-90 percent shot? You can't win with these percentages! Remember, some days your percentages are NOT up to your expectations...if you keep taking lower percentage shots, you are not going to win...you have to avoid mistakes at all cost and keep the ball in play every single shot(if you expect to have a winning record)!

When you've been confronted with these options(or you're looking back on past results), consider what might have happened had you chosen the highest percentage shot...this is something you **MUST** decide on every shot!

TIPBITS #136

TOO EARLY

Last time, we began a mini-series on Percentage Pickleball, repeating our mantra, “Percentage Pickleball is not making mistakes... never over hitting, being under control, being patient and being in the right place at the right time ”...then, we picked a potential situation with two options and discussed their likely outcomes, hoping to help you recognize the differences in the *potential* for success and the *likelihood* for success...making the right choice!

Making the right choice does not always mean pulling the trigger on one shot versus another BUT waiting to take the shot until the most opportune time!

Opportunities to be aggressive(use power) and attempt to win the point come *frequently* throughout each match, even several times in a single point...but, being patient is required *all the time*...sure, you could try to win the point on the Serve, your first opportunity...or you could go for a winner off a short Serve and rip a Return cross court...or similarly, taking a weak, short Return and blasting a drive through the middle...BUT these are all somewhat premature...they are NOT going to give you a 90% chance of winning the point...if your goal is to eventually win the point by forcing a weak reply to your early aggression, that's another story...BUT this presumes you are able to put this kind of pressure onto your opponent ALL the time...in other words, 90% of the time you will NOT make a mistake!

Let's consider one such scenario...your team, now Serving, is working their way to the net...you're not there yet but you get a bit of a high ball...you are really out of position but you decide to take the shot anyway...chances are, simply because of your position, that you are not going to win the point...you are NOT in a good enough position to win the point...why?...because, if it DOES come back, which often they do, what can you do...HOPE???...wait for the time when you are in position and get the shot, then take it!...going for a winner when you are out of position is NOT a high percentage

shot!

Percentage Pickleball, it's all about putting the percentages, the overwhelming likelihood that you will be successful, on your side!!!

TIPBITS #137

MOVING ON

In our previous articles focusing on Percentage Pickleball, we reiterated the importance of making good decisions, which often simply means choosing the right time to play more aggressively...AND being patient...all with the intent of either waiting for or creating an opportunity to make a HIGH percentage shot that will either CONTRIBUTE to winning the point or BE the outright winner...

We pointed out two different scenarios, both describing low percentage versus high percentage options...scenario one, hitting a shot at an opponent versus to the open court and scenario two, taking a chance on hitting a winner when you're not yet in position...each of these are judgment calls that you need to make repeatedly throughout a match...and making the right decision could not only determine the outcome of the point but of the entire match ...

These examples merely point out the relevance of good decision making...they assume you have the necessary skills and consistency to properly and effectively execute a winning shot when needed...that those shots will be winners, not errors...that your percentages for hitting those shots are at or exceed 90%!!! So, if you don't yet possess that level of skill and consistency, it's time!

That's what this article is introducing...how to MOVE ON with your game...how to move from where your game is now to where you'd like it to be!

First, you must assess just where you are at...you can always move on, get better...but, you need to know where you are at so you can determine where you need to go...this may be as simple as recognizing your overall skill level, as in ...your rating!...it may mean taking a serious look at your weaknesses, recognizing which skills are not consistent enough or reliable enough to fit into that 90% category...you'll need to look at each shot...and be truthful(to yourself)...

You may need to adjust to the fact that MOVING ON may require that you take a step back in order to move forward...perhaps relearning a stroke or positioning or footwork...shoring up your soft game or putting power into its proper perspective...maybe it's your intensity, your area of focus or your patience...all factors in MOVING ON...

Next time, we'll look at assessing your current status, doing an evaluation of your game as it is right now...in the meantime, why not get a head start? Start to MOVE ON right now!

TIPBITS #138

YOUR ASSESSMENT

If you really want to MOVE ON with your game, start by making an *assessment* of your current status...if you're perfectly happy with the status of your game, skip this article...if you're not and you're relatively new to the game OR you've been playing for some time and feel you've reached a plateau in your game, this article is for you...the purpose of this article is to help you determine the status of your game and identify the issues you may be having...that's step number one!...addressing these issues, how to fix or correct them, comes later...

Assessing your status should really start with knowing your rating...if you've never been rated, refer to a couple of previous TIPBITS articles, particularly #'s 127 and 128...or, if you play regularly with players that know their ratings, you can compare yourself to them...that will put you into the ball park...but, better yet, GET RATED...you'll not only see where you need to improve, you may also be advised as to how to improve those trouble spots...

To MOVE ON, you need to improve...you simply need to be able to get better at the facets of your game that have been holding you back...especially those areas that will give you a better chance of winning when you're playing against the NEXT LEVEL of player...but, where to start?...

How's your Serve?...is it always in play, deep and sometimes able to force an error?

Is your Return always in play, deep and in the middle, sometimes forcing an error?...do you always follow it to the net?

Can you hit a 3rd shot drop shot from anywhere on the court?

How's your soft game?...can you hit dink shots from anywhere to anywhere?...can you always keep them low enough to prevent being attacked?

How's your power game?...can you hit ground strokes, from either side with pace, spin AND control?

Can you hit a defensive and offensive lob?...Can you put away your overheads?

How's your hand to eye coordination?... Can you attack and defend with your volleys, the most point-ending shot of them all?...is it your best shot?

How's your mobility, your footwork, your court positioning?...always in the right spot at the right time?

