

# Pickleball Strategy Guide

by Coach "Mo"

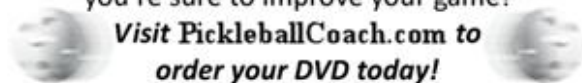
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**Here is what Coach "Mo" says are 10 ways to  
guarantee that you will LOSE more  
Pickleball games than you WIN.**

1. FREQUENTLY miss your serve.
2. FREQUENTLY miss your return of serve.
3. HELP your opponents by keeping their OUT balls in play.
4. When your opponent hits a very difficult FAST shot at you, try and hit a low percentage sharp angled shot for a winner rather than a DEFENSIVE shot.
5. Take away your PARTNER'S easy forehand shots, with your weaker backhand shots.
6. Get upset with your Excellent Pickleball partner who has SUCCESSFULLY jumped in front of you to win the point!
7. Do NOT keep the ball at your opponents feet as much as possible.
8. Do NOT play up to the No Volley Zone line.
9. Hit the ball TOO FAST for good placement, and do NOT give yourself enough leeway for error.
10. Take TOO MANY sharp angle shots rather than high percentage shots down the middle of the court that bounces between your opponents.

# Pickleball Strategies

## Grip

Use the continental grip. The point of the "V" between your thumb and index finger should be placed on top of the handle of the paddle when the face of the paddle is perpendicular to the ground.

The easiest grip to use is the Continental Grip (See "Volley Tips"). This grip is halfway between the Eastern Forehand Grip and the Eastern Backhand Grip. A player never has to change his grip on the paddle. The volley, serving, overhead and ground strokes are all the same using the Continental Grip.

Most Pickle Ball players only keep one hand on the paddle when making their shots. A player can have much greater control hitting the ball if he uses two hands to steady the paddle before hitting the ball.

If you have a wet grip problem on hot, humid days, wear a wrist band and buy some tennis over grips for your paddle handle. Gamma Pro Wrap over grips are about \$1.00 each, shipping included. Check back pages of tennis magazines for telephone numbers of suppliers.

## Ready Position

Get back to the ready position (See "Volley Tips") quickly after every ground stroke and especially volleys with your paddle way out in front of your body.

A common mistake made while moving forward to net is not having your paddle in proper ready position. Many players have their paddles at their knees or below the net, not up and out in front of the body.

At the point when the ball contacts your opponents' paddle, you should be in your ready position: elbows and paddle out in front of your body, feet at shoulder width apart, side by side on your toes, not your heels, ready to move left or right. Never be moving at the point of contact of your opponent's paddle on the ball. No matter where you are on the court, stop and get into your ready position. Never sacrifice being ready, for positioning on the court. If you are not prepared early and properly to hit a ball, it doesn't

matter where you are on court. You probably won't hit the ball properly.

## Return of Serve

Never try for a pure winner. Do not make an unforced error. Make your target spot five feet from the baseline and eight inches to left of center. This will keep the ball closer to the backhand of the player whose backhand is toward the middle of the court. The ball will travel over the low part of the net and give you a lot of leeway. Hit the ball slow to give you plenty of time to set up at the no volley zone line.

Change spin occasionally (top or under spin). It will cause some opponents to make mistakes at times.

Once in a great while, when ahead, hit fast return of serve for a change up when you feel your opponents will least expect it.

Place the return down the middle, slightly closer to the back hand player. Both opponents may think the other will take the shot.

Wait for the serve 12" or more behind the baseline so that the ball will bounce in front of you, not at your feet for a difficult shot. If your opponent has a very fast and deep serve, you may have to wait about 3 feet behind baseline.

Have a mental note in your mind of players who do hit soft, short serves. Watch the face of the server's paddle and be ready to sprint in and split your feet for the short return.

If one opponent is weaker than the other, hit the return to weakest opponent's backhand until you get ahead a few points.

When the better of your two opponents least expects it, hit a shot to him deep to his backhand. The element of surprise can help.

When your serve is returned, try to place a soft shot in the no volley zone. Do not try to overpower your opponent with a very fast passing shot, unless you are an advanced player and you feel you can win more than 80% of points in this manner. Both opponents are already at net, and it would be a very low percentage shot. A low soft shot is important because it gives you time to get to the net and not be on the defensive. More points are won when returning serve

because the first team that gets to the net usually wins the point. If you can win 8 out of 10 points with any other strategy, go for it.

Never Miss Your Serve because you are hitting too hard, an especially important part of the game. Your opponents only need a pulse to win the point if you miss the serve. Give them a chance to lose. Also, your partner will lose confidence in you if you keep missing your serve.

After serving, step back one step behind the baseline. There are two reasons for this. (1) The ball must land in front of you not at your feet. (2) It will be easier to see if your opponents return is going to be out. If your opponent has the ability to hit a drop shot, be prepared to quickly run forward.

When serving the ball, give yourself leeway, aim for center of serving box 5 feet from baseline. Serve fast only if you never miss your serve.

## Volley

When volleying, keep elbow out in front of your hip with paddle head above wrist for better ball control. Never drop the head of the paddle on low shots. You must keep skin wrinkles on your wrist at point of contact.

Try and keep your head and eyes behind ball at ball height when hitting a volley.

Bend your knees on all low shots. Your back knee should almost be touching the ground. Stay down all the way through your shot and keep your head down and eyes looking at ball contact point long after ball has been hit.

Do not swing at your volleys unless you are an advanced player and feel you can make 80% of your swinging volleys. Punch them unless your opponent hits a very fast volley or overhead at close range at you. Then just set the height and angle of your paddle and block the shot low to your opponent's feet. Beginner Pickleball players have a tendency to swing at their volleys and punch the ground strokes which should be just the opposite. There is not enough time to swing at most volleys and you lose your consistency when you swing and not punch the shot by extending your arm from the elbow.

