

PICKLEBALL

TIPBITS

YEAR FIVE

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FOREWORD

If you've had a chance to read one of our earlier publications, TIPBITS YEAR ONE, TWO, THREE or FOUR, 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 #209

PLAN A or PLAN B

Have you ever been in a tournament, a league match, or even a somewhat serious pick up game and you just don't seem to have what it takes...you're off and can't fix it?

It's not frustrating at first...you may just write it off to early game jitters...or you just might not pay any attention and simply ignore it...BUT when your PLAN or your GAME or even your go to SHOT doesn't fall into place soon enough, you're in trouble...and the sooner you take notice of it, the better...you MUST make a conscious decision that what you're doing just isn't working AND you MUST make a change!

It's time to go to either your Game Plan B (as a Team) or your own B Game (as a Player)...this, of course, presumes you have a second approach...and here is the point of this article...1) having a second plan, 2) knowing when to change, 3) knowing what to change(your options) and 4) knowing when, if ever, to return to your original approach.

THE GAME PLAN: This is a TEAM thing and should be dealt with as just that...you must agree with your partner on the situation at hand and agree on what to do next, as a team.

- 1) The Game Plan you discussed initially (let's hope) with your partner isn't working, so now you must go to your alternate plan...did you have one? Shouldn't you? Good idea!
- 2) The Time to do this should certainly be recognized after your team has lost 3 points in a row and some change made before you lose no more than 5!
- 3) The What to do begins with the discussion...such as, should you...change the opponent you're attacking or change the side you're attacking or change your formation or ???...just do something different!
- 4) As a Team, changing back to your original Game Plan probably makes little sense...staying with what's working does!

YOUR GAME PLAN: The style of play you prefer is an Individual thing and needs to be dealt with by you alone...you must realize this and then you need to do something about it!

- 1) Your A Game just isn't there for you today...if you're playing the soft game and you've got no feel so far, you can't hit a Third shot drop for love or money, you have got to go to an alternate Game, your B Game...you've got one, don't you?...you need one! One style of play just doesn't cut it anymore!
- 2) The Time to make this change has to be recognized after 3 failed attempts and no more than 5!
- 3) The What you change is to move to your B Game...even though it's not your favorite, you've got to stop making errors and make that change...
- 4) Finally, as an Individual, changing back to your A Game will become evident as you play your way back into the match and recover your confidence.

NOTE: having more than one style of play is paramount in becoming a well rounded player and essential for all competitive formats(tournaments, leagues, and open play); that is, being able to play the Soft Game and the Power Game!

TIPBITS #210

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...

#201 Grunting...the analysis and value of Grunting in Pickleball

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REPEAT...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 #211

INSIGHTS FROM A NATIONAL CHAMPION

(This TIPBITS format presents some Background and Insights from the Best Players in the Country)

DICK SCOTT

Where were you born? Samaritan Hospital in Dayton, Ohio...I had 8 older brothers, which led to a very competitive life, especially the many hours of ping pong with them that helped me develop my fairly quick hands...now, the best part of my Pickleball game.

Did you play other sports?

In Junior High, I played football, basketball and baseball; In Senior High, the football coach asked me if I'd ever consider cross country running and the baseball coach thought I would do better in track...so High School was cross country, basketball and track; At Baldwin-Wallace(B-W) College, I did the same...11 Varsity letters, Outstanding Male Athlete of the Year and in 1983, was inducted into the B-W Hall of Fame.

Do you remember where and when you first played PB?

In my early years as a Physical Education teacher, we played a game very similar to Pickleball that used a Nerf ball and Raquetball paddles...very slow but safe!

What is your favorite shot and why?

It's any shot that's in and is kept fairly low...my backhand is better than my forehand, so my favorite shot is a backhand snap low and down the middle and a backhand misdirection.

What paddle(s) do you currently use?

I use a Red Engage Encore...it keeps me focused on the right things...ask me "Why" if you see me, it's a great story about friends being friends!

Do you have a shot you practice or a drill you like?

I love Skinny Singles...great conditioning, requires a deep serve, a deep return, Third Shot drops and produces wonderful sword fights...great for reaction time.

Do you have a warm up routine?

I stretch for 15 minutes before leaving for Pickleball, then warm up at the courts with dinks, volleys and Third Shot drops.

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

The most important shot is any shot that stays in and low...it can be hard or soft BUT should be one that has a very high percentage of being IN.

Would you care to add anything(suggestions/comments) you'd like the readers to hear?

Pick your partners carefully for major tournaments...I have had wonderful partners at the National level; Bill Freeman, the master of placement, Nancy Nowak, the master of consistency and Ernie Tomlinson, the master of power ...all three of these strengths are important for success in Pickleball.

Finally, I have been so fortunate to live in The Villages, a community that offers over 170 PB courts, countless numbers of National Champions, men and women, all readily available for daily play...they have all been instrumental in my development.

TIPBITS #212

INSIGHTS FOLLOW UP

DICK SCOTT

Our last article, Insights from a National Champion, Dick Scott, presented a relatively low keyed, not so obvious presentation of the key to his success...anyone who knows him is quick to point out he is NOT a low keyed person...but quite the opposite...however, his answers to the questions did not really over emphasize his reasons for success...hence, this follow up article!

When you talk strategy with Dick or listen to him in clinics, there is only ONE philosophy he maintains for all to follow, "Don't make mistakes!"...this, more than any other postulate, dictates his rise to success...the corollary is simple and often heard, "Keep the ball in play!"...Finally, he mentions subtly to "Keep the ball low!"...again, not the style of many flamboyant super stars but a very effective strategy for winning!

One can only speculate about what was going through Dick's mind while watching a recent nationally televised Men's Open Championship match...could you imagine his chagrin, watching point after point being decided almost exclusively by errors...in the end, the number of winners could be counted on a single hand...not his philosophy...nor should it be yours!

Practicing and drilling for Dick must meet at least two criteria...it has to be challenging and it has to benefit (improve) his game...his choice, when asked in the article, was "Skinny Singles", a drill described in its own article (TIPBITS #193) a short time back.

What's so remarkable about this choice can be appreciated when you learn that Dick is known for having the fastest hands(reactions) of anyone in The Villages...he loves to challenge any and all players that are present, especially younger and stronger players...that fact alone says volumes about the value of the Skinny Singles drill...as he states, it helps develop the skills required for the first three shots in every point, it requires far more control than

that needed in a typical doubles point AND, as he favors, it produces great sword fights...one on one fast-paced duels to the end...if it works for him, shouldn't you incorporate it into your practice regime?

TIPBITS #213

ARE YOU READY

It seems like every time you turn around these days there is another tournament on the horizon...you may have played in a number of them, maybe only a few or haven't played your first just yet...one thing's for sure, however, and that is they are not like your open play pick up games in any way!

A good question you should ask yourself prior to playing, maybe even prior to signing up, is “are you ready”?

Ready could mean a number of things...is your game in tournament form, do you have a good partner, are you tournament tough, can you handle the riggers of tournament competition or do you really know what to expect?...all good questions...surely, your game can always get better, you've got to have good chemistry with your partner, you'll get tournament tough the more you play and the riggers of the game?...well that's what we're going to talk about right now!

As more and more tournaments come along and more and more players take up the game, more and more players enter tournaments...this simply means more competition and more competitors...you'll need to face off with more opponents...already, many tournaments are spread over several days...even the smaller tournaments run all day long, combining multiple events, such as gender doubles in the AM and Mixed doubles in the PM...the point being, you're playing all day long...how often do you play all day long?...if you expect to get to any final, whether the event is split into several days or not, you have to be ready...to play all day long!

Consider the casual runner who has just begun to run to get into better shape, maybe to lose a little weight or increase their lung capacity...they work their way up to their first milestone...a mile...once they've got the bug, they're ready for a 5K run, maybe to support a favorite charity...so, they add a little more length to their running routine...this can progress all the way to running a marathon...do you think they just go out and run that

marathon(over 26 miles) without any training, any prep work?...not hardly!...they prepare for weeks, running longer and longer each time until they build up their stamina and endurance...they do all this so they are at their best on race day!

How does this differ from your preparation for a day long tournament?...clearly, it shouldn't!

To be ready for a tournament, to be at your best, to be able to perform at your best all day long, you need to build up your endurance! You CAN do this by cross training, like running, biking, swimming but if those options don't interest you, guess what?...you've got to do something!

Playing longer and longer prior to your tournament day will get you ready!

That IS your very best option and it's a must if you expect to do well and last the whole day...

Are You Ready?

TIPBITS #214

SIMPLE REPETITION : CONSISTENCY

It's important to recognize the role that Consistency plays in Percentage Pickleball...proper Technique, Consistency and Repetition all breed successful performance...good Technique produces Consistency AND Repetition of good technique produces successful performance!

Consistency...One word, two meanings...

To the Pickleball Instructor or to the Player Evaluator, 1) Consistency means that a player has varying degrees of predictability or uniformity with regards to their shot making ability...a player with little or no consistency is often considered either a Beginner or a lower level Intermediate player...a player that is very consistent is considered a stronger Intermediate or Advanced player...the more consistent, the higher the skill level...so Consistency, HERE, means the ability of the player to repeat successful shot making...but Consistency also means 2) Simple Repetition...

And it's Simple Repetition we want to focus on because Simple Repetition results in Consistency of performance and successful play...

As a basis for our discussion, let's look at the Third Shot Drop...not an easy shot, not easy to repeat successfully...it requires proper technique AND it requires repetition (the ability to repeat that technique consistently)! This done consistently will produce a successful Third Shot Drop!

So, if repetition of proper technique is all there is to successful performance, where's the secret in that? Isn't it then a simple matter of "Just Do It!"?

Certainly, if you could just stand there, as in practice (with a ball machine), and repeat the same motion over and over, you'd probably be able to hit 90% of your drops successfully...but,

THERE is the wrinkle!

Perhaps this article should be entitled Good Footwork?...because this could very well be the answer to becoming more Consistent...hitting the ball repeatedly the same way is a no-brainer...BUT, being able to be in a position to hit the ball the same way repeatedly is a whole “nother” story...this requires good footwork...immediate recognition (FOCUS) of the path of the ball, it's pace, spin and direction...THEN, your movement, either right or left, forward or backward, that will allow you to be in the exact same POSITION you were when you were on the ball machine in practice...MOVE to the ball so that you can repeat your exact stroke (without stretching, reaching or otherwise contorting)...it IS that simple!

It really does not make much difference which shot is needed...a Serve, a Return, a Third Shot Drop, a Lob or Overhead or a Volley...if you can REPEAT putting yourself into the same POSITION every time, you'll be able to hit a Consistently Successful shot most every time! Percentage Pickleball!

TIPBITS #215

REPEATING REPETITION

Previously, we discussed the value of Consistency, the value of Repetition, the value of good Technique and their relationship to successful performance...in that article, emphasis was placed on using good footwork to achieve or put yourself into a better position (pun intended) to achieve a successful outcome...unfortunately, this doesn't come easy...many times it's all too easy to take the simple way out, to be lazy, to REACH for the ball versus MOVING to it!

This article may reinforce just how easy it is to take the simple way out and continue with poor habits when we really know better...but, it's hard to change bad habits...so, why not use your height or reach to hit the ball? It's easier, requires less effort...so what if your unwillingness to move spawns one unorthodox shot after another?...sometimes you even make a good (lucky) shot! Right?

BUT, how can you expect to hit the ball the same way every time if you don't put yourself in the proper position to do so? Being consistent requires that you DO stroke the ball the same whenever possible...it should not be by chance but by intent!

Well, like so many other things in life, we know what's best but we're often too lazy, too tired to do the right thing...BUT, does that attitude make you a better player or a better person?...it's easier to NOT change than it is TO change...it's HARD to change!

If you want and expect better results, you KNOW you need to commit to doing the right thing...where do you start?

Perhaps with recognition of when and how often you find yourself taking the easy way out, the REACH versus the MOVE...make note of it at the time it happens...were you able to stroke the ball the way you learned, using proper technique? Or did you stab at the ball like you were fending off an attack? In this particular circumstance could you have been better prepared? Could you simply have moved one way or the other and hit the stroke you

KNOW you should have hit? Would it more likely have had a better chance of being successful? You know the answers...you CAN make a conscious effort the next time, WILL you?

Clearly, we can't expect to MOVE to all of them...But when we can, we should!

It takes commitment...you have to decide if it's important enough to you...to MOVE your feet to put yourself into a better position...to produce consistently better and more successful performance!

The simple goal...1) MOVE to the ball, 2) SET yourself up, 3) STROKE the ball, 4) REPEAT your good Technique and 5) SEE your successful performance!

TIPBITS #216

DINK WITH A PURPOSE

How often have you hit a shot with OUT some specific purpose, direction or intent as your motive? Perhaps many of your shots are simply reflexes or for the sole purpose of keeping the ball in play? This approach is certainly acceptable but does it always produce the best results?

We're not talking about the big picture here, as in a game plan...But on a much smaller scale, at the shot and/or point levels...and we're going to focus on just one shot...the Dink shot!

The good news is that a Dink shot rarely fits into the category of a reflex only shot...you almost always have plenty of time to both set up for the shot and to give some thought to its direction/target and to its purpose...hence, you should Dink with a Purpose!