Any trouble with these shots or in these areas?...they **MUST** all be reliable, meet the criteria for Percentage Pickleball...to be successful 90% of the time...WOW, does that sound simple?...of course, it's not!!!

The lack of consistency, regardless of which shot it may be, is your major culprit...you can **NOT** make mistakes and expect to **MOVE ON** and win against better players...again, easy to say, hard to do!!!

ASSESS each one of your shots...do they pass the percentage test?...if not, put them on your **FIX** list!!!

To **FIX** your troubled spots, you'll need to recognize that successful percentages and consistency come from using proper mechanics(the **BASICS**) and then repeating them over and over with drills and practice...if mechanics appear to be holding you back, get a lesson or go online to the many self help **YOU-TUBE** videos...

More on **MOVING ON** next time!!!

TIPBITS #139

MOVING ON (from an Advancing Beginner)

Our continuing series of articles on MOVING ON will be addressing the following areas...we've already discussed the Need(#137) and the Assessment(#138)...this article will begin the discussion on how to MOVE ON from an **Advancing Beginner(2.0 to 2.99)**...followed, in subsequent articles, by how to MOVE ON from a Beginning Intermediate(3.0 to 3.49), then, from an Advanced Intermediate(3.5 to 3.99), and then finally, how to MOVE ON from an Advanced(4.0 to 4.49) level player!!!

The largest RANGE of skills development in all these groups is in the **Advancing Beginner's** area (just started playing to almost an intermediate level player)...basics learned at this time are crucial to your ability to continue MOVING ON...or stating this in another way, if you do not get something down correctly now, it will deter your ability to MOVE ON later!!!

BTW: Even if you are past the Beginner levels, it might not be a bad idea to be sure YOU are able to successfully MOVE ON from these fundamentals?!

Through out this effort, you must focus on control(placement) and consistency...Your efforts to do well here will pay dividends over and over in virtually all other areas(shots) in your game!!!

You will need at least 2 players...

Begin with learning to control short balls (they're called dink shots) at the net, straight ahead, then diagonally, always bouncing the ball just over the net well inside the NVZ line...mastering these soft and low controlled shots is imperative and should be the first drill you do whenever you warm up or practice...this is so important that you will continue to practice these shots no matter what level you have reached...

Emphasis must be placed on the basics...stroke mechanics, movement and footwork, positioning!!! Mechanics begin with the

grip(see article #'s 16 and 17) and continue with stroke development, footwork and proper positioning (see article #'s 61 through 65)...either becoming acquainted or re-reading these articles will help you be more successful(more quickly)...

Remember, your goal here is to hit consistently, meaning hitting 9 out of every 10 successfully not only in play but accurately positioned and not attackable...don't stop with 10 either, repeat at least 10 times!!! If you can't reach your 90% goal out of the first 50, don't stop until you do!!

This philosophy must be applied to all your shots...you must recognize the importance of mastering the control and consistency of your short(dink) shots before MOVING ON to other shots...all other shots are more difficult and require a greater degree of effort and practice to reach the same level of success!!!

We'll address other shots for **Advancing Beginners** in a subsequent article...Start MOVING ON now!

TIPBITS #140

TIME TO RECAP

As we have done after each multiple of 9 TIPBITS, it still seems appropriate to continue to provide a review of the last 9...the rationale now is the same as it was then...many of the topics presented need to be made a part of every day play or simply warrant repeating...so, here goes...

#131 Indoors or Outdoors...a list of the many differences in the two playing venues

#132 What's Your Preference?...a discussion of the minor differences between indoors and outdoors

#133 Positive or Negative Impact?...a discussion about most of the obvious venue differences

#134 The Ball...why the ball may be the single biggest difference playing indoors versus outdoors

#135 High Road or Open Road...a discussion of Percentage Pickleball when choosing a target

#136 Too Early...a consideration about timing as it relates to Percentage Pickleball

#137 Moving On...an introduction to getting better or improving your game

#138 Your Assessment...analyzing the status of the various components of your game...a Fix List

#139 Moving On(Advancing Beginners)...start with the basics...placement/control and consistency

Finally...You've read this before but absolutely nothing is more important than these next few sentences...Percentage Pickleball is not making mistakes... never over hitting, being under control, being patient and being in the right place at the right time... Percentage Pickleball, it's all about putting the percentages, the overwhelming likelihood that you will be successful, on your side!!!

TIPBITS #141

MOVING ON (Advancing Beginner-Part 2)

Continuing with MOVING ON for Advancing Beginners, let's remember the key points made last time, control and consistency...being able to successfully hit your shots 90% of the time...we left off with the need to recognize the importance of mastering all angles of soft, low dink shots at the net AND that this practice/warm up should be done every time you play, regardless of your skill level!!!

Learning to master your ability to control the ball and do so consistently will serve as a benchmark for MOVING ON with all the other strokes...that's why you are starting with the easiest shot, the soft dink...apply this same effort and attitude to all the other strokes and shots...

If the soft dink shot at the net is the easiest shot to master, then surely, its big brother, the Third Shot dink is the hardest...but, let's wait a bit for that...

The shot most used to end all points, either won or lost, is the volley!!!...a volley is simply most any shot hit BEFORE the ball bounces(not to be confused by the half-volley which is NOT a volley)...we say "most" any shot because several other shots are hit before the ball bounces but are not considered volleys...this includes such shots as Serves and Overheads...

Just to be sure you do NOT under estimate the value of the volley in Pickleball, let us be certain of its frequency of use relative to other shots/strokes...if you add up all the other strokes used in a match (serves, returns, dinks, overheads, lobs, and drives), their TOTAL would not exceed the number of volleys that cause a point to end...putting it another way, over 50% of all point ending shots are volleys...what better place to MOVE ON to?!

A good volley begins with the proper ready position...please see TIPBITS #15 for some insights...and a good volley becomes an even better volley if its followed by a quick return to your ready

position just as soon as possible...keep your stroke sharp, crisp and firm BUT short (no big follow through)...

Mastering the stroke itself is rudimentary...but reacting to the ball that comes from a wide range of angles, heights and pace is another story altogether...this can best be achieved by practice with a partner...or better yet, several partners...

Begin with your partner directly across from you, both toe to toe on your respective NVZ lines...feed the ball so your partner hits a volley(in the air) and repeat gradually increasing the pace BUT always keep the goal in mind (keeping the ball in play)...repeat as long as you can...try for 10, then 20, then 50...do the same with another player...if there are four of you practicing, repeat with each player...

Getting good at that?...try this variation...one player on one side(in the middle at the NVZ line), the other three players equally spaced on the opposite side on their NVZ line...keep the ball going, gradually increasing the pace...the single player sees a ton of balls from all directions...the three players must react with just as much speed but must do so in the confines of a much smaller area...a good drill for all...don't forget to rotate so you've played all positions!

Practice (a must) will help you MOVE ON!

TIPBITS #142

MOVING ON (Advancing Beginner-Part 3)

Continuing with MOVING ON for Advancing Beginners, we've previously discussed the value of control and consistency(hitting soft, low dink shots successfully 90% of the time) and then recognizing , as well, the importance of the volley in the game...why it's so important and how best to improve your volley...once you are truly comfortable with your progress in these two areas, it's time to MOVE ON(never forgetting the importance of the continual need to practice dinks and volleys)!

What's next/left?...well, every other stroke, of course...AND then a bunch of strategy...let's address strategy...we'll presume you can put your Serve and Return into play most of the time...What is the number one strategy in Pickleball?...we're not talking about keeping the ball in play or never making a mistake or eye on the ball or bend your knees...these are "givens"...we're talking about what you must do to win points and win games...

The number one strategy in Pickleball is to get to the net and control the net(see TIPBITS #1)...the vast majority of points won are by the team that is at or controls the net...or the vast majority of the points lost are by the team at the baseline...Percentage Pickleball at its most basic level!

"TIPBITS Year One" is full of articles that address why and how to get to the net...they start with the basics of the Return...articles #2 through #5 discuss options for not just the Return but for combining those options with getting to the net...the two always go hand in hand...if this is NOT a part of your strategy(getting to the net after EVERY Return) you are NOT playing Percentage Pickleball and you will find it very hard to MOVE ON from where you're at!

The articles then proceed to discuss the most difficult to master aspect of the game, getting to the net as the Serving team...articles #6 though #9 address the Serve and getting to the net on the Third Shot...further discussion takes place in articles #11 and #37 that

provide insights on how best to move to the net as a team...and article #44 provides additional rational for getting to the net...finally, article #45 as well as number of other articles in "TIPBITS Year Two" discuss numerous drills to improve your Third Shot success...

MOVING ON from being a Beginner or Advancing Beginner to the Intermediate level will require that you get a good start on mastering your ability to get to the net...**always on the Return and as soon as possible on the Serve!**

TIPBITS #143

MOVING ON (All Levels)

While this article will conclude the series on MOVING ON from an Advancing Beginner, it will also introduce a tool for ALL LEVELS of players...

To recap previous Advanced Beginning articles, we focused on the importance of control and consistency...and that they apply to all Pickleball strokes...we also stressed the value of learning these attributes through practice BUT you were encouraged to do this by starting with nothing more than dink shots at the net...

We then addressed the value of the volley and how to improve this most frequent of all point-ending strokes...lastly, we took a page out of the tactics handbook to re-iterate the importance of getting to the net and controlling it...

While these topics/areas of the game are a must for ALL LEVELS and will help any level player to MOVE ON to the next level, it's NOT enough...you will need to specifically address each part of your game...

The best way to do this requires that you take an inventory of your game...doing this inventory should result in an all inclusive list of all Pickleball shots and an honest evaluation of your status...basically, your FIX IT List!

To begin with, 1) list each shot used in your game, then assign two separate values to that shot that represents how often you hit it successfully...for purposes of this List, successful means...

What percentage of the time will that shot not only be in play BUT also how effective is your

2) PLACEMENT of that shot and can you hit it with adequate 3) PACE?...

leave some room for 4) comments...

At the end of the list, add one line each for Mobility and Game Strategy (and comments)...

At a minimum, your FIX IT List should include...1)Serve, 2)Return, 3)Forehand Drive, 4)Backhand Drive, 5)Forward Dink, 6)Diagonal Dink, 7)Forehand Third Shot Drop, 8)Backhand Third Shot Drop, 9)Block Volley, 10)Swinging Volley, 11)Overhead and 12)Lob...not that this is in any way all inclusive but it covers the basics...(want to triple the size of your list?...add spins and angles to most any shot)...

Once you've completed your List (plugged in your %'s), you should prioritize it...this could vary...it could be in the order of their frequency of use OR the value they add to your success OR the worst first OR the easiest to fix ???...

How far should you take this effort?...Should your goal be to reach the ideal (90%)?... For every shot?

Perhaps you can reach these numbers when playing against lesser or similar level players...BUT can you reach them when playing against better players?...

**THAT should be your goal...then you have successfully
MOVED ON!**

Next time, more on these percentages...

TIPBITS #144

MOVING ON (Percentages)

Previously, we discussed the notion of creating a FIX IT List to better identify where your game needed work...we gave a relatively long list of items, even suggested that list could be longer if you included variations on the basic shots(spins and angles)...this much need for information might overwhelm many of you...not sure if that's good or bad, but there is no doubt, there are many more shots one could identify...so what!?!...