The Dink shot plays a key role in many points and strategies...the first and probably the most important, the shot of choice when attempting to approach the net, either from 1) the baseline or 2) en route to the NVZ line...and its most frequent use, its use 3) in the soft game at the net!

Having a purpose for the use of the Dink shot from 1) the baseline is pretty self-evident...getting to the net ...but there can certainly and SHOULD be more to it than just that...looking for the most effective placement for the Dink shot should be priority number one...should it be down the middle over the lowest part of the net opening the door to confusing the opponents...or should it be the more difficult shot over the higher part of the net to find the corner of the NVZ and your opponents weaker backhand?...or should you mix up the target of your Dink shot from the baseline?

If you're en route to the NVZ line but had to stop part way, you now find yourself faced with dealing with your opponents' more aggressive shots aimed at keeping you away from the net...in this case, your options for a purpose becomes much narrower...it's 2) just getting SAFELY to the net any way possible...your target here

is simply what's easiest to accomplish!

Now, it's most frequent use and the greatest need for a Dink with a Purpose...3) the soft game at the net.

How often do you make it to the net(or you're there already as the Returning team) and you simply react to the oncoming ball? You've got to have a purpose! You've got to KNOW your opponents' weakness at the net (or you need to DISCOVER it if you don't already know it)...so your first target needs to be their weakness...if it's one side or the other, you need to work that side...if their movement to one side or the other is suspect, you should go there! Which of your two opponents has the weakest soft game?...you need to go there!

Given that both opponents are as good or better than you, you can NOT just hit the ball repeatedly any old place...you need a plan, a purpose that results in an advantage for you...it could be pulling them wide or hitting two shots wide then one in the middle or hitting short, then deep or mixing the spins...if it works once, keep doing it...but have a plan and Dink with a Purpose!

PARALLEL SPORTS 1

There are many racket sports that we have either played, watched or been aware of...all have a number of similarities and a number of differences...many that play Pickleball have played one of these other sports and have subsequently had a bit of an advantage or edge on those without such backgrounds...but sometimes the rules, the mechanics, or even the strategies, work in reverse...they may or may not be of benefit to the new Pickleball player...let's take a look at one of the other racket sports that has several parallels to Pickleball.

Some racket sports that come to mind include Squash, Racquetball, Badminton, Platform Tennis, Beach Tennis and, of course, Tennis...arguably, Tennis has had the widest public exposure, both from a participation point of view as well as from the number of opportunities for viewing from its broad television schedule...so, let's compare Tennis to Pickleball.

Rules: It seems clear that the inventors of the sport of Pickleball used many of the rules for Tennis as a guideline for Pickleball...it doesn't take someone long to recognize that the inventors made an effort to change the Tennis rules to make their sport more skill or age or gender friendly...the end goal being that gender, age and all levels of skill could play the game and be competitive...these considerations are never more evident than in the underhand Serve requirement, the two bounce rule and the NVZ line rule...other rules also provide a gender, age, and skill neutralizing result.

More specifically, the Serve must be hit with an underhand motion(and now a number of other refinements not in the inventors' original thinking)...this rule clearly eliminates any favoritism...add to that the single Serve only rule...this further neutralizes the value of the Serve...see where this is heading? Even the two bounce rule slants the benefit of Serving back to the Receiving team...no Serve and Volley allowed!

Perhaps the only real benefit of Serving, unlike Tennis, is that it is

the only time you get to score!

Next, we have the court size and configuration...similarities and differences...the court's size is the most obvious difference, just one third the size of a Tennis court...this is an incredible equalizer, maybe no more valuable than as an age neutralizer, young or old...you still have a diagonal service box you must target...but you don't have to squeeze the Serve into a box just over the net...just keep it from going too long...much easier for everyone...the whole court size thing parallels teaching any sport with a ball...the closer you are to the target, the easier it is to hit!

Add to that, the ball is bigger and the racket is shorter...and the net is lower...all these elements make the game easier to learn and to play...

Then, there is the NVZ line and its rules...no such thing in Tennis...this rule keeps the aggressive players from overwhelming the less aggressive players.

Finally, because it's easier to win points at the net, often all 4 players are at the net...this makes for an even smaller target area, easy enough for anyone to hit...just a seven by ten foot box from just seven or fewer feet away...who can't do that?

But these are just some similarities and differences...what can we learn from this Parallel Sport?

PARALLEL SPORTS 2

In Parallel Sports 1, we saw that Tennis has several parallels to Pickleball...we also saw that the Pickleball “Fathers” made several rule changes...these all seemed directed at making this new game more attractive to all ages, genders and skill levels...this article begins a discussion on what we can learn from Tennis that could impact our Pickleball play...both mechanics and strategies, good and bad!

Some highly desirable traits of good Tennis have little or no value for the Pickleball player...

One of the most rudimentary aspects of playing good Tennis is the ability to hit ground strokes and volleys on the run...and not just moving from side to side but with wide open running at full tilt...in Pickleball, hitting on the run is discouraged for a variety of reasons...it's rarely required, due to court size...1) the area of court coverage is minuscule compared to Tennis and 2), the target area is much smaller which suggests the need to stroke the ball using a firm foundation so that the greatest degree of accuracy can be maintained...hitting volleys on the run works for Tennis when you're using a Serve and Volley technique but in Pickleball, this strategy doesn't apply...further, the Serving team in Pickleball is HIGHLY discouraged from racing to the net without a carefully placed third shot...and then it's strongly encouraged that the advancing player STOP before the opponent strikes the ball...hitting on the run just doesn't have a role in Percentage Pickleball.

Another characteristic of good mechanics in Tennis is long sweeping strokes(lengthy back swings and a long follow through)...these strokes are very fluid and allow the Tennis player to hit with great pace and lots of spin...in Pickleball, there is little time or value in the long stroke...in Pickleball, the intent of the stroke is to put the desired amount of pace and spin on the ball with the least amount of preparation time and the shortest possible follow through...each of these components of keeping the stroke

short and compact helps both with direction of the ball and with the need to be ready for the likely quick response from the opponent...not something required in Tennis!

With over 1,000 (36'X39' versus 20'X22') MORE square feet to target, the Tennis player has a much larger margin for error...and if you watch much, most shots are WELL within the constraints of the court...not so in Pickleball...in Pickleball, shot control is crucial on virtually every shot...in Tennis, pace and spin can be used with much LESS concern for accuracy...not to mention that the ball reacts much more favorably to spin, providing, again, a much larger margin for error...with tolerances(court dimensions and such close proximity to boundaries), CONTROL is the name of the game for the Percentage Pickleball player.

There are numerous other differences between these two sports, like the significant use of soft controlled dink shots, the whole notion of net play and point resetting, to name a few...but the similarities in both should be given their due...these similarities include not only technique and mechanics, but strategies including game plans, choice of partners, playing as a team, positive reinforcement, court positioning, camaraderie and FUN...what's so great is that so many elements of each parallel racket sport translates to Pickleball, either as a similarity or as a difference...it comes down to just how quickly you adapt to those elements!

Perhaps we can use these thoughts as a method to attract other racket sport players to our game?

PARALLEL SPORTS 3

In Parallel Sports 1, we saw that Tennis has several parallels to Pickleball...we also saw that the Pickleball “Fathers” made several rule changes directed at making this new game more attractive to all ages, genders and skill levels...In Parallel Sports 2, we had a discussion on what we can learn from Tennis that could impact our Pickleball play...both mechanics and strategies, good and bad! In this article, we want to attract more players to our sport by sharing with them why we enjoy Pickleball as much or more than Tennis!

WE LIKE PICKLEBALL because...

- 1.it's a great physical exercise to keep you healthy and in shape while competing AND having FUN
- 2.it satisfies our need for competition
- 3.it's a FUN activity
- 4.of its social aspect....expect to meet AND get to know many new friends EACH time you play
- 5.it's easy to learn and become proficient...small paddle, large ball, small court(less than 1/3 the size)
- 6.it's easy to find places and times to play
- 7.of court availability and overall costs that are hard to beat
- 8.it's joint friendly/ less strenuous...shoulder(serve, paddle size), hips, knees and ankles(small court)
- 9.it's truly a sport for LIFE...with virtually no AGE limit
- 10.of its “show up and play” mentality versus the need for prior planning/organization/reservations/etc.
- 11.of its attractive rules that preserve gender equality(single easy Serve, 2 bounce rule, NVZ)
- 12.of its attractive rules that neutralize age differences(very young to very old AND all in between)
- 13.of its attractive rules that neutralize skills(beginner to advanced)
- 14.you can hit with lots of power
- 15.you can hit with lots of touch
- 16.you can hit with lots of spin
- 17.you can hit lots of angles
- 18.you can use a variety of strategies such as a soft/control game, a

power/pace game, formations, etc

19. there is far less time between points (small court, single easy Serve)..more playing, less walking

20. you get a larger number of strokes/shots/hits per point

21. you get longer lasting points (easy to keep ball in play, rules favor longer points)

22. rapid volley exchanges are commonplace

23. it uses simple and logical scoring

24. it's a growth sport....continued rapid growth speaks for itself

25. of the ongoing challenge of a new game (learning, improving, and then, addiction to the game)

26. of the support of local Pickleball clubs everywhere

27. of the support of a sanctioning body (USAPA...rules, events, play locations, videos, training, etc.)

GOT OTHERS? Lets us know with your reply...

Consider sharing these thoughts with others in hopes of attracting them to our game!

TIPBITS #220

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...

#211 National Champion Insights-Dick Scott...keep the ball low and in play!

#212 Insights Follow Up...don't make mistakes and choose your partners wisely

#213 Are You Ready...being successful in tournament play means spending lots of time on the court

#214 Simple Repetition : Consistency...repetition of proper technique leads to consistency in play

#215 Repeating Repetition...use your feet to move yourself into position to repeat successful technique

#216 Dink with a Purpose...when dinking, especially at the net, have a specific plan of attack

#217 Parallel Sports 1...why and what Pickleball rules make our sport more player friendly

#218 Parallel Sports 2...Tennis mechanics and strategies that are good and bad for Pickleball

#219 Parallel Sports 3...attract your friends to Pickleball with these 27 reasons

REPEAT...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 #221

DOWN THE MIDDLE

The old saying, “Down the Middle, Solves the Riddle” has never been more true than it is today...of course, this is the suggested, perhaps most desirable, placement location for almost any shot from most anywhere...it doesn't make any difference if you're hitting a Return, a Third Shot drop, a Third Shot Drive(or even a Lob), volleys from the NVZ or even Overheads...they all have the best chance for success if they're hit Down the Middle!

Why is that?

At least three solid reasons come to mind...1) success means, first and foremost, in play and without error...the net is a full 2 inches lower in the middle, so your chances of getting it over and in play are considerably better...2) there is ALWAYS the chance that the ball will never be touched by your opponents because of the confusion of Who will take the ball...and 3) there is ALWAYS an opening between your opponents Down the Middle!

BUT that's not the focus of this article...the focus is an equally important maxim, Cover the Middle!

It's the corollary to the solution of the riddle...if most shots or at least most winning shots will be hit down the middle, it's a must that covering it must be your most important objective on defense.

This thinking must start before each point begins...prior to the Serve, remind your partner who has “got” the middle once the point begins...this is meant to remind each player of his/her responsibility with regards to the balls in the middle...it should be based on a number of factors that you as a team agree upon beforehand...BUT mostly who is most capable of handling/being successful with balls in the middle in your PRESENT configuration (SIDE) on the court...such things as who is the most aggressive, who has the forehand, who is there first, who struck the last ball, and so on...

This thinking does not apply so much when you are the Serving team and you're deciding on who will take your opponents' Return of your Serve...this decision should be handled by an audible declaration of who will take the ball at the precise second when the ball has just been struck by the Returning team...and make it loud and clear, so that there is NO doubt about it!

During the point issue...if you're the Returning team and you're both at the NVZ with your opponents still back on the base line, you've got at least one other issue to deal with...if you're comfortable with all that's needed to Cover the Middle, but you're facing a team with strong and accurate drives, you may be susceptible to their drives down the sideline...if your opponents have already demonstrated this skill, you must do what's necessary to offset their tactic...further, if they can hit successfully down the sideline, they can surely hit it down the middle...this is a bit of a conundrum...in this case, you must cover as much of the side line as you feel comfortable doing(leaving them only the smallest of a target) but you must do this with your partner's knowledge so that he/she can Cover the Middle.

As with any good shot you make, you will be putting the percentages on your side, if you...

Cover the Middle!!

TIPBITS #222

FORM A PRACTICE GROUP

Have you been playing for some time and not really been able to progress as some others have? Have you wanted to play with the next level of players but you feel somewhat out of place when you do? Do you want to feel like you belong and not rely on the kindness of others for being included? Do you feel you are just not up to their caliber?

If that's you, you are not alone..not even close!!!

That feeling is all part of advancing your game...it can come at any time in your playing development...it's not just when you start...it occurs when ever you want to progress from one level to the next!

The solution? Well for sure, if you're not making the progress you need by just playing day after day, you need to branch out...you need to have a plan...a plan that has a goal of making your game better...adding more shots, more spins, more pace, more consistency, etc., etc...you can't expect to immediately add all these improvements to your game BUT you've got to start somewhere!

Start by Forming a Practice Group...we're not talking multiple courts here...we're talking at least one other person BUT preferably a total of four...you'll need to choose from players of similar skills and goals to your own...find players who are willing to make the commitment, up front...know, going into it, that this commitment could last for weeks or even years! Finally, give some consideration to an alternate player when, on the hopefully RARE occasion, some one can't make it.

Perhaps the hardest part of this effort, in the beginning, will be to find a common time and convenient and available place to meet...work on this...and don't give up!

Next, you MUST commit to the amount of time...and frequency...certainly, any amount of time and frequency is better than none...but noticeable growth of any consequence will require

weekly scheduling and at least or an absolute minimum of one hour but preferably 90 minutes.

The purpose of the group is to get better...this starts with consistency...there is no better way to improve consistency than by drilling.

Drills will be your primary mechanism for improvement...look to prior TIPBITS articles for a variety of drills, modify them to your liking and/or add new ones as needed...keep in mind that it's good to repeat drills from one session to the next...always use drills that have proven successful...this will help you maintain what you've learned...there is nothing wrong with bringing a cheat sheet along with to remind you of the drills and the order/sequence to use them...this will become second nature after a while but useful in the beginning...it keeps everybody on the same page.

Adding or modifying drills will become a crucial part of your development...this will come in handy when you are learning a new shot, stroke or technique...and you should try to add something new into most every session...that's progress...your goal in Forming a Practice Group!

TIPBITS #223

IT ALL ADDS UP

Got an upcoming tournament and not sure if you're ready...not sure if you can handle the potentially long day, that you can maintain the energy levels you'll need, or just being able to survive the heat and the sun...all these factors will determine how well you perform as you get further and further into a tournament.

Energy Levels...your ability to perform well for long periods will depend greatly on how well you are prepared...have you ever pushed yourself past a couple of hours of elevated performance? See TIPBITS #213 for insights on getting physically ready for a tournament.

Hydration...if you are not FULLY hydrated, you will never be able to perform at your maximum potential...further, as you become less and less hydrated, your performance potential will continue to go down...see TIPBITS # 207 for more insights to Hydration issues during prolonged play.

Heat...long days of strenuous play in the heat not only require close attention to your hydration levels but also to your core temperatures, especially if you hope to perform at your peak level...keeping your core temperature cool during tournament play is almost impossible...yet, many relatively recent clothing improvements/offers can help you control those temperatures...first consider appropriate attire (and bring several changes)...tops (shirts and blouses) should be light in color, light in weight, relatively loose fitting and moisture wicking...consider fine mesh versus solid texture to allow breezes to dry perspiration before its weight becomes overwhelming.

Cooling...consider the many new caps/hats, head bands, wrist bands, scarves and towels that are designed to trigger super cooling powers when simply combined with water...numerous manufacturers offer these products(see GOOGLE)...you may be surprised at their abilities to get/keep you cool.

Sun Protection...whether your sun protection goals are merely to keep the sun's rays away from your skin or to protect your eyes from its harmful affects, there is no denying its adverse affect on your day...keeping the sun away from your eyes or off your head, neck, and arms ought to be your principal concern...so many manufacturers offer very attractive outerwear with all the SPF protection you need.

Time Outs...don't ever under estimate the value of your Time Outs...first, be certain of how MANY you are entitled to and how LONG they can be...use them, not just when you need to discuss a strategy issue but for all the reasons above...to rest and restore your energy, to drink and re-hydrate yourself, to change a now heavy top, to soak a hat or wristband in cold water to cool you down or just get out of the sun...that's what Time Outs are for...use them!

Consider these tournament insights...IT ALL ADDS UP!

TIPBITS #224

YOUR TAKE AWAY

Have you watched any tournament matches lately, or watched a close match or maybe even lost a close match? The question is really, what was Your Take Away? What did you learn? And, finally, what will you do with what you learned?

It really doesn't matter if it was something you learned the hard way or just something you observed, the most important part is what you do with it!

If you were “just” watching a great match, perhaps you were compelled to see it through to the end...you may have seen the lead change several times or saw a significant momentum change? You may have seen strategy changes after a time out? How about one player picking up the other? Or one player turning cold or getting hot? You may have seen some new shot(to you) that made all the difference in the outcome? Maybe you saw one style of play that was dominant through out or was there just one factor that made the difference? Was it who wanted it (the win) the most? Was it consistency or percentages or just overbearing power? Did endurance make the difference?

Most likely you saw/witnessed a number of these game changers...if you remember any of them, clearly the ones that stand out the most are attributes you need to incorporate into your game...some might be an overnight fix..others may take days or weeks to add to your game...but, what's important is that you don't ignore/forget them!

Then, recognize that most of these changes/improvements will take more than your own desire to add them...some of them may be beyond your own scope...discuss your observations with your partner, your drill group or just others you play with regularly...come to a consensus as to which of those game changers that you'd like to adopt...determine as a group how you'll move forward with adding them to your game...set aside separate time from your open play or add time onto the end of your open play...

BUT, be certain you make time to add to your game what You Took Away so they'll be talking about you next time!

TIPBITS #225

PICKING A PARTNER

How often have you heard it?...the best way to win at doubles is to pick a good partner! Usually that statement/sentiment is reiterated at the end of a tournament by one or both of the Gold Medal winners, "I had a great partner"...How DO you pick a good partner?...lots of factors go into making a good team, maybe even more into making a great team!

But first, what does a good or great team MEAN to you? Is it just about winning(nothing wrong with that), is it about building a friendship, or is it for the pure fun and enjoyment of it? What are your goals as a player, a partner or as a team?

What if you have a regular partner already? If all is good, then you're all set!...If it's not going that well, regardless of your goals, it may be time to bite the bullet, have the talk, be as diplomatic as possible, and then, move on!

We mentioned factors earlier...the factors or characteristics that make up a good partner and a good team...these factors must be as relevant to you as they are to your partner...in other words, if you're going to be a good team, you need to be on the same page...both of you need to be in sync on what it takes!

To help define YOUR needs for a partner, first, get a handle on YOUR skill set, YOUR strengths, YOUR short comings...and then, you can determine the ideal partner for you!

Here's an over simplified scenario...you're a lefty and have a strong forehand and like playing in a stacked (power) formation...you don't need another strong forehand lefty who likes to stack...you need a righty who likes to stack! That was easy...unfortunately, many other scenarios/factors exist!

These factors might come under team/partner chemistry...personal compatibility, for one...a BIG one!...this starts with mutual respect, timely praise and support...and, these are just a few of the

personality factors that enter in...consider these others...are you hyper and need a calming influence, are you spontaneous and need a calculating partner, are you an opportunist and need a strategist...any of this sound familiar? Finally, when considering a partner based on these personality factors, do you want a partner that is similar (just like you) or (totally) opposite?

And we have NOT even touched upon the physical attributes yet(next time)...

PICKING A PARTNER (2 of 2)

In a previous article, we discussed the value of having a good partner. Picking a partner requires a number of considerations, both from a personal as well as from a the physical point of view...we addressed some of the personal factors in the previous article.

Here are a few...you need to determine your ultimate goal(s) as a team, like winning, developing a friendship or purely for enjoyment...most of the factors/considerations centered around personal compatibility and chemistry...and the need to make a personal assessment of your own strengths and short comings...the article left off without addressing any of the physical attributes that could be considered when picking a partner!

Once you've decided upon the Goals for your team, you need to perform a Personal Assessment of your own skills, strengths and weaknesses...armed with an honest assessment and a good grasp of this analysis, you can begin your search for your ideal partner.

Here is a list of physical attributes for you to consider...

- 1) if you are a right handed player, would you benefit by playing with a left handed player? Or vice versa?
- 2) if you have an effective soft game, would you benefit by having a partner with a power game? Or vice versa?
- 3) if you don't have the best foot speed or court coverage, would you benefit by having a quicker partner?
- 4) if you're a play maker and play with an aggressive style, would you benefit by having a solid and steady player? Or vice versa?
- 5) if you are of average height or shorter but with good foot speed, would you benefit by having a taller partner with good reach? Or vice versa?
- 6) if you are on the older end of your age category, would you benefit by playing with a younger partner? Or vice versa?
- 7) if you have an obviously stronger side, would you benefit by playing with a partner that's stronger on the other side?
- 8) if you are a strong baseline player with weak NVZ skills, would

you benefit from a strong net player? Or vice versa?

The scenarios presented above describe one physical attribute and suggest that the opposite attribute would be beneficial when picking a partner...do you agree or do you feel that having a partner that has identical strengths to your own would make a better partner?

Well?...do your skills fall in line with some or any of those presented above? If so, perhaps it's time you spread your wings a bit, look into open play at some less familiar locations and start your search!

TIPBITS #227

HUNGRY?

At least 4 times a year, we are given the opportunity to watch some Grand Slam Tennis tournaments...and, it seems, that almost without fail, a number of upsets occur...ranked seasoned players are defeated, unexpectedly, by either younger or heretofore lesser players.

Why does this happen? And who are these players that come from seemingly nowhere to claim victory over our favorite players?

You might be able to understand the young player who's just coming up into the Tennis world...they've been playing, most likely for years but are unknown to most every viewer...they've probably played junior tennis for years, traveled across the country to play tournaments, been tutored at the best Tennis camps, maybe even played a few years for their colleges and universities...they're known to Tennis insiders but not to us.

Or, they're older (?) veteran players, in their late twenties or early thirties, who've been on the tour for years and often referred to as journey men or women...they have put in their time, traveled the circuit for years but never reached any real level of success similar to the super stars.

Then, suddenly, they're on a roll, coming seemingly from out of nowhere to garner the attention of both critics and commentators as well. The skills and strategies they are demonstrating seem well beyond what their ranking suggests. Some seem fearless, playing high risk after high risk shot and winning points. They seem bullet proof, playing seemingly without any cares or pressure at all. Others play mature high percentage solid, yet powerful strokes that rarely miss. Yet others show creativity with shots, angles and spins not normally associated with winning Tennis. Yet, this day is their day because all is going their way...and no one seems to be able to stop them...one upset after another. And with each win, they gain more confidence and their style of play becomes all dominating.

Whether they go all the way or not is almost irrelevant...the point is that they have made great progress and have had great success...but again, WHY?

The title says it all...they are hungry! Hungry for a win, willing to do whatever it takes...they try harder, they need it more, and they want it more!

When is the last time you were in OR put yourself into this kind of position...OR on the flip side, when did you play someone who was not as good but they wanted it more...Golf, Tennis, or Pickleball, no difference...it's a powerful force, being HUNGRY!

Right now, in our own country we have witnessed a devastating storm that has caused thousands of our fellow neighbors to go HUNGRY, thirsty and without homes...

BUT this is no game...THIS is your chance!

LOW PROFILE WIDE STANCE

Sounds like an advertisement for a high performance tire...the high performance is the part we want to focus on...we're talking about tweaking your ready position to optimize your performance, whether it's at the NVZ or on the base line or anywhere in between, should you get caught there...

What: As Chris Evert would say, "It all starts with the feet"...this may mean many things to different people...but as it applies here, it means foot positioning...where your feet are in relation to your stance...so your stance begins with your feet and moves up from there...up means your knees...they have got to be bent, not locked...further up means your trunk and upper body...they should be forward leaning.

Why: here are just a few reasons WHY a low profile wide stance is good for your game, your best performance...

- 1) Reaction Time/Being Ready: as the name implies, the Ready Position means just that...having a specific, go to Ready Position...if you take this position early, you'll limit your reaction time and be ready for anything that comes your way.
- 2) Stability: the wider your stance, the wider your base, the more stable you will be...having/taking a stable wide stance prepares you to make any move you may need...your lower profile (bent knees, forward lean), prepares you for movement in any direction.
- 3) Visibility: having a low profile will help your visibility...to see the ball more clearly AND, being low, will keep your eyes on a closer plane to the ball's flight...this helps you to more easily triangulate the paddle angle required for your desired ball positioning...you will find that being and staying low will result in far fewer net balls, the ones that hit the top of the tape and don't go over!
- 4) Power: having a firm, stable and wide stance provides a strong foundation for generating power on all your shots.
- 5) Success: all these factors lead to better performance and more success.

How: Follow these easy steps to improve your performance...

Wider Stance: when getting ready to take your stance, first face the direction of the on-coming ball...then, position your feet...this is the point...many players simply position their feet comfortably apart, it's generally suggested that they be shoulder width apart...however, if you widen your stance 6 to even 12 inches further you will note(feel) the added stability of your stance immediately!

Lower Profile: the wider stance gets us half way there...now you've got to get down...envision the prowling tiger about to pounce...bend your knees more than just a little...starting at your trunk, arch your back and lean forward (picture the tiger)...you are now ready to pounce!

TIPBITS #229

RESET THE POINT

Sometimes points don't always go the way we want them to go...we wish we hadn't made this shot or that shot...we want to get out of the mess we are in, whether we caused it by our own misdeeds or our opponents put us into this awkward position...it would be nice if we could just start the whole point over again...or at least back the point up to where we were on equal terms with our opponent...what a great idea!