Advancing Beginners, players trying to become Intermediates, just need to master the basics, so why list so many...here's why...every one of those 12 shots will be used in any given game by virtually every level of player...regardless of your level, if you haven't got past the 50% level on at least half of those shots, you won't be able to MOVE ON...

Now, nobody expects you to be able to put a percentage on each shot but you must know ROUGHLY where you're at...half your Overheads don't go where you're aiming, only 1 in 5 Lobs stay in, your Return rarely gets past the mid-point of the court...think these areas need work?

So, that's the whole idea...you need a road map...how can you get anywhere if you don't know where you started or if you're there yet??

Make that list and then play a couple of times keeping in mind the shots on the list...at the end of your session(s), guess-ti-mate your results...if you can't put a number on it, then put the shots into categories...

Consider these categories...were you more often than not *effective* with the shot(did it serve its purpose)...was the shot mostly *ineffective* (resulted in an error or ended up being a lollipop)...or were you somewhere in the *middle*...if it was *effective*, give yourself a 70%, if in the *middle*, then 40, 50 or 60% and, *ineffective*, less than 40%...certainly you can do this!?

As you get better at identifying your status, remember we were going to focus on two areas (not just putting it in play) that include Placement(did it go where you intended) and, where applicable, Pace(were you able to add some pace)...with the shots list in mind, remember your first goal is Placement, which will either keep you in points longer or result in outright winners...then Pace, which will rob time from your opponents and may also result in triggering an error...to MOVE ON, they are both needed, just keep in mind their *relative* importance...

And finally, the best players are the most consistent...they get that way through practice, choosing the right shot at the right time, always being in control and never over hitting..and they do this 90% of the time...everyone's GOAL!

TIPBITS #145

MOVING ON (From a Beginning Intermediate)

Is this you?...you're no longer a Beginner, you've been playing quite some time and you find yourself on the winning team more often than not when playing against Beginners...further, you're not yet able to have a winning record when playing Advanced Intermediates, which probably leaves you just a little under the level of the bulk of all players...

In general, the opponents that have winning records against you (aside from the obvious Advanced players) are more consistent with all their strokes...they tend to have a slightly wider range of strokes...they may be a bit more aggressive and they use the Third Shot drop more often (helping them to get to the net more easily and more often)...and they occasionally hit some better angles than you're accustomed to seeing...once again, keep in mind that virtually all Advanced players have these attributes in "spades", so don't compare yourself to them...don't get them confused with an Advanced Intermediate...do these descriptions put you into the Beginning Intermediate area or do you think you're just a step away from becoming an Advanced player?...be honest!

By the numbers, the Advanced Beginner has a 2.5 rating, the Beginning Intermediate has a 3.0 rating and an Advanced Intermediate has a 3.5 rating...so a Beginning Intermediate can be anywhere between a 3.00 and a 3.49 (pretty hard to define the difference between a 3.49 and a 3.50)...there is quite a range of skill level that a Beginning Intermediate possesses...but you get the picture!

If this is you (not quite yet a 3.5), then probably your most important factor for MOVING ON is your time...your time on the court...if time is a problem, then every minute you put in on the court must be of the highest quality of effort you can muster...

And what is it that you are going to do?...for starters, you've got to look at your FIX IT List (or the one you have in your head)...what's your weakest PB attribute?...can you effectively "hide" it so you

can focus on other issues?...if it's consistency, there is no "hiding" it or working around it...if you're inconsistent because of your mechanics, get a lesson...if you're inconsistent because you don't play enough or use that shot enough, you've got to put in the time...learn a drill that focuses on that particular weakness and do it...

Really, it almost doesn't make much difference which one of the attributes you're missing or issue you have (consistency, range of strokes, aggressiveness, use of the Third Shot drop and/or angles), they all lend themselves to practice and more time focusing on them...even if aggressiveness is not in your nature, use your practice sessions or even actual playing situations to work on it...try to turn off your defensive mechanisms and add some offense...go for some of your shots...doing this repeatedly will result in something positive, for sure...either a positive result or the certain recognition that more practice is required in that area...

MOVING ON requires a focused commitment...both of time and the willingness to practice!

TIPBITS #146

MOVING ON (From a Advanced Intermediate)

Making the transition from an Advanced Intermediate(3.5) to an Advanced (4.0+) level player may be one of the most difficult MOVING ON efforts players make...it not only requires the necessary physical transition but also a commitment to a mental transition...and that mental transition may very well be the most difficult part of your transitioning to an Advanced player...

You may have heard this before or maybe you just can't believe it or accept it...BUT, it will come at you from all sides and all directions...the means to make that transition is by learning and mastering the soft game...rating clinics everywhere note that the principle difference between intermediates and advanced players is their basic strategy of play...soft versus power!

Yes, it's clearly a philosophy but that philosophy is supported by the vast majority of advanced players...consider this...you CANNOT overpower players of your own skill level...the likelihood of that happening are no better than 50/50...not a winning percentage...and surely you CANNOT overpower players of a higher skill level...you can't win against them if you're still driving balls from the baseline...less than a 20% chance of that!

With this said, having a soft game and being able to get to the net using a soft Third Shot is imperative...so, MOVING ON from an Intermediate player to an Advanced player is going to require that you learn the soft game and utilize it the majority of the time!

Want to read some earlier articles that may help you through this transition, then consider these...TIPBITS #59 Why the Soft Game, #'s 61-65, Improving Your Soft Game...#79, Footwork that Gets You to the Net...#'s 84 and 86, Drills to Improve Your Soft Game...