This is exactly the object of this article...to Reset the Point means to do whatever it takes to get ourselves out of the trouble we are in...and to do it right now before the point progresses any further, jeopardizing our chances for winning the point/saving ourselves from losing the point!

Here is a parallel in tennis...your watching a professional singles tennis match...the players are moving each other from side to side...each player hopes to hit a shot that will pull their opponent as far off the court as possible, opening up the other side of the court for a winner...when the opening becomes big enough, an attempt at hitting a winner into that opening is made...the player suffering from this attack can only hope to reach the ball and get his racket on it...he now has, at best, two options...1) make a last ditch effort to hit a winning shot of his own...or 2) hit the ball high in the error to buy himself time to get back in the point...the odds of hitting an outright winner are slim but the odds of at least getting back onto the court with a lob are far better...and, if the lob is deep enough, he is back in the point, hence resetting the point, so they can go at it again!

This similar dilemma presents itself in almost every point in Pickleball...so many scenarios exist...it can start as early as dealing with an very aggressive Return that forces you to Lob your opponents and you find yourself fending off Overhead after Overhead...or, as in what is most often the case, you find yourself in a duel at the net exchanging rapid volleys with only a 50/50 chance of winning...or maybe your team is just being out gunned

by the better player or a better team...this is when you must make the effort to Reset the Point...to get yourself out of this no win situation!

How?...makes no difference what sport you are playing...it's time for Defense!

And your best Defense in Pickleball is simple...take the pace off the ball and drop it slowly just over the net! Suddenly, things are good...you've neutralized your opponent's attack and you ready to start the point all over again!

This shot is not easy to execute...But it is effective! You'll see it successfully used in almost every high level match...watch this technique, learn it and practice it, every chance you get! If you do, you will find yourself having longer points AND more chances to win those points...just because you have learned to Reset the Point!
!

TIPBITS #230

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...

#221 Down the Middle...why and how to cover the best place to hit a winner

#222 Form a Practice Group...getting better requires regular practice time with like minded players

#223 It All Adds Up...being tournament ready means addressing all of these key factors

#224 Your Take Away...the many insights you can learn with a post match analysis

#225 Picking a Partner...evaluating your own personal traits and recognizing your ideal partner

#226 Picking a Partner(2of2)...analyzing your own physical skills and your ideal partner's skills

#227 Hungry...why some players excel for no other reason than they want it more

#228 Low Profile Wide Stance...what, why and how your positioning can lead to success

#229 Reset the Point...when, why and how to give yourself another chance to win the point

REPEAT...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!!!

INSIGHTS FROM A NATIONAL CHAMPION

(This TIPBITS format presents some Background and Insights from the Best Players in the Country...the next TWO articles will share information from a married couple that have won a number of National Championships in Doubles and (yes) Mixed Doubles...it will be Ladies First)

LINDA KAUSS

Where were you born?

I was born in Minneapolis, but moved to Sheboygan Wisconsin on the shores of Lake Michigan as a young girl.

Did you play other sports?

I remember in 3rd grade playing four square during recess. At age 10, I began playing tennis daily with my father and racquetball during the winter. I also played high school basketball and was on the track team running the half mile and mile events.

Do you remember where and when you first played PB?

Soon after I was finished home schooling my 4 children, some friends from church introduced me to Pickleball. The next day I attended the Woodbury club and I was hooked.

What is your favorite shot and why?

My favorite shot is the dink...It can be used to control the game and bring out weaknesses and set ups.

What paddle(s) do you currently use?

I am currently using the Pro-Lite Groove and Pro-Lite Crush. Both are lighter weight so I am able to move the paddle quickly. The graphics are also "groovy".

Do you have a shot you practice or a drill you like?

A drill I have recently been practicing incorporates several shots. Start by dinking (3 shots); then one person lobs, you go back and return the lob with a drop shot and begin to move in to the net

hitting another drop to get you back to the NVZ line and then start the dink rally again with the other person hitting a lob...on and on.

Do you have a warm up routine?

My husband and I recently started a warm up routine...we start by volleying the ball quickly at the NVZ...we then dink and play out points starting from the back of the court and then moving toward the NVZ...these help us get you ready to play the points when the tourney starts.

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

I think the third shot drop because it sets up the serving team's chance of getting to the NVZ line and helps neutralize the advantage of the returning team.

What has been the key to your Mixed Doubles successes?

The Key to my mixed doubles success is having the blessing of playing with my husband...He has helped me refine my game and be more consistent.

Would you care to add anything(suggestions/comments) you'd like the readers to hear?

Dink responsibly...don't get smashed!

TIPBITS #232

INSIGHTS FROM A NATIONAL CHAMPION

(This TIPBITS format presents some Background and Insights from the Best Players in the Country...this article is the second in a series from a married couple that have won a number of National Championships in Doubles and (yes) Mixed Doubles...now the guy).

DEL KAUSS

Where were you born?

Janesville, Wisconsin

Did you play other sports?

I played baseball and basketball in high school....I did not play a racquet sport until I played racquetball in college...then I also played squash and tennis.

Do you remember where and when you first played PB?

My wife Linda introduced PB to me...two of our friends from church wanted to show us this game.

What is your favorite shot and why?

I really like the 3rd shot drop and dinking. I think this is what makes Pickleball unique in all the racquet/paddle sports.

What paddle(s) do you currently use?

I am currently using the Pro Lite Titan. I like the balance of touch and power.

Do you have a shot you practice or a drill you like?

I like to drill all the shots (soft and hard). To be a top player you have to excel at all the shots...and drilling is the best way to gain mastery.

Do you have a warm up routine?

After just a short warm-up practice time, I prefer to move on to playing out points...I am a slow starter and this helps me work into

playing well.

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

The third shot drop...this helps get the Serving team up to the net to equalize the Returner's advantage.

What has been the key to your Mixed Doubles successes?

I think our mixed doubles is unique in that we are husband and wife...I have found our key to play well is to stay positive and not be critical during the match...this keeps us from putting extra pressure on each other...and pressure usually results in more errors.

Would you care to add anything(suggestions/comments) you'd like the readers to hear?

I think Pickleball is a great lifetime sport...that I would like to enjoy more and more as I grow older...a great tennis coach had 3 keys to success that we can control in every match no matter the final score...1. Stay positive. 2. Good sportsmanship. 3. Give 100%. If we achieve these 3, we will end the match a winner in what really counts.

RECAPPING INSIGHTS

Our last couple of articles highlighted some insights from a husband and wife National Champion Mixed Doubles team, Linda and Del Kauss...it seems appropriate to re-iterate some of their comments, putting more emphasis on some key points...

As a team, whether a mixed, a womens' or a mens' doubles team, you'd think that each team player would be on the same page with regards to their answers to the various questions asked...and that they are!

The answer to “What's the most important shot in PB?” seems to have an incredibly familiar ring...over and over, Championship player after Championship player repeats exactly what both Linda and Del answered...the Third-shot drop because it sets up the Serving team's chance of getting to the NVZ line and subsequently, neutralizing the advantage of the Returning team.

Both Linda and Del have discovered, at least for themselves, that warm-up drills alone do NOT prepare them adequately for tournament play...drills to simply get “loose” work BUT playing points gets them into competitive game mode, both physically and mentally...and, obviously both are required! It doesn't matter whether they play actual points that start with the Serve or whether they play abbreviated points that start at some strategic position...what is important is that the warm-up points played focus on their strengths and/or weaknesses...either way, they benefit by the competitive nature of the warm-up!

Next, what appears to be one of the key factors that helps every team become successful, BUT especially a married couple team, was shared by Del...clearly, a successful married mixed doubles PB team is unique and the exception...the KEY for them to play well is to stay positive and NOT be critical during the match...this keeps them from putting undo extra pressure on each other...and pressure almost always results in more errors!

Finally, an overriding factor for their continued success remains in their overall attitude, no matter what PB or life brings their way...their creed is to 1) Stay Positive, 2) Maintain Good Sportsmanship and 3) Give 100%...if they achieve these three, they will always be winners in what really counts!

TIPBITS #234

A GOOD HABIT

Ever been “Quick Served” by your opponent...you didn't hear the score announced or you were JUST getting into position...and all of a sudden, the ball goes buzzing by you, just out of reach...you think, that really wasn't fair; I wasn't ready...all legitimate feelings...so what do you do?...you make a veiled effort at complaining but let it ride...what should you do?...you clearly don't want it to happen again, and if it does, is it your opponents fault?...or yours(you know, the fool me once, shame on you line)?

What we're talking about here is really Serving before the Returner is REALLY ready...playing in an Open format versus a match that has a referee(tournament or league play) may allow for some bit of softening or even exploitation of the Service/Return rules...but, isn't it always best to follow those rules as closely as possible to give your opponent the benefit of them?

Here is a Good Habit to get into...when you're Serving, always look at the Receiver to be sure that he/she is ready...then, announce all 3 components of the score, Loud and Clear...do NOT start your Service motion until you have looked at the Receiver...be certain he/she has not gestured that they are not ready...then, you can Serve!

You might even add a bit of good sportsmanship or courtesy to your Serving routine...while neither is required, you might consider even 1) waiting for the Receiver's partner to get into position and/or 2) adding the name of the Receiver to your call of the score...this clearly makes for a much more congenial playing atmosphere!

In a match that has a referee, as the Server, you may NOT even begin your Service motion until the entire score has been called...if you do Serve before the score has been fully announced, the referee will call a fault and you will lose the point...and this rule applies to all formats of play, casual or otherwise!

As the Receiver, you have rules that help you from being at the wrong end of a quick serve...first, know your options if you are not ready...as the score is being announced and you are not ready, you can stop the point from continuing by 1) holding your paddle hand up above your head, 2) holding your free hand up above your head or 3) by simply turning your back to the Server...Note: Once the Server starts the Serving motion, the Receiver cannot become not ready!

If you feel you have become the victim of a quick serve, you must take action to prevent that from happening again...your best solution is to take immediate action after the incident...advise the Server that 1) you were not ready, that hereafter, 2) the Server announce the score loud and clear and that 3) the Server not begin his/her Serve until the score has been fully announced.

As the Server, if you make this a part of your everyday Service routine, you'll be avoiding unnecessary conflicts, you'll have fewer issues related to the score (am I on the right side) and you'll be maintaining a more pleasant atmosphere throughout the game.

If you're not doing this already, why not make it one of your Good Habits?

TIPBITS #235

YOUR PLAY BOOK

It doesn't make any difference what season it is; Winter, Spring, Summer or Fall; Basketball, Baseball, Football or Hockey; Sports are being played!

And they all seem to have a bunch in common...they've got coaches, leaders, players, practices, scrimmages, games, playoffs, and maybe even, championships...and getting to reach the end of any season successfully rarely is accomplished by chance...it takes skills, strategies, teamwork, desire, focus and good planning...not just a single game plan but a plan for each opponent, a plan for each play, a plan for each shot, each stroke, each pitch, each pass and/or each kick!

There's plans for defense and plans for offense...there's plans to use when your leading and plans to use when your trailing...and there's plans to use during extended play...plans are used simply because they're needed...and they work! And if they don't, there's always Plan B and Plan C...and sometimes, there's just that last Time-Out to try something totally different!

But, regardless of the sport, you have to start with a plan somewhere..and that somewhere is before the game begins, before the first play or point, before the next play or point and before every play or point thereafter!

This kind of thinking applies every bit as much to Pickleball as any other sport!

Have you got a play book? Have you thought out how you'll play this opponent or that opponent? What you'll do in this situation or that situation? Against this player or against that player? In this environment or that environment? With this ball or that ball?

If you don't think each of these factors is important, watch what happens when your opponents have thought about all these factors and have just the plan for each situation!

We plan to address some of the most common components of a Pickleball Playbook in subsequent articles...but, don't wait until then...start right now...build your own Pickleball Playbook so that you can start calling some winning plays of your own!

TIPBITS #236

SERVE ROUTINE

Last time, it was suggested that successful results in sports are often contributed to a well thought out plan of attack or strategy for winning...that such a plan needs to address more than simply an overall game plan but also a plan for each opponent, each play and even each shot or stroke...that plans might exist for defense and offense, with the lead or trailing, or for a game ending push to capture the win...such a collection of strategies is called a Play Book.

Play Books are used in all sorts of sports...coaches carry them around on clipboards(what better way to spot the coach)...they work on these plays during practice and attempt to make timely use of them during game play...many football quarterbacks keep the whole offensive play book neatly summarized on their wrist...and utilize them often!

But Play Books are certainly not unique to football...every single sport played benefits by a plan...and most sports utilize some form of Play Book...and Pickleball need be no different!

A Pickleball Play Book should start at the beginning...with a plan for the Serve!

Every Serve should start the same way...with a Serve Routine(like in golf)...a series of steps PRIOR to the actual Serve...this should at least include the following...

- 1) Collect Yourself...whether its the first Serve of the match or the last Serve of the match...by collecting yourself, it's suggested that you do whatever is necessary to stop thinking about the last point and begin focusing exclusively on just this point.

- 2) Evaluate Receiver...is the Receiver someone you are or have become familiar with? What have you learned from prior experiences? What are the Receiver's strengths AND weaknesses?

3) Serve Type...decide the type of Serve you plan to hit...at this point, do you simply want to put it in play or do you want to hit an aggressive Serve that may result in a weak Return?

4) Serve Specifics...decide in your mind ALL the particulars of the Serve you have decided to hit...that should include its placement, its pace, its spin and its trajectory.

5) Your Position...based on the type and intended location of your Serve, what is the best position for you to locate yourself on the baseline? Should you be in the middle of the court or to one side or the other? Move to that position.

6) Advise Partner...prior to your Serve, advise your partner of your intentions.

7)Focus...this is the crux of your plan...you must focus on the Serve Specifics...envision the balls flight, its intended target location and the mechanics you need to execute to make it all happen...ready?
Set?

8) Go!

THE GOLD STANDARD

Our first play in our Pickleball Play Book was the Serve Routine, PB#1...now perhaps, we should have started with an overall plan for most points, the traditional, classic plan for Pickleball points...perhaps, the Gold Standard for all Pickleball points...so that's what will be presented here!

Whether you're at court side, watching a league match or a tournament match or watching some championship matches on YouTube, virtually every point evolves in almost the same manner...in a traditional/classic manner...

1) The Serve...Serving team players are BOTH positioned behind the Baseline prior to and during the Serve...the Server shares his/her intended target...any other last minute communication is made known prior to the point beginning...the Serve is made deep into the Receiver's court, at least in the back half of the court...both players remain in position, behind the Baseline, until the Receiver begins his/her Return.

2) The Return...Returning team is in position, the Receiver comfortably behind the Baseline...the Receiver's partner is at the NVZ, partially turned to view the Serve location and prepared to call the Serve out as necessary...also, the Receiver's partner will view his/her partner's Return to be better prepared for the likely reaction by the Serving team...the Receiver's Return must be deep into the Serving team's court, at least in the back half of the court...and either directed at the weaker player, the weaker player's least effective side or down the middle...regardless of the position of the Return, the Receiver must always come forward ALL the way to the NVZ, getting into the Ready Position prior to the Serving team's response.

3) The Third Shot...at the moment of contact by the Receiver, one if not both, Serving team players MUST be able to determine and advise the other of who will be taking the Return and making the Third Shot...it IS the goal of the Serving team to neutralize the

Receiving team's advantage at the net...assuming that the Return is forceful and deep, the plan is to hit a Third Shot drop and both players advance to the NVZ...if this is the case, the player making the shot will move quickly into position while his/her partner moves just one or two steps forward, adopts a low crouched ready position with paddle in a defensive position and carefully watches his/her partner's shot...a well executed Third Shot triggers the rapid movement of the Serving team forward to the NVZ...should the Return happen to be a less than forceful shot or very short, the Serving team MAY choose to drive the Third Shot and both players move forward in unison to the NVZ.

4) The Net Play...all four players are now actively engaged in a defensive “dance” orchestrated with the intent of moving opponents out of position or into making an errant shot that can be attacked...when this opportunity presents itself, it is vital that the player be fully ready to attack and make the shot...many times the first strike is not the end of the point and a volley “dual” follows...winning the point in this environment has odds of only 50/50, so returning the point to a neutral position often proves to be the most successful approach, waiting for another better opportunity to end the point!

Summary...1) Serve deep and wait, 2) Return deep and join Partner at NVZ, 3) Advance to NVZ with a Third Shot drop, 4) Continue defensive net play until a scoring opportunity presents itself and then, Put the ball away for a winner...The Gold Standard!

RETURN ROUTINE

If you've got an entry in your Pickleball Play Book entitled the Serve Routine, then you should also have one entitled the Return Routine...

The two shots/strokes share many of the very same components...the big difference between the two is this...if you make an error on your Serve, you have simply missed an opportunity to score...if you make an error on your Return, it COSTS you a point...clearly, if a Serve Routine is important, a Return Routine should be even more important!

Notice the similarities between a Serve Routine and a Return Routine...

Like the Serve, every Return should start the same way...with a Return Routine(like in golf)...a series of steps PRIOR to the actual Return...this should at least include the following...

- 1) Collect Yourself...whether it's the first Return of the match or the last Return of the match...by collecting yourself, it's suggested that you do whatever is necessary to stop thinking about the last point and begin focusing exclusively on just this point.
- 2) Evaluate Server...is the Server someone you are or have become familiar with? What have you learned from prior experiences? What are the Server's tendencies in certain conditions? What kind of pace or spins can you expect? What about Service depth? Is it frequently deep or occasionally short?
- 3) Return Type...decide the type of Return you plan to hit...at this point, do you simply want to put it in play or do you want to hit an aggressive Return with the hope of triggering a weak response?
- 4) Return Specifics.....decide in your mind ALL the particulars of your Return...that should include its placement, its pace, its spin and its trajectory...this needs to include what differences in your

Return might be required based on whether you will be hitting a Forehand or a Backhand...lastly, your Approach...consider how you may need to alter your Approach to the net because of the location of the Serve (its depth, pace or angle).

5) Your Position...based on the position of the Server immediately prior to the Serve, locate yourself accordingly, factoring in any preferences you have for favoring either your Forehand or Backhand. Keep well behind the baseline and assume your Ready Position.

6) Advise Partner...prior to the Serve, advise your partner of your intentions for placement.

7)Focus...this is the crux of your plan...you must first focus on the Server's back swing , then the toss of the ball, the forward motion of the Server's arm and paddle, then, the ball at contact. Maintain your focus on the ball, noting its pace, spin, direction and depth...move immediately to the ball, position yourself accordingly and execute the Return you planned!

8) Join your partner at the net immediately!!!

TIPBITS #239

THE SQUEEZE PLAY

Our Pickleball Play Book is evolving...we've got the the Gold Standard, the Serve Routine and the Return routine...what's next? How about the Squeeze Play?

Ah, yes...this play(name) is stolen from Baseball...there are variations on it but all have the same intended net result...to score! There's the Regular Squeeze, the Safety Squeeze and the Suicide Squeeze...and these same variations can be used in Pickleball...more on those later...but let's set the scene...

Your team is Returning and they want to gain an early advantage in the point...someone calls the Squeeze Play and the play is set into motion...it starts with the Return...

The Returner has several options including a Return Deep(almost always chosen) that 1) goes to the weakest player, in hopes of soliciting a weak Third Shot, 2) a return Deep that goes to the weakest player's weakest side, for the same reasoning, 3) a Return to the strongest player, for the purpose of keeping the strongest player back on the baseline for as long as possible, 4) a Return down the middle, in hopes of creating confusion, 5) a Return cross court, providing the Returning player with the greatest length/area as a target or 6) a Return down the line immediately across from the Returner.

When the Squeeze Play is on, the Return (#6) will be hit directly down the line as close to the sideline as possible and as deep as possible...this is without regard for whether you are on the right side or the left side of the court...the Returner follows directly behind the ball all the way to the NVZ...the Returner's partner, already at the NVZ, squeezes off the middle, even moving slightly into his approaching partner's side...this is the Regular Squeeze Play!

The Safety Squeeze Play develops in exactly the same manner except the Returner's partner does not begin the squeeze until he or

she is certain the opponent is not going to try to go cross court behind him or her.

The Suicide Squeeze Play also develops in exactly the same manner but the Returner's partner makes his or her move at the moment the Returner strikes the ball.

The expectations by the Return team is that the opponents will hit their shot at or towards the net-rushing Returner, the easiest of the shots and perhaps most promising since they feel they may catch the Returner only part way to the NVZ...this is further justified by the fact that hitting the ball back in the same direction is much easier to control than changing the direction and attempting to go cross court...

The object in all cases is the expectation that the Returner's partner can step in and knock off the opponents' shot for a winner or, at the least, put them into a much more compromising position... the very purpose of the Squeeze Play!

TIPBITS #240

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...

#231 Insights from a National Champion-Linda Kauss...play points prior to tournament play

#232 Insights from a National Champion-Del Kauss...Be Positive, Exude Sportsmanship, Give 100%

#233 Recapping Insights...the key to mixed doubles success is staying positive and NO criticism

#234 A Good Habit...know the Service rules that apply for open and tournament play

#235 Your Play Book...what is a Pickleball Play Book and why should it be used

#236 Serve Routine...the components and description of a Play Book Serve routine

#237 The Gold Standard...a description of the most common elements of any and all points

#238 Return Routine...the components and description of a Play Book Return routine

#239 The Squeeze Play...a Return team's Play Book plan used to gain the early advantage in the point

REPEAT...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 #241

EARLY ATTACK

Our Pickleball Play Book continues to evolve...now we've got the the Gold Standard, the Serve Routine, the Return routine and the Squeeze Play...what's next? How about an Early Attack Play?!

This play has been around as long as players that love to drive the ball have learned about the Third Shot drop...why?...because it gives those players the chance to do what they love...drive the ball!

Many players just drive the ball because they love doing it...some players just do it when it's appropriate...they restrain themselves because they realize that just driving the ball doesn't always work in their favor...that driving the ball against equally skilled or better players is a no-win situation...this particularly applies when the player driving the ball is on or very near the baseline.

This thinking does not apply, however, when that player is in mid-court and moving forward...such is the case for this particular Play Book entry!

As eluded to above, this play has been used when a Third Shot drop may not be the only or best alternative to dealing with the Return...players that can drive the ball with good pace AND placement have almost always looked for a weak and short Return...when they get it, they can move forward rapidly and drive the ball down the middle...this strategy usually results in one or more positive results...1) the Serving team reaches the net/the NVZ, 2) they have neutralized the Return team's advantage at the net, 3) they may have won the point outright or 4) they have forced a weak reply from the Return team and can easily win the point on the next shot!

Not a bad play! Always having this play in your Play Book is a good idea...forcing this situation as a planned means of scoring is EVEN better...this gives both the Server and his/her partner the edge as they set the play into motion. What triggers this play?

The Serving team can set this play into motion whenever they feel the time is right...that might be dependent upon 1) the opponent who is Returning the Serve, 2) the opponent's position on the court, or 3) the duration and result of the last point...when the Serving team decides that NOW is the time, that decision is shared, agreed upon and put into motion. What motion?

The motion IS the Serve...a well planned Serve is required...it needs to be one that can predictably result in a short/weak Return...a couple of common options include 1) an aggressive deep (perhaps heavy topspin) Serve hit to the opponents weakest side or 2) a very wide and short Serve that pulls the opponent wide, off the court and moving forward rapidly...if the Return IS short and weak, jump on it!

Being ready for an Early Attack is good, setting up the play to do so is better!

TIPBITS #242

SNEAK ATTACK

Our Pickleball Play Book continues to evolve...now we've got the the Gold Standard, the Serve Routine, the Return routine, the Squeeze Play and the Early Attack...what's next? How about a Sneak Attack Play?!

This play is similar in one respect to the Early Attack...it also takes place very early in the development of the point...as the name implies, much (not all) of the potential for the success of this play is based on the element of surprise...but it also capitalizes on the difficulty level of the opponent's response...the more difficult the response for the opponent, the easier it is to take advantage of the situation!

Here's Sneak Attack Option #1...

By the steps...Your team is Serving the first point of the match...that is, you're 1) Serving from the right side of your court...your opponent 2) Returns down the line to the left side of your court...you have a ton of faith in your partner's ability to hit an effective Third Shot drop, let's say 80% of the time...your partner, as Planned, 3) hits a Third Shot drop Cross Court to the awaiting opponent's backhand (who is right-handed)...simultaneously, you 4) rush the net directly toward the opponent who's the target of the drop...your opponent may or may not be able to effectively deal with this low shot to his/her weaker side...if a 5) weak or somewhat high reply is offered, you can simply 6) put the ball away for an easy winner!

As the onward rushing player, you will need to be prepared for some variety of responses from your opponent at the net...these could include a pop up right in front of you, a slightly stronger attempt at avoiding you by going more cross court or they may be able to avoid you altogether leaving the ball for your approaching partner...you need to be prepared for either of the first two options...if it's popped up, you know what to do...if the ball starts going cross court be prepared to intercept (poach) it and put it

away, as well.

Needless to say, this play need not to be reserved for just the first point of the game...but it can be used at any time where this alignment AND a down the line Return occur!

Sneak Attack Option #2...there is certainly no reason this same exact play cannot be used when the opposite situation exists...that is, you're Serving from the left side of your court and the Return is hit down the line to the right side of your court...all else remains the same!

Try this Sneak Attack on the very first point...and whenever the opportunity presents itself!

TIPBITS #243

ESPIONAGE

Our Pickleball Play Book continues to evolve...now we've got the the Gold Standard, the Serve Routine, the Return routine, the Squeeze Play, the Early Attack and the Sneak Attack...what's next? How about a little Espionage?!

No coach would be worth their salt if they did not keep a Playbook on their opponents...specifics on how to win or how not to lose!

As a Pickleball player, you too need this collection of experiences, a wealth of valuable insights...the more you play, the more you see traits, both good and bad, in your opponents...you need to capture this information, either figuratively (in your mind and memory) or literally (written down) for later reference...it will become your Playbook for those opponents!

Your data you collect must focus on two distinct areas...