MOVING ON may require that you take one step back in order to take two steps forward...if you take that approach(learning the soft game), you CAN be the one that MOVES ON to being an Advanced level player!

TIPBITS #147

MOVING ON (From an Advanced (4.0) Player)

So, you've made it to the Advanced level...Congratulations...most likely, you earned it...or maybe you just squeaked in...or you latched on to a good partner and they brought you along...no matter, you're now among those at the best end of a bell curve that describes all Pickleball players...many in the middle(Intermediates) and less at either end(Beginners and Advanced)...

Why stop MOVING ON now?...well, it's never easy...but you already have most of the skills you need, you just need to hone them a bit more...your next goal, becoming an Advanced Tournament (4.5) level player...

As this implies, to reach this goal, you'll not only need to compete against some of the best around, you'll also need to start winning against them...and that's not going to happen by merely trying harder...you're going to have to MOVE ON with your game considerably(again)...

The first thing you may notice is that you can already hit some of the same shots your 4.5 counterparts can hit...but the really big difference is that they rarely miss...you, on the other hand, make your shot more often than not...but you're in the 60 to 70% range...they are in the 90% range...you now need to be more consistent than ever before...this is especially true when playing against the better(best) players...they can either bring out the worst or the best in you...

Something else you may notice is that the same shots you hit at 40 MPH, they can hit at 60MPH+

They put their overheads away, first chance they get...hit them a fat ball, you'll NEVER get it back...

You hit 6 out of 10 Third Shot drops, they hit 9 out of 10...

You hit many of your Returns fairly deep...they always pressure

you with their Returns...

You might be able to drive a ball past your 4.0 peers...it'll never happen with the 4.5...

You're good for 3 or 4 dink shots at the net...they rarely miss or get impatient...

You can hit angles inside the baseline...they can hit angles inside the NVZ...

You can over hit the ball...you make too many errors...they're always under control...

You find yourself in the wrong place on the court...they're always in position...

You like to compete...they love to compete...

Basically, they've got many more arrows in their quivers and all their arrows are sharp and straight...to MOVE ON to an Advanced Tournament player, you'll have to match them in every area...you can start by both observing (in person or on YOU-TUBE) and competing (casually or in tournaments) with the best whenever you can...learn more, play more, be more, MOVE ON!!!

TIPBITS #148

CUSHION IT

After a couple of hours on the Pickleball court, have you begun to notice a little aching in your hips...maybe a tender knee...a sore ankle...the bottoms of your feet bothering you a bit?

Maybe it's right after play or maybe it's the next morning...Think back!

If you answered "yes", maybe it's time for some new shoes?...if you're like most folks, you check the outer soles for wear...if they're badly worn or wearing unevenly, you probably recognize the need to replace your shoes...and replace them you should!

Why?...because you'll not only replace that badly worn outer sole but you'll also replace that worn out(down) inner sole...but are both important?...you bet the outer sole is important but the inner sole is more important..especially if you answered "yes" above!

And even if you didn't answer "yes" above, it's only a matter of time before you'll start noticing those aches(any or all of them)...replacing your shoes will miraculously help you with those aches and pains...and for two reasons...the new outer sole will be thicker than the worn out ones and the inner sole will be fresh and plush, adding even more new cushion to your step...So, don't put off replacing those worn shoes!

That was easy...what a simple way to relieve AND prevent aches and pains in your joints!

BUT, maybe you've been playing indoors a lot and your outer soles just don't show any wear...If that's the case, you might get a lot more usage out of your shoes(they don't wear out nearly so fast as they might on a typical abrasive outdoor surface)...that's good news for your pocketbook...but bad news for your joints!

Why?...because your outer soles may still look pretty good but you can be sure your inner sole is SHOT, as in worthless!...further, if

you're pretty mobile on the court, regardless of the surface you play on, chances are the inner soles have taken a worse beating than your outer soles...as a matter of fact, the inner sole needs replacement far sooner than the outer sole...

Here's some ideas on how to combat the inevitable stress being added to your joints because you've waited too long to replace your shoes(insoles)...consider athletic socks with extra padding(available at most sporting supply stores), buy sports socks that have at least some padding and wear two pair of them...

And consider this...the next time you buy new shoes, buy them one-half size larger...then ADD a very cheap pair of insole inserts(we're talking \$2 at Wal-mart or Walgreens), put on two pair of socks and you AND your joints will feel the difference immediately...more importantly, in a few weeks, if you do start to feel joint pain again, simply replace those cheap insoles and you're set to go again...give your joints a break, give them the CUSHION they need!

Remember when you "give back" you "get back" more than you "give back"...see TIPBITS.ORG
or consider something simple in your own back yard at
<http://www.foodpantries.org>

TIPBITS #149

REACT TO A WIDE ANGLE

The wide angle is a shot you will see frequently as your game progresses...adding complexity to the shot, it can often be very close to the net...when you're playing against better players, they will use angles to keep their opponents off balance...this type of shot is often a surprise because of its abrupt angle...further, it almost always angles off the court before reaching the NVZ line...it always seems to pull players from one side to another and who knows where you're at when it happens to you...

Two scenarios come to mind...

Both teams at the net, dinking back and forth...suddenly, your opponent hits this very wide sharp angle causing the ball to go way wide...what can you do...you're way off the court, probably heading for the fence or the next court or even the bleachers...you can't hit it back over the net, your opponents are right there (amused by your effort)...this is one of those rare chances when you get to forget about getting it over the net...your only goal is to get it back on the court(anywhere)...so this is your chance, a chance to go "around the pipe"...your best chance, hit a low screamer aimed at the back corner of your opponents court...forget the net, you don't need to go over it...just hit it briskly, aim for that corner and hope no one is there to cover your shot! Go for it!