1) your opponents' strengths...the skills they have that can hurt you...it couldn't hurt to arrange them in order of their degree of effectiveness...the most obvious, first and the least of your concerns, last...expand your comment on their strengths to include methods/techniques you have used in the past to offset these strengths...also include what didn't work as a reminder of what NOT to do!

2) your opponents' weaknesses...if your data is on a team, versus an individual, you must note the player that can hurt you the least...note that this will be the player that you will attack...if your data is on an individual player, then you must note the shortcomings you have noticed in their skill set...note that those shortcomings are the areas that you will attack!

Use of this “intelligence” can vary...in a league or in a tournament setting, you will want to stay away from the opponents' strengths and go after their weaknesses...in an open play setting, you might choose to go at their strengths in order to advance your own

skills...use this opportunity to learn how to cope with their strengths...to improve yourself for the next time you're playing other better players!

While this article is shorter than most, the intelligence/data you gather will be much greater and more valuable than this article alone...Espionage is good...it will pay dividends the next time you meet!

TIPBITS #244

SETTING GOALS

Our Pickleball Play Book continues to evolve...now we've got the the Gold Standard, the Serve Routine, the Return routine, the Squeeze Play, the Early Attack, the Sneak Attack and last time we added Espionage (collecting data/history on our opponents)...what's next?

Let's learn from our Espionage...today seems to be an appropriate day to reflect AND to look forward...let's set some Goals for the future...for these things we are so passionate about...

PICKLEBALL and LIFE

We can learn from our mistakes, from the history we've collected, so we don't make those same mistakes again...that's assuming we've remembered what has happened in the past...the good and the bad...the strengths and the weaknesses of our opponents (and our own)...this is why we need to set Goals...if we stay with the status quo, we are not progressing, we are regressing...meanwhile others are progressing...we must make plans (set Goals) in order to progress.

Whether it's Pickleball or Life, your Goals can be generic or specific...

In Pickleball...a generic goal could be 1) to learn the skills to move to the next skill level or 2) join a league or 3) play in a tournament...a specific goal could be that you will 1) learn the power formation (or stack) or 2) learn to poach or 3) learn to hit with spin.

In Life...a generic goal could be 1) to just become a better person or 2) to be a better parent or son or daughter...a specific goal could be 1) to give to a new charity or 2) give of your time or expertise to help another.

So, today (right now), create these new goals for your game and for

yourself...write them down for easy reference (like your cell phone or personal device), then refer to them often, check them weekly...then, at year end, see how you're doing or how you did!

Once you've made the effort to fulfill one of your goals and you see the progress, at the end of a point or the end of a game, take a moment to be thankful you took the time, made the effort and can now reflect on a job well done...as in Life, when you become a better person, it'll not only bring you Joy but also Peace and Satisfaction.

Start now...SET some GOALS!

TIPBITS #245

MIDDLE MIDDLE MIDDLE

Our Pickleball Play Book continues to evolve...now we've got the the Gold Standard, the Serve Routine, the Return Routine, the Squeeze Play, the Early Attack, the Sneak Attack, Espionage and last time we added Setting Goals (learning from the collection of data/history on our opponents)...what's next?

Let's go with the Play/Plan that has got to be the “bread and butter” strategy of all players, regardless of age, gender or skill level...the Location, Location, Location of Pickleball...Middle, Middle, Middle!

If you're looking for a play to use over and over AND one that presents the least amount of risk, you cannot find a better play that conforms to all the elements of good Percentage Pickleball (not making mistakes, being under control, being patient and being in (or going to) the right place at the right time)...and we are talking about either side of the game, offense or defense...there is every reason to choose this option every chance you get...

On Offense...playing down the middle can begin as early as the Serve...while this is not exactly the middle play we are preaching, it does maintain most of the benefits of middle play...in the case of the Serve (putting the ball into play), hitting the ball in the middle of the court (and deep) has the lowest level of risk over all other options...

But the first real use of the middle comes into play on the Return and on all subsequent shots...hitting the Return up the middle (and deep) also has the lowest level of risk....you can hit it with pace or soft with depth...either is safe and effective...safe is obvious, effective is because of the confusion factor...at many levels, the Return deep to the middle results in at least one turn over every game.

Drives and Dink shots hit down the middle from the baseline have the best potential for success versus any other placement...again for

several reasons...the net is fully 2 inches lower (a greater margin for error (lower risk)) and again there is the ever present confusion factor...further, sometimes the opening in the middle is so large, the confusion factor isn't the issue that makes the middle shot so effective...it's the open space...continual and repeated shots made down the middle remain effective even when they are predictable...it's just the "best" place to go.

Volleys and Dink shots hit down the middle while at the net also have similar potential for success...the lower net, the confusion factor and the size of the opening all contribute to lower risk and greater point winning percentages.

On Defense...all the discussion above should make you realize the utter importance of the middle on defense...this has got to be your Number One play on defense...no matter where your opponent is positioned, your team must cover the middle...this may require shifting from one side to the other but both players must be of the same mind...that the sidelines are not the most important...covering the middle precedes any other area...and constant communication must be a part of this team effort...your wall of defense must not have a vulnerable spot in the middle.

Middle, Middle, Middle.

TIPBITS #246

THE TIME OUT!

Continuing on with our Pickleball Play Book...now we've got the Gold Standard, the Serve Routine, the Return Routine, the Squeeze Play, the Early Attack, the Sneak Attack, Espionage, Setting Goals and Middle, Middle, Middle...what's next?

Coaches and players depend on it...its the Time Out!

The Time Out is used in virtually every sport...some sports limit the number and duration of Time Outs that are allowed (2 or 3 per game or half, 30 or 60 seconds, etc.)...they dictate when a Time Out can be taken (during play, at the end of a point, etc.)...and they categorize Time Outs (regular, injury, equipment, turnover, first down, end of a quarter, end of game, etc.).

The Time Out is used by Coaches for a variety of reasons...1) most coaches use the Time Out to give their players a chance to rest or take a break or even make player substitutions...2) other coaches use the Time Out to call a new play and explain who will do what and when...3) many times the Coach will simply take a Time Out to change the momentum of the game...4)at other times, the Coaches use the Time Out to inspire their players to work harder or keep up the good work...all valid and useful reasons for taking a Time Out.

Pickleball Time Outs are available and should be used for most of these very same reasons...that's why we are adding the Time Out to our Playbook...the expeditious use of the Time Out can easily make the difference between winning or losing...clearly, 1) knowing when to call a (regular) Time Out is one factor and 2) knowing how to utilize the Time Out is another factor all together.

1) When to call the Time Out...Injury and Equipment Time Outs are beyond your control and are taken when they occur...But your regular Time Outs need to be used sparingly, since you only get 2 per game and they are only 60 seconds long...if things are NOT going well, you must call a Time Out (to stop the bleeding) anytime you have lost 3, 4 or 5 points in a row...3 points lost should

be the rule, 4 points lost is very serious and 5 points lost is almost too late!

2) How to utilize the Time Out...Why did you call the Time Out? Is it a team problem or an individual problem? Address the specific issue and make a change! If it's a team problem, change your team's game plan to another approach...If it's an individual player problem, change that player's approach to a different style of play (more aggressive or more defensive) and be encouraging and supportive.

This is clearly an over simplification of how best to utilize your Time Out but further discussion can be obtained by reading the TIPBITS Article #209, "Plan A or Plan B"...for here and now, at least consider this...

Add the Time Out to your Playbook...Use it when needed...Use it wisely!

TIPBITS #247

TIME OUT BASICS

Last time we introduced the Time Out as an important feature to add to your Playbook...we touched upon the Reasoning for taking a Time Out, When to take a Time Out and How to Utilize a Time Out...as a brief refresher, let's review each of these factors...

Time Out Reasoning...probably in the order of importance, you need 1) to stop or change the momentum of the game, 2) to change the strategy being used, 3) to change the mental attitudes of either or both players and 4) to provide an opportunity to rest or recover from heat or fatigue.

Calling a Time Out...if things are NOT going well, you must call a Time Out (to stop the bleeding) anytime you have lost 3, 4 or 5 points in a row...3 points lost should be the rule, 4 points lost is very serious and 5 points lost is almost (but never) too late! Finally, if you have any left, call one prior to your opponents' Serve at Match Point.

Time Out Utilization...Diagnose the problem...Keep it simple...Is it a team problem or an individual problem? If it's a team problem, a change to your team's game plan will be required...If it's an individual player problem, you'll need to provide positive reinforcement and be encouraging and supportive...remember, you've got just 60 seconds to determine the problem and agree on a solution!

One of the biggest things in Time Outs is not to make it real complicated...don't over analyze it.

1) Team Issues...do a quick analysis...are they winning (making all their shots) or are you losing (by making too many mistakes)...what's been working for you and what's not working...is it what you're doing or what they're doing...what should be done about it...what's the fix...before the Time Out has expired, determine, decide and agree upon one or two (but no more) new strategies that you will focus on...and return to the match with a

100% agreement and confidence in your new strategy.

2) Player Issues...sometimes, you or your partner may be struggling with their game...one or both Time Outs may be required to focus on changing the probable negative feelings that have overtaken the player...this can only be done by having a frank discussion about the situation, reminding the affected player of their many strengths, sharing what's been working (and what hasn't), providing all possible encouragement and having both players return to the match with nothing other than the most positive attitude.

Lastly, regardless of the reasoning for the Time Out, your emphasis when returning to the court is to change the course of the match IMMEDIATELY!!! Extreme focus is necessary coming out of the Time Out...that the first point after the timeout is a truly CRITICAL point in the match...this cannot be overemphasized enough...you must come out of the Time Out with a very very very strong level of concentration on this single point...Your Attitude coming out of the Time Out is paramount!

Finally, before each and every subsequent point, remind each other of the agreement you have made...stay supportive and encouraging!

TIPBITS #248

USE OF TACTICS

Continuing on with our Pickleball Play Book...now we've got the Gold Standard, the Serve Routine, the Return Routine, the Squeeze Play, the Early Attack, the Sneak Attack, Espionage, Setting Goals, the Middle, Middle, Middle Play and the Time Out...what's next?

Let's address the value of Tactics and their use throughout the entire match...there is a countless number of Tactics or Strategies and our Playbook should list many, if not all of them...your Tactics list may not be all inclusive initially but it can always be added to as a new tactic is born/discovered.

Unlike a Play in our Playbook, a Tactic may be just a single maneuver or action taken to trigger some sort of desired response ...EG., hitting an angle shot that pulls an opponent off the court.

Numerous Tactics may be utilized throughout a game and may be continually Mixed and Matched...you may have a number of Tactics that you find are your "Go To" Tactics and you will use them more frequently when they work and less often when they don't...of course, the key to their value/success is knowing/recognizing when to or not to use them.

Let's address two somewhat more elaborate Tactics and get them into our list of Tactics for the Playbook...

1)The Power Formation...stacking or using the Power Formation is a common Tactic used to position your team members in the best possible position on the court to be the most effective on each and every point...initial use of stacking put the best player where his or her forehand was always in the middle...or in the case of a team with both a right and a left handed player, always keeping both forehands in the middle...or perhaps in mixed doubles, putting the strongest player where his or her forehand was in the middle...now, it's just a matter of keeping your best possible alignment in the

same position...learn more details about the Power Formation by referring to other TIPBITS articles (#'s 34, 35 and 184).

2) Poaching...a good Poach has at least two elements that make it an excellent Tactic to use...a) it offers the element of surprise and b) it robs your opponents of time to react...basically, the Poach occurs when one player crosses over in front of his partner AND onto his/her partner's side of the court in order to hit/intercept the ball...generally, the Poach is done by the more aggressive player that also has good foot speed and excellent anticipation...the Poach can be performed at almost any time during the point...it can either be a spontaneous reaction to a situation occurring during the point or it can be planned ahead of time and controlled by a hand or audible signal agreed upon by the team members...again, learn more details about Poaching by referring to other TIPBITS articles (#'s 25, 159, 161 and 202).

Adding these first two Tactics to your Playbook will make a good start for your collection.

TIPBITS #249

A BAKER'S DOZEN

Wrapping up (for now) our Pickleball Play Book, let's review what we've accumulated...we've got the the Gold Standard, the Serve Routine, the Return Routine, the Squeeze Play, the Early Attack, the Sneak Attack, Espionage, Setting Goals, the Middle, Middle, Middle Play, the Time Out and Tactics...what's next?

Here is a series (a Baker's Dozen) of Tactics and Strategies. They can be Mixed and Matched in any way your team might see fit. BUT the idea is to TRY this particular Tactic and STAY with it until it's obvious that it has no more value. Then, take a Time Out and discuss your next Tactic. Consider these Tactics and Strategies.

1) Down the Line and Angles Angles Angles...this is a corollary to Middle, Middle, Middle...keep your opponents off balance but forcing them to cover the outside of the court...expect a clean winner...if you don't get a clean winner, follow up by going to the open court.

2) Third Shot Drive, Fifth Shot Drop...try to soften up the Return team by driving the ball on the Third Shot (versus a Typical Soft Drop) and hit a Fifth Shot Drop on the likely easier and closer to the net reply from the Return team (refer to TIPBITS article #107).

3) All Third Shots by One Player...with the exception of the difficult to reach Third Shot, have the most successful (hottest) player take all Third Shots and the other player rush the net in hopes of triggering an easy set up or put away.

4) Strike Early during Dink Rally...during a dinking rally, be the first team to hit the aggressive shot...don't wait for the ideal shot but use the First Strike mentality to surprise your opponent.

5) Lob during Dink Rally...during a dinking rally, when dinking directly across from your opponent, bring him or her forward with a particularly short dink (close to the net), then POP the lob over his or her head (refer to TIPBITS article #41).

6) Dink Diagonal...during a dinking rally, dink all shots diagonally attempting to pull your opponent off the court and opening up the middle for a winner.

7) Dink Across or Down the Middle...during a dinking rally, dink all shots across or to the middle...if your opponents seem focused on maintaining the rally pattern, be alert to their willingness to try the “Ernie” or see if they might be susceptible to an “Ernie” of your own.

8) Direct All Shots to One Side...regardless of which player is where, direct all shots to the right side or all shots to the left side.

9) Direct All Shots to the Strongest Player Only...regardless of the location of that player, direct all shots to the strongest player.

10) Direct All Shots to the Weakest Player...regardless of the location of that player, direct all shots to the weakest player.

11) Hit Only Loft Returns...since the worst possible mistake you can make (with regular scoring) is to miss a Return, remove all the anxiety and danger of an error on the Return by simply lofting (lobbing) the Return deep and in the middle.

12) Keep Opponents Deep, then Drop Them...when you're the Return team (or whenever a similar alignment presents itself), keep your opponents deep and then hit a Dead Drop or Angled Volley (refer to TIPBITS article #'s 26, 27, 53 and 108).

13) Use All Power or All Soft...take your choice...generally a weaker team is more vulnerable to the Power game...an equally skilled or better team will require the use of the Soft game...but consider using one or the other tactic on virtually every shot regardless of your opponents' skill set or level.

Add this Baker's Dozen into your Playbook and remember, these are Tactics that may or may not work against your current opponent...try them, mix them up, use them in combination...AND remember to bail out when they're no longer effective!

TIPBITS #250

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...

#241 Early Attack...when to use a Hard Drive instead of a Third Shot Drop

#242 Sneak Attack...sneak all the way to the net as your partner is hitting a Third Shot Drop

#243 Espionage...collect and utilize insights available on your opponents' strengths and weaknesses

#244 Setting Goals...be a better person and a better player by setting reachable goals

#245 Middle, Middle, Middle...on offense, go to the Middle; on defense, cover the Middle

#246 The Time Out...know when to call a Time Out and how to use it effectively

#247 Time Out Basics...detailed discussion on Individual and Team issues and agreed upon solutions

#248 Use of Tactics...the Power Formation and Poaching are examples of two aggressive Tactics

#249 A Baker's Dozen...a collection of thirteen tactics and strategies to Mix and Match as needed

REPEAT...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 #251

5 SHOT PRIORITIES

Every match, every game and every point we play is the sum total of all the shots we make...every single shot adds to the result of the match...every single shot adds to the result of the game...and every single shot adds to the result of the point...shouldn't every single shot have a purpose, a goal, a priority?

Each shot should have a series of priorities...not every shot will have the exact same priorities...but most shots will share some things in common...let's start with the most obvious...

You must keep the ball...

1) In Play...easy or it should be...but all too often, it's NOT given its true or sufficient merit...In Play addresses your first 3 most important opponents...they are a) The Net...you must get the ball over the net (every single time), b) The Boundaries...you must keep the ball within the boundaries (every single time) and c) Yourself...you must keep yourself under control (every single time)...don't make mistakes!

You must have...

2) A Basic Target (what or who)...you have options...should it be the opening (between your opponents or down the line) or should it be one of your opponents?...which offers the greatest potential for success?...which opponent is the most vulnerable?...each point is different...you must decide!

Then you must have...

3) A Precise Target (which one)...you've decided on the opening, now which one makes the most sense?...you've decided on the opponent, now which side makes the most sense (the weaker side)?...you must decide!

Then you must have...

4) A Location (where)...now, where exactly should you place the shot?...do you hit it deep or do you hit it wide?...you must decide!

Then you must choose...

5) Your Weapon (how)...will you hit your shot with PACE, will you hit your shot with SPIN or will you hit your shot with TOUCH or with some combination of them?...you must decide!

These are the priorities you must decide upon before you make every shot!

Finally, after factoring in each priority above, envision the SMALLEST possible area as your target and go for it...you'll be amazed at how accurate you can be if you limit the SIZE of (all) your targets!

Every single shot counts...Make it/them count for you...Prioritize them all!

TIPBITS #252

TWO HANDS

How's your backhand?...Are you able to put enough pace on your Return for it to be any sort of threat?...Can you hit an effective backhand drive on your Third Shot that puts pressure on your opponent?...Can you hit with lots of topspin on your backhand?...Does everyone know where you're going to hit your shot?...If your backhand is lacking in some of these areas, perhaps it's time for some new thinking? Consider this....

In a parallel world (Tennis), nine out of ten of the top ten women on tour use a two-handed backhand...you might have already guessed that...but, did you know that almost the same ratio of the top men also use a two-handed backhand?...why is that?

Again, in Tennis, youngsters being taught the game are often encouraged to use two hands merely to enable them to hit the ball with enough strength and power to get it over the net...it also helps them to control their swing...who says slight of build players or older players don't need to take this same approach?...so what?, you say!

Have you noticed the influx of young (and older) Tennis players in our sport?...Are they good?...you bet!...Have you noticed, in particular, the number of really talented ladies who have brought their two handed backhands to "our" game?...Does it work for them?...you bet! Why again?

The Benefits: First, you can get more power and pace on the ball from a two-handed backhand...on a ground stroke, you'll be able to drive the ball more aggressively, both deeper and with greater pace...the two-handed stroke is more compact requiring a shorter back swing and follow through...you'll also be able to hit later in your stance and, as a result, you'll be able to "hold" your shot longer, better disguising your shot, making it even more effective...further, because you're using two hands, you will also be able to hit with greater accuracy...and you'll also be able to apply more spin...finally, you'll be able to hit better angles..that's a pretty

good list of benefits!

The Down Side: Reach is the single biggest issue...you will need to hit the ball closer to your body with a two-handed backhand...and balls that are hit very close to your body or at you will be harder for you to deal with...both issues can be counteracted with either good/better footwork or by returning to a single hand shot.

What about a paddle that you can easily hold on to with two hands?...is there such a thing?...if you look, you'll discover many paddles with longer handles, some even “designed” for two hands!

More next time on working Two Hands into your Pickleball Game!

TIPBITS #253

WEAKNESS 2 WEAPON

The previous article addressed the potential value of a two-handed backhand...in Tennis, the two-handed backhand is a mainstay in the sport...it's not used as a backup to a one-handed backhand BUT in place of it...but, we are NOT suggesting that the two-handed backhand can play a similar role in Pickleball because, clearly at this time, it does not!

What is being suggested is that it could be used in lieu of a one-handed backhand when appropriate AND necessary...it is NOT being suggested to be used in all cases, just some!

By way of a quick review, a two-handed backhand has...

The following benefits...you can get more power and pace on the ball...on a ground stroke, you'll be able to drive the ball more aggressively, both deeper and with greater pace...it's more compact requiring a shorter back swing and follow through...it can be hit later in your stance and, as a result, you'll be able to "hold" your shot longer, better disguising your shot, making it even more effective...you will also be able to hit with greater accuracy...you'll be able to apply more spin...AND you'll be able to hit better angles!

The only downside...a limited reach!

Who should use it?

If you're Backhand "challenged", meaning that you have a relatively weak backhand, it might be for several reasons...you may not have the physical strength required to be effective with a single handed backhand, you may be aging and recognize that your once effective backhand no longer has the same "pop", perhaps you never were able to figure out how to be that effective from your backhand side, maybe you are just learning the game and you're open to anything that will help or your backhand simply needs some "help" to improve...all good reasons to give it a try!

When/How should it be used?

Use your two-handed backhand for all your ground strokes...

Start with the Return...if you want to put real pressure on the Serving team, use your two-handed backhand to put pace and depth on your Return...add a greater margin for error on your Return by hitting it with topspin, something that's almost impossible for most/many players on their backhand side...done effectively, this will become a real weapon for you!

Use it on your Third Shot....rather than always hitting a drop shot, drive the Third Shot with pace AND spin up the middle using your two-handed backhand...follow the likely weak response with a now much easier Third Shot drop and take the net!

Use your two-handed backhand at the net for firmer volleys...while most of your rapid fire volleys will remain best hit with a single-handed backhand, many opportunities will present themselves when a ball is hit in your two-handed power zone...or on a high volley when added strength is needed..look for these opportunities and couple your ability to hit with more pace AND spin to go for a winner!

Change your WEAK one-handed backhand to a two-handed WEAPON!

TIPBITS #254

IMPROVING?!

Have you been successful lately in improving your game? Have you added any new *strokes*, like a different Serve? Have you added *spin* to a shot, like a topspin Return? Have you added any *pace*, especially to your volleys? Have you added any *touch*, like off a hard drive? How about *angles*, like off a low Third Shot drop? How about *redirection*, like off a Lob? Notice these are all stroke related techniques or mechanics.

Have you taken any other approaches to improve your game? Have you tried some different *strategies*, like stacking or poaching? Have you tried playing more frequently, to become *steadier*? Have you tried working on your mental game, like more *focus*? Have you tried drilling, to become more *consistent*? Or how about joining a league or entering a tournament, to become more *competitive*?

If you can answer “yes” to many or any of the questions above, you are clearly on the right path...but how can you measure the level or degree of your success in these efforts?...how well have you mastered any of those new stroke mechanics or strategies?

One sure way to measure your progress, aside from your relative performance to your peers, is to sign up to be rated...here, virtually every stroke you use, every technique you incorporate and every strategy you demonstrate, will factor into your skill level rating...there will be a line item for every stroke and a score for that stroke...the score reflects the level of mastery (consistency and effectiveness) of each stroke...another or other line items contain data reflecting an overall analysis of your game, which takes into account strategies, competitiveness and other factors used to grade your skill level...and then there is one other common line item, seemingly unrelated, and that is your Mobility.

Why would Mobility be a factor in your skill level analysis? Because your ability to cover the court, to be in the right place at the right time, is critical to your level of success as a player.

Mobility is being isolated here to make a point...the point is that not all improvement in your game can come from more drills, more play, more clinics, more tournaments...but from a whole different approach...and that's called Cross Training!

Mobility isn't the only factor you should be concerned about...consider Maneuverability and Flexibility, Strength and Endurance, Speed and Reaction Time...they all factor into better performance on the court...yet none of these can be improved with more drills or more play...but they can be through Cross Training!

So what is Cross Training?...it couldn't be more simple...you can Cross Train by going to a pool and simply walking in it...getting on a bike and doing wind sprints...going to the gym and working out...taking classes in Yoga...getting a personal trainer...in other words, do something other than Pickleball to get yourself in better condition and continue IMPROVING!

TIPBITS #255

CROSS TRAINING

Last time, we addressed Improving...we asked the question about whether you have tried to add some new *strokes*, some *spin*, some *pace*, some *touch*, some *angles* or some shot *redirection* to improve your game...we also asked if you tried some new *strategies*, tried playing with more *frequency*, worked on your *mental game*, added *drills* to your practice sessions or joined a *league or tournaments* to improve your game.

Then we suggested adding an altogether different approach to improvement...it was called Cross Training...and, along the way, it became apparent in that discussion that something other than the more obvious areas to improve (listed above) were NOT the only factors to consider that might lead to improvement...but that Mobility might impact your performance and level of success.

And then, it was suggested that Mobility wasn't the only factor you should be concerned about...others included Maneuverability and Flexibility, Strength and Endurance, Speed and Reaction Time...they all factor into better performance on the court...so, Cross Training was taunted as another method for improving these areas and your overall Pickleball performance!

To paraphrase Wikipedia, Cross Training is athletic training in sports other than your regular sport(Pickleball)...the goal being to *improve* your overall *performance*...and to do that by taking advantage of one sport's effectiveness to offset the lack of it in your other (regular) sport(Pickleball)!

Finally, we eluded to some very common sports that could fill this need...

Swimming...to increase strength, endurance, mobility and flexibility...for strength, the waters' gentle resistance to motion, swim strokes or ANY motion, lends itself to safe strengthening of almost any muscle group...not to mention mobility and flexibility...further, longer periods of time repeating the same

routines, whether they be laps or simple repetition, builds endurance.

Bicycling...to increase strength, endurance, mobility and speed...merely biking anywhere will increase a number of your leg muscles but a regular routine augmented by variation of time, terrain and pedal speed can address all four of these attributes...hills, up and down, length of time or distance lend to strength, endurance and mobility...speed can be gained by doing wind sprints, pedaling rapidly for a short burst, then slowing and resting, then repeating again...increase the duration or frequency of these routines over a number of days to see how your speed, endurance and strength increases.

Gym...address virtually every area you need to improve by visiting your local gym...you can use their machines, use their exercise areas, and perhaps most importantly, use a Personal Trainer or take a Yoga class...