Or perhaps you're on the baseline and your opponents are at the net...you're either attempting a Third shot drop or trying a hard drive to test your opponents...out of nowhere they hit a delicate wide angle shot into the NVZ...surprise...you're on the baseline and now you've got to scamper to merely get your paddle on the ball...what can/should you do?...here again, not many options...if YOU go for the ball and you DO get to it, you've got next to no shot...and now you're way out of position to deal with anything that comes back even if you do reach the ball(much less your partner, whose in no man's land)...the shot?... "pop" it in the air...here's one time a lob can really bale you out of trouble...it's not an easy shot and may require a bit of ingenuity but properly hit, with enough

height and depth, it'll both surprise your opponents, get them off the net and buy you and your partner some time to regroup!

It's just a matter of time before you'll be in one of these positions...keep these options in mind for when the time comes...in the meantime, take a minute and consider the options in TIPBITS.ORG and see if you can find a way to "give back" too!

TIPBITS #150

TIME TO RECAP

As we have done after each multiple of 9 TIPBITS, it still seems appropriate to continue to provide a review of the last 9...the rationale now is the same as it was then...many of the topics presented need time to digest or to be made a part of every day play or simply warrant repeating...so, here goes...

#141 Moving On(Advancing Beginner-Part 2)...the importance of and mastering the Volley

#142 Moving On(Advancing Beginner-Part 3)...the number One PB strategy...getting to the net

#143 Moving On(All Levels)...examining the status of your game using a Fix-it List

#144 Moving On(Percentages)...assigning values to the effectiveness of items on your Fix-it List

#145 Moving On(From a Beginning Intermediate)...why and how to Move On with time and practice

#146 Moving On(From a Advanced Intermediate)...why and how to add the Soft Game to Move On

#147 Moving On(From an Advanced (4.0) Player)...how to up the ante to Move On to the top

#148 Cushion It...the important parallel between your shape and your shoes

#149 React to a Wide Angle...adding some options to your game to deal with wide angles

Finally...You've read this before but absolutely nothing is more important than these next few sentences...Percentage Pickleball is not making mistakes... never over hitting, being under control, being patient and being in the right place at the right time... Percentage Pickleball, it's all about putting the percentages, the overwhelming likelihood that you will be successful, on your side!!!

TIPBITS #151

GET A GRIP

If you've had your Pickleball paddle for a while, play regularly or just got a new paddle, you might be in the market for a new or different grip for the handle...it could be, even if you just got a new paddle, that the grip isn't to your liking...grips come in different thicknesses, patterns and grooves and different colors...the thickness of your grip may provide some advantages and/or some disadvantages...or the grip size may be of little or no difference to some players...a good grip may be defined in several ways...how it feels and how it fits...what can a good grip do for you?

It may be too small(thin) or too big(thick)...generally speaking, a smaller grip will "allow" you(using that word loosely) to use more wrist in your strokes...an example, in the tennis world, might be Rafael Nadal who uses a smaller(thinner) than most grip size than his peers...this does "allow" him or makes it easier to use much more wrist on his shots which in turn allows him to hit shots with much more spin and racket head speed(something he is known for)...this might be a good thing for you if you can control when and when NOT to use your wrist(using too much or ANY may not be good, which has often been addressed)...so, a thicker grip controls(lessens) the amount of wrist you can use...this may be good if you're using too much wrist on some or all of your strokes/shots...one further point...as it relates to over use injuries(such as tennis elbow or simply muscle fatigue)...a larger (thicker) grip will let you grip the paddle with less effort and subsequently help prevent muscle fatigue and assist in avoiding or recovering from tennis elbow strains...

That seemed to get technical real quick...but for most players the grip you choose is the one that does the best job of just being a "grip"...in other words, if it's no longer tacky to the touch or just plain slippery, it's time to replace it...this is where your options come in...

Let's describe your options...the terms most often used are... a Replacement grip...or an Over grip...simply put, a Replacement

grip replaces the grip that came with your paddle...they are generally black in color, come in a couple of different thicknesses and may or may not have somewhat different surface textures(eg., plain, ribbed or sponge-like)...an Over grip is much thinner than a Replacement grip, costs about one sixth of a Replacement grip and is often used to build up the size of the original grip...some players order their paddles with a slightly smaller grip from the manufacturer and then add an Over grip to build it up to the size they like...Over grips have the advantage of being much cheaper, are very easy to replace, are often much tackier than Replacement grips and come in a ton of colors...and some players remove their original grip entirely and just use one or two Over grips to build (reduce) their grip to the size they like...you get the picture!

Regardless of your choice of grip, you could just leave your grip alone if its size is not an issue...then, you just want to keep it tacky(not slippery)...this can be accomplished in several ways...first and most common is to replace the grip entirely when it's no longer effective...another option is to keep your old grip and simply refurbish it to like new...this can be done quite quickly and very inexpensively by using either a tacky towel(to wipe on a new level of tackiness) or a liquid formula that accomplishes the same thing...if this isn't to your liking, there are numerous rosin-style bags that will offset your perspiration...and, should none of these work, there are always gloves...

Gloves are commonly (and successfully) used in at least two other racket sports; racquetball and squash... this may, however, become an investment issue...for some, regardless of cost, this is the best possible solution to maintain the "grip" desired...many players change gloves frequently, some each match, some each game and some numerous times in a single game, depending on both the weather conditions and the conditions of the glove(its age and quality)...if you have difficulties with sweating and maintaining control of the grip, consider a good quality glove(and then be prepared to buy more than one)!

You've got to have a good grip!