Personal Trainer...expand your horizons by seeking advice from an expert...a highly qualified, trained and certified Personal Trainer can provide you with any number of exercises and routines you can perform on your own or with the assistance of the many different exercise machines...get customized insights to improve areas of your conditioning that need the most help.

Yoga...to increase your flexibility (and mentally, your focus), consider a Yoga class..start with a beginner class and progress slowly, being careful not to over-extend yourself prematurely...this could result in being the best thing you can learn to improve your flexibility (and to prevent injuries).

At Home...to improve your reaction time, do some serious homework...that is, Research! Yes, you can improve your reaction time...reaction time consist of two factors...1) having recognition of the need to react is one factor and 2) making the rapid move is the next! For that, you need to trigger your fast twitch muscles and they CAN be improved...more next time!

FINAL CAUTION: As you begin your Cross Training, always do what you do in Moderation!

TIPBITS #256

REACTION TIME

Continuing with our Cross Training series...Reaction Time is yet another area of our game that could be improved with Cross Training... but let's start with a description of Reaction Time and how it relates to Pickleball and how it impacts our performance or success...

By definition, Reaction Time is the amount of time it takes to respond to a particular stimulus...further, Reaction Time has many practical implications that may be of some consequence...as an example, slower than normal Reaction Time while driving can have grave results...while many experiences we have in life may be impacted by our Reaction Time, most do NOT have grave consequences BUT improving our Reaction Time does lend itself to better results in many of our daily activities.

Reaction Time is made up of two basic components plus a third sandwiched between the two...Recognition, Decision and Execution...each is as important as any other and each aspect of these components can be improved.

Recognition is the **detection** of the need to respond to some sort of stimulus...in Pickleball, it is detecting the need to react to a ball coming your way.

Decision is the **analysis** of what must be done based on the stimulus...in Pickleball, it is making a decision based on the analysis of your options for the ball coming your way.

Execution is the **action** necessary to effectively deal with the stimulus presented...in Pickleball, it is getting your paddle on the ball and directing the ball to the best possible target.

Recognition can be improved by Anticipation, Observation and Recollection...Anticipation is the ability to recognize the need for a movement (right, left, forward or backward) based on previous experience...this experience comes from your prior Observations of

similar situations you have encountered before...and your Recollection provides you with the resources you need to have an effective understanding of your situation...you can see how it pays to take notes, either mentally or physically, so that you can draw upon those past experiences in these similar situations.

Using your Recollection of prior patterns of play, or of prior similar circumstances, or likely options your opponent might use, or your opponent has used in the past, are all acquired over time by way of Observation...these actions that you recall from prior play improve your Anticipation...you can see how they are all tied together...one does not exist without the other...with that said, it is crucial to your game that you draw upon your Recognition of these patterns so that you can move quickly to the next step, the Decision making and then the final step, Execution.

So where does Cross Training enter into the above discussion?...Sorry, it doesn't! This discussion has just primed us for the next discussion on the Execution portion of improving your Reaction Time.

REACTION TIME (EXECUTION)

By looking at of other ways of training aside from simply playing more Pickleball, we've discovered that Cross Training could improve our overall performance, the very definition of the term...we left off looking for ways to improve our Reaction Time...we've seen that Reaction Time, regardless of the sport, is made up of several components...1) the Recognition of a need to respond, 2) the Decision about what must be done and 3) the Execution of doing it!

Once we've made up our mind about WHAT is to be done, the onus then goes to DOING it...in Pickleball, perhaps more than most other sports, a quick response to this required action makes all the difference in the outcome...and this doesn't occur just once in a while, it can occur in almost every point...so, if there is any room for improvement in your Reaction Time, it certainly seems to be worth pursuing.

Some players have these skills in spades...you might call them reflexes or simply that ability to react quickly, ala "fast hands"...many players come by these skills naturally, they were born with these talents...these gifted players don't have to look like Popeye, with bulging muscles and a spinach diet...it's pretty hard to look at a player's physique to determine whether they can out duel you in a fast volley exchange...they blend in pretty well until you run into them on the court... so if you weren't so fortunate, the only recourse is to try to improve what you've been given to work with.

Start by getting a better understanding of how we move...understanding how we are able to react more quickly, in less time comes down to an understanding of how your body moves, what makes it move and subsequently, how to make it move faster...our muscles get us moving and keep us moving...their conditioning determines their effectiveness...further, some muscles help us get moving, some muscles keep us moving and some muscles help us to move faster...they are broken down into several categories and having an understanding of which ones do what is

crucial to making improvements in a desired area...it's necessary to know the difference between slow twitch (Type 1) muscles and fast twitch muscles, the last being further divided into two categories, intermediate fast twitch (Type 2a) and fast twitch (Type 2b) muscles.

In Pickleball, we need to focus on two areas...first, our court movement needed to get to the right place on the court in the least amount of time (mostly the legs) and secondly, how to get our paddle on the ball and directing the ball in the right direction in the least amount of time (mostly the arms)..the latter addresses court Mobility and the former, Reaction Time (Execution), our focus here.

Bottom line...we need to improve/strengthen our Fast Twitch (Type 2b) muscles that help us react (move our paddle) more quickly...these muscles can be isolated/identified by doing exercises that simulate similar movements to that required while playing...these exercises can be done either with weights, weight machines or resistance machines (get a personal trainer to help you get started).

But if you'd prefer another approach that is much less demanding and far less likely to cause injury, yet equally capable of producing the same results, you could consider Isometric exercises...see the link below for some interesting, simple and safe exercises to improve your Execution! Be sure to read down through the “Wall Punch Drill”!

<https://breakingmuscle.com/fitness/increase-your-fast-twitch-potential-with-isometrics>

Regardless of your approach, you can improve your Reaction Time Execution by improving your fast twitch muscles...what are you waiting for?

TIPBITS #258

REACTION TIME (READER INPUT)

Reader feedback on recent articles included several insights from players that are worth sharing.

First, from a frequent provider of feedback comes this insight...

I believe regular 10-20 minute wall volley (bang board) drill sessions are the practical key to reaction time and training your body/hands to automatically do the right things to keep the ball safely in play on defense...and on offense, when the ball is in an attack location. You can never be sure where/how the ball is going to come off the wall toward you...which forces you to recognize, decide and execute. Obviously this form of training requires you to mentally have a target just above net-top level and to hit it close to the net top (neither too high nor too low) over and over. This drill also gives you confidence in stressful competitive situations because sometimes the wall sends your shot's rebound back at you below net-top level, presenting you with defensive volley and half-volley practice which helps you make saves and re-set points which your team seemed about to lose.

I include such wall volley and dink drills in my regimen...and always before I play my first game of the day (and sometimes in between games if I feel I need it to hone my touch and accuracy). The ball coming off the wall at you at high speeds preps you for countering drives and hard volleys.

As a brief supplement to this very prevalent and useful method of improving Reaction Time, some players like a flat wall while others prefer a somewhat less predictable wall, such as a block wall with its less than predictable rebound...further, players using this method often start out at a comfortable, easy to manage, distance from the wall, then move closer and closer to further increase its benefits.

Second, consider these variations on the classic volley/volley drill...

In one variation of the volley/volley drill, start the drill by standing directly across from your hitting partner...but both players stand INSIDE the NVZ line...the farther into the NVZ area you stand, the quicker your replies must be...as always, start slow and gradually increase the pace...after 10 to 15 minutes, return to the normal position, just in front of the NVZ line and try the classic drill again...what happened?

In another variation of the volley/volley drill, start across from your hitting partner at mid-court...then proceed with the drill hitting 3 or 4 volleys, then stepping in a step, repeating until you're again, inside the NVZ line...both, simple to do but very effective!

Finally, work on the mechanics of your volley stroke...

Think Shadow Boxing...no balls, no partners, no net, just you and your paddle (use a mirror, if you like)...take a proper ready position, feet spread generously apart, knees bent plenty and crouch forward facing the target...hold the paddle out front and parallel to your body...keep it somewhere below your chin and above your waist and comfortably away from your body...using a backhand, perform the stroke...use a punching motion 12-15 inches in length and straight as an arrow ending with that paddle face still exactly parallel to your body...return the paddle (straight back) to its “docked” position...use a quick snapping motion...repeat over and over!

These techniques really do work...try them and see!

STRUCTURED PRACTICE

If you've ever been to a Pickleball clinic or camp, had a Pickleball lesson or read any of the TIPBITS Insights from the National Champions' articles, you've seen a common thread or theme through them all...1) practice, 2) practice, 3) practice...1) practice to learn new shots...2) practice to gain consistency...3) practice so you don't forget seldom used shots...and the more often the better...some say weekly, some say as often as you play, some say twice as much as you play...the upshot? It's a requirement for staying competitive!

And like any thing else, the harder you work at it, the better your results...but don't just put in the time...have a purpose, have a structure to the time you spend...make it the best use of your time...have a plan...a plan that has some rhyme or reason...consider this...

First, schedule your practice sessions. If they're weekly, schedule them on the same day, at the same time and the same place each and every week. Plan on at least one hour, preferably two! Get similarly skilled players and try to have at least four or more players attend. If you're part of the group, be responsible about attending...AND, if you can't make it, get a suitable substitute...don't ruin it for others!

Second, organize and structure each session...have a set plan, a sequence or outline of events...group your practice, your drills by category...and have a logical progression...start with...

A. Warm Up and Soft Game Skills...if you can't keep the ball in play at the net or place the ball where you want while at the NVZ line, how can you expect to be steady or precise back on the baseline? Work on all your shots, either with a single playing partner or all four players...hit across, hit diagonally both ways, try top and under spins, hit alternately from side to side or to a different player each time, play mini games in the NVZ only, keep two balls going, or add your own drill(s).

B. Net Game Skills...the net game, your volleys, determine the result, either won or lost, of the majority of all points! Don't think your volley is important?...just ponder that thought for a moment...all the other shots in the game, added together, don't determine the outcome of as many points as does the volley! Work on a volley/volley drill with each player in your group, have your initial goal to keep the ball in play, keeping the ball low, never shoulder height but lower and flat and firm...play 3 on 1, step inside the NVZ line, start at center court and move forward, play a mini game with one ball, two on two, hitting only volleys, or add your own drill(s).

C. Approach Game Skills...getting to the net is the most important goal of the Serving team...and the most difficult shot in the game is required to do it. Work on your Third Shot drops from the NVZ line, then, from half court, then, three quarters, then from the baseline(hit at least 3 in a row before moving back), do this straight ahead, then do BOTH diagonals, next, start from the baseline, working forward with a Third Shot drop first, then move forward hitting whatever is required thereafter until you reach the net (either successive Third Shots or block (dead) drops), use the 3 Ball drill diagonally (Serve, Return,Third Shot, then catch and repeat), or add your own drill(s).

D. Drill of the Week(optional)...consider the addition of a stroke (learn a Backhand Overhead), a stroke technique (add a Spin or Angle) or a strategy (Signaling or Poaching) and take the time to practice working on something all new each week...work together to decide on What to work on and How to practice it (a drill that fits).

E. Simulated Game Play...work on the key components of every point, Serves, Returns and Third Shots...focus on drills that emphasize proper positioning, placement and techniques of these first three shots...then work on game play strategies with all players at the net...use the "3 Serves" or "5 Serves" drill that requires specific depth and placement on the Serve, specific depth and placement of the Return and effective Third Shot drops, use the Skinny Singles drill that focuses on the same shots but much

narrower (and demanding) placements, the Plus/Minus game that rewards and penalizes good and bad shots, play abbreviated games (rally scoring to 7) and play with each player in your group, or add your own drill(s).

Learning, perfecting and maintaining your best game requires constant practice...don't waste time...make it a **STRUCTURED PRACTICE** with a purpose!

TIPBITS #260

LAST TIME TO RECAP

PLEASE see the information below about the NEW TIPBITS feature to begin with our next article...but, for now, let's do 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...

#251 5 Shot Priorities...keys to success when choosing targets and weapons

#252 Two Hands...the benefits and short comings of using two hands on the paddle

#253 Weakness 2 Weapon...who should use and when and how should a two-handed shot be used

#254 Improving?...questions you might ask yourself to see if your game is on the right track

#255 Cross Training...several different methods of Cross Training that can improve your game

#256 Reaction Time...understanding the elements of Reaction Time; Recognition, Analysis and Action

#257 Reaction Time (Execution)...how to more quickly execute the shot you've decided to make

#258 Reaction Time (Reader Input)...methods and drills from readers who have reduced reaction time

#259 Structured Practice...learn, perfect and maintain your game using a Structured Practice

RECAP...Five years later and after 260 weekly articles, it still all comes down to playing Percentage Pickleball...not making mistakes, never over hitting, being under control, being patient and being in the right place at the right time...It all started with TIPBITS #1, Coming to the Party (At the Net), where the percentages ARE on your side...So, now as then, Percentage Pickleball is all about putting the percentages, the overwhelming likelihood that you will be successful, on your side!!!

NEW FEATURE...it sounds like it's over but it's not...TIPBITS is introducing weekly TIPBITS Question and Answer (Q n A)...go to the TIPBITS.ORG website's cover page and enter your Question about anything Pickleball (Strategies, Tactics, Mechanics, Techniques, Drills, Rules, Equipment, History or you name it)...we will Answer by return email for any Question submitted, whether it's used in an article or not!