If you're ready to "give back", check new ways at TIPBITS.ORG

TIPBITS #152

GOAL FOR TODAY

Finding it hard to get a group together to practice or just find it difficult to find the time to drill?...if this is your situation, then you might be having a hard time making much progress on MOVING ON (improving your game)...

Do you find yourself trying to add something or fix something in your game during your regular open play games?...only to find out that you get too focused on trying to win each point and the game, you forget to work on those very problems you intended to improve...

Or maybe it's not so much about winning that distracts you from working on those problems?...it's trying not to let your partner down or embarrass yourself in front of your peers...

Any of this sound familiar?

Or maybe you DO go into a game with the best intentions?...focusing on getting your Serve deep, putting the Return to your opponent's weakest side and working on your Third shot drop...certainly, they all need the work!

Or you've decided it's time to get back to basics and that's your goal for today...keeping your eye on the ball, bending your knees and moving your feet...

Really...this doesn't work either, best intentions or not...if you really want to make progress on something, you have got to focus on just ONE GOAL only!!!

Let's take the most elementary strokes...the Serve, Return and Third shot drop...really, all three in one day?...be serious!...or the basics for virtually all sports?...focusing on the ball, bending your knees and moving your feet...not likely!

IF you honestly would like to improve your game during open

game play, you can only have ONE GOAL...work on your Serve on every point...that's it!

OR focus on just ONE basic GOAL...watch the ball ALL the time...that's it!

If you do this, you WILL be able to focus on and expect to MOVE ON to your ONE GOAL!...

How about having just ONE GOAL for your life for today?...maybe it's time to "give back"?
Check out some new ways at TIPBITS.ORG

TIPBITS #153

THE MIDDLE MAN

Unlike some racket sports where the Serving team has the advantage, in Pickleball, the Serving team is at a disadvantage...yes, the Serving team does have at least one advantage...they get to score points...Returning teams don't...but, the Serving team remains at a disadvantage until they neutralize the Returning team by getting to the net...nothing you didn't know already...right?

So, presuming you're the Returning team and you feel it's important to get into a position to score points...then, you must wrestle the Serve away from your opponents as soon as possible...that means getting to and holding onto to your advantage at the net...and winning the next two points!

No better way than to start on your very first Return...simply hit your Return deep and, preferably, with some pace as well...the depth keeps the Serving team back and makes for a more difficult Third shot...the pace also makes for a more difficult Third shot...but, on the down side, it robs you of the time you need to join your partner at the net...if you're not BOTH at the net, you are jeopardizing your advantage!

Solve this problem by relying on your net man...let's nickname him the Middle Man...as the partner of the player hitting the Return, the best way for your partner to get quickly and safely to the net(to join you) may be for you to help him out...how?

As the net man, you're generally positioned just inches from the NVZ line probably very close to the middle of your half of the court...BUT, you do need to be able to pick off or at least take the balls that are in the middle of the court(or any balls that are within your reach, especially if your partner is still a step or two from the NVZ)...to do this, prepare early and move over a step to the middle immediately as the Return is crossing the net...this will significantly narrow the Serving team's target, either to force them to go wider than they had planned or to try to hit a winner behind

you...both of their options have less chance for success...this concept works regardless of what half of the court you're on or whether the middle is on your forehand or backhand sides...

Certainly there are issues with this approach(a couple of examples)...

The Return goes back to the opponent on your half of the court...if your opponent recognizes what you're up to, he may try to go behind you...be aware!

The Serving team likes to hit drive shots down the line AND they're frequently successful...be aware!

The bottom line here is really pretty straight forward...we're NOT trying to make a last second poach on the occasional fat ball that presents itself...we are predictably moving more to the middle and squeezing off the area where the opponents' ball most likely will be headed...further, we are forcing the opponents into making a more difficult shot, paying attention to you at the same time and making your partner's trip to the net more likely to be successful...

Try being a Middle Man for your Returning team and get the Serve ASAP!

TIPBITS #154

IMPROVE YOUR FOCUS

Easy to say, hard to do...why focus?...and on what?...and how?...improving your results on a daily basis, on the Pickleball court, can simply come down to FOCUS...keeping your eye on the ball...or improving your reaction time...or improving your hand to eye coordination...any or all of the above...

Practice can help you FOCUS...repetition of focusing routines does pay off...the more you practice, the more progress you'll see...try these drills and see how much their frequent repetition helps your game improve...

Here is a simple variation on a drill you may already be doing...if you're not familiar with it, here's the original version of the drill...with just 2 players on the court, stand opposite of the net from one another at the NVZ line and at the far edge of the court...begin hitting soft dinks across to each other...after hitting a few in a row, continue the same soft dink but each player moves the other slightly toward the middle of the court moving along with him(or her), still along the NVZ line...continue this movement and soft dinking until you have moved each other all the way to the opposite side...then reverse direction, continuing the soft dinks until you have arrived at your starting position...makes you focus, doesn't it?...

Want a slight variation?... do the same thing but this time with only volleys(using only 50-60% of your maximum pace)...and finally, do the same thing but one player volleys only and the other hits only a stop volley bouncing the ball softly into the NVZ...that's 2 variations on the original version...all 3 versions are effective and beneficial to your game and help you to learn to focus for a longer periods of time..

Now, here's the twist on these original versions...you've probably seen new players just learning the feel for the ball by hitting it(bumping it) several times up in the air, a foot or so...to add complexity(and the added focus required to do this), try adding one

such "bump" before each soft dink over the net...each player must "bump" the ball before they dink it over the net...repeat this all the way down to the end of the court and then back to the beginning(WITHOUT missing)...challenging?...not challenging enough?...try it with the other two variations as well...the result?...you'll clearly learn to watch the ball, improve your reaction time, your hand to eye coordination AND you'll FOCUS better, too...

One more!...with four players(or three)...this drill is done with just one player on one side and the other players on the opposite side, all at the NVZ line...this will be a volley only drill...anyone can feed the ball...begin with volleys hit at 50-60% maximum pace, with the intent of reaching 10 or 20 in a row...gradually pick up the pace until an error is made...repeat until the player in the hot seat has had enough...then rotate so that each player is in the hot seat...learn anything?

Why not take a little time out to see if improving your FOCUS can help your results on the court?!

And maybe see if "giving back" a little time results in "getting back" more than you "gave back"!?

See TIPBITS.ORG for some good options...

TIPBITS #155

SPIN TRENDS

You may have noticed or heard recently about some trends taking place related to imparting SPIN on a Pickleball...Spins have been a frequent topic and are clearly an integral part of our game...now, some trends have begun to evolve that are putting more emphasis on SPIN and warrant some further discussion...

They relate to at least two areas of the game...the Rules and Guidelines, for one, and two, their Use, perhaps as a result of or recognition of those rules and guidelines...

SPIN is a natural by-product of the manner in which the paddle comes in contact with the ball...based on that contact, the ball may or may not have SPIN or "rotation" added to it...the more SPIN or rotation that is added to it, the more impact it has onto its flight, its trajectory And its bounce(either off the ground or off another paddle)...

This is where the Rules and Guidelines come into play...the governing body for our sport, the USAPA, has mandated from nearly the beginning that certain criteria must be met for paddles and balls that are sanctioned for our sport...paddle criteria includes such things as size(length and width), rebound or deflection(that amount of POP the ball has off of the paddle) and the paddle's face abrasion or coarseness(which determines the amount of grip the paddle has on the ball at the point of contact)...

Now, more than ever, a number of paddle manufacturers are pushing those boundaries(unlike ever before)...but more specifically in the area of the level of abrasiveness(adding power or POP has always been a go-to target)...now it's all about being able to apply more spin to the ball...manufacturers have produced paddles that have reached those limits and some have exceeded them(with the predictable result of being categorized as illegal for competitive use)...so there's one trend for sure!!!

Rules and Guidelines for balls are also getting the once over with new parameters being presented and enforcement of those changes following shortly behind(October 1, 2016 deadlines-moved back several months to accommodate manufacturing issues)...Balls must conform by diameter, weight, bounce and hardness...balls with more or less bounce and balls that are softer or harder ALSO have an impact on the amount of SPIN that is imparted on them at contact...the USAPA pays close attention to these characteristics in order to keep the balls from becoming too removed from the original intent of the games' founders(meaning that they choose NOT to add an unfair advantage to one style of play over another)...interpret that any way you like!!!

That pretty much covers the Rules and Guidelines portion of how SPIN is being addressed for paddles and balls...next time, what trends have appeared as a result of this emphasis on SPIN...

Finally, if you have some GOOD OPTIONS you feel should be shared to help others to "give back", please share them by visiting the TIPBITS.ORG website!

TIPBITS #156

SPIN TRENDS (Use)

We previously discussed a recent observation about an upsurge in the use of SPIN...in particular, attention brought to it by the Rules and Guidelines and subsequently, its Use...Spins have been a frequent topic and are clearly an integral part of our game...and now, some trends have begun to evolve that are putting more emphasis on SPIN and warrant some further discussion...

SPIN is a natural by-product of the manner in which the paddle comes in contact with the ball...based on that contact, the ball may or may not have SPIN or "rotation" added to it...the more SPIN or rotation that is added to it, the more impact it has onto its flight, its trajectory And its bounce(either off the ground or off another paddle)...

This is our subject here, the Use of SPIN...or more precisely, some current emphasis on its Use...this current emphasis has been triggered because many paddle manufacturers are also placing more emphasis on pushing the boundaries on just how "coarse" the paddle's surface can be made...players are discovering that more and more spin can be applied to the ball...it's almost "free" SPIN...meaning that, given two paddles of similar size and weight, the paddle with the "coarsest" face will provide more spin with the exact same level of effort by the player...it's "free" because the player needs to do nothing different to get the extra SPIN...

This benefit can be seen at the offset of every point, the Serve...it's obvious Use here is by many players using either much more(almost excessive) top spin and/or side spin while Serving...the result is at least two-fold...first the ball's flight or trajectory is changed from that of a ball hit with little or no SPIN..and second, the ball's bounce upon landing...this second result is exactly what makes the added SPIN of so much value...an opponent must detect this SPIN immediately AND then overcome its impact...this is more easily said than done(more later on that)...

The next opportunity to benefit from this "free" SPIN is on the

Return...here again, both top spin and side spin can be effective...but a trend has become popular and that's under spin, especially now, because of the paddles' design, excessive under spin or back spin(or "slice") is making inroads for many players...again, the trajectory is impacted but, as before, it's the bounce that presents the challenge to the opponent...

Because the first two shots in each point (the Serve and the Return) must bounce before they can be hit, the fact that both the trajectory and the bounce are impacted is the very reason these shots have received so much emphasis on the additional SPIN that's become "free" to the player...and this benefit becomes greater as the amount of SPIN increases...the reason...because the excessive spin MUST be counter-acted in order for the player to control his reply to these shots...if not, the direction of those replies will be way off target...this fact alone opens the door to a whole new topic (for future discussion)... "How to Counter SPIN" ...

For now, consider adding one of these SPINS to your Serve or Return...maybe you'll see the value in popping for a new paddle...just make sure you purchase ones that HAVE been approved by our governing body...

And please don't forget, there are other GOOD OPTIONS at the TIPBITS.ORG website!