When you punch your ground strokes, you lose power and control. Stroke your ground strokes for better placement and power.

When you are waiting for the ball, you should be in the "ready position." Your elbows should be out in front of your body, your feet should be shoulder width apart, and you should be on your toes. The head of your paddle should be higher than your wrist. You should see wrinkles on your wrist. Never drop the head of your paddle and let those wrinkles disappear. The angle of the face of the paddle should be slightly open (1 o'clock to 7 o'clock).

When you strike the ball, you should point your front shoulder in the direction you want the ball to go and open or close the face of the paddle to set the angle of the paddle. Keep a firm wrist and extend your arm from only the elbow joint, using a jab motion. Setting the angle of the paddle and the jab motion are two completely separate motions. First aim the paddle early. Then jab from the elbow joint.

Keep the butt of the paddle level to the ground all the way through the jab. (Adjust only the angle of the face of the paddle).

Always make contact with the ball as far out in front of your body as you possibly can for more power and more control of placement.

At the exact point of contact with the ball make a sound to yourself. This will help prevent you from making one of the biggest mistakes made while playing Pickleball, not watching the ball hit the paddle.

After the point of contact, keep your eyes focused on the contact point during your follow through.

Return to the ready position quickly after each volley.

The harder you hit your volley the faster you must return to the ready position.

Never let the face of the paddle of your paddle drop below your wrist on low volleys. Bend your knees so that your back knee is almost touching the ground. Your fist or the butt of the paddle must almost touch the ground. Keep your head and body down all the way through the follow through. Stay down; don't come up too soon.

If you don't have time to step to the ball, at least turn your upper body and point your front shoulder in the direction you want the ball to go. If you don't have time to turn your shoulders, then from the ready position keep a stationary wrist with paddle parallel to the net and block the fast shot over the net.

Keep your volley low to your opponent's feet or bounce the ball on the court exactly beside him.

Hitting your right handed opponent's right hip pocket is not as good as hitting his feet or hitting exactly beside him, but it is very effective.

After each volley move forward one step toward the no volley zone. Get as close to NVZ line as possible.

On the back hand volley keep your knuckles lined up with the paddle face in the direction you want the ball to go and keep the handle slightly ahead of the paddle.

You must use an aggressive jab when volleying a ball with a heavy spin.

The difference between an overhead and a volley the height at which the ball is when you make contact with it. If the ball is below the highest point at which you can reach it with the center of your paddle, you should use a volley shot. If it is above that point, you should hit an overhead shot. On too low a shot you will not be able to fully extend your arm and will probably put the ball in the net.

When at the net, turn toward your opponent before he hits the ball. When the ball travels straight toward your paddle it is easier to hit the ball.

## Drop Volley

If your opponent is moving away from the net near the baseline or your opponent never comes to the net, these are the times to try drop volleys if you have a good drop volley.

Most drop volleys are placed near the post on the side of the court from which your opponent had just retreated to the baseline to return your team's lob shot. If you feel his partner has been anticipating your drop volley, don't place your drop volley by the post, place it half way back from the net and baseline so that the net person must run away from the net to play the ball. It is much more difficult to hit a shot

when moving quickly away from net than towards the net. Many times the player who just ran way back for the lob will recover and get in the way of his partner trying to help him out

Use a drop volley if your opponent stays at the baseline.

At the point of contact on a touch shot squeeze your pinky middle finger and ring finger. This will help you keep a firm wrist.

## Lob Defensive & Offensive

When making a lob, lob over your opponent's backhand side.

If you hit a very high short lob from up close to net and you are exceptionally fast on your feet, then the percentages play is to drop back to the baseline and play your opponent's overhead. If you are not able to quickly retreat to the baseline, then hold your position at the net with your paddle in the ready position and on your toes. If the ball is hit at your feet while you are backpedaling and only halfway to the baseline, it is almost impossible to return. Do not leave your position at the net unless you are 100% confident that you can retreat to the baseline with enough time to prepare for your opponent's overhead.

If the ball is lobbed over your head at the net, your partner should yell "I got it" and run behind you. At the same time, you should switch sides of the court. If you feel you can make an excellent overhead, call off your partner early.

If a ball is hit straight over your head and your partner isn't running back to help you, then run back parallel to the ball so when you get to the ball, you can hit a deep forehand lob. Do not turn 180 degrees and run straight back after the ball, because you will not be in a good position to hit the ball when you get to it.

Hit a few high lobs before game to evaluate direction of wind and speed. During every second of an important game, keep the wind direction in mind. It will give you points. Steady your game by playing the wind to your advantage. Beginner and intermediate players would hit less out balls if they hit into the wind. Advanced players are better

qualified to play the wind. It can help you and hurt you.

If the wind is 20mph, it is best to have it at your back.

## Overhead

Never hit an overhead shot unless the ball is high enough. You should hit the ball at the highest point you can reach on the center of your paddle or you must take a volley shot.

When hitting an overhead point, point your shoulder and your finger of your left hand up at ball until just before you contact ball. Keep your head up until ball is long gone. Pronate your wrist and paddle just before you contact ball for a more disguised and powerful overhead. Hit at opponents' feet wherever they are standing.

The difference between an overhead and a volley the height at which the ball is when you make contact with it. If the ball is below the highest point at which you can reach it with the center of your paddle, you should use a volley shot. If it is above that point, you should hit an overhead shot. On too low a shot you will not be able to fully extend your arm and will probably put the ball in the net.

When the wind is at your back, your timing can be thrown off and the ball contact is too far out in front of your body causing the ball to be short and into the net the way to help this problem is to aim your overheads just inside the baseline.

Keep in mind while hitting the overhead:

- Use your palm to block the sun.
- Keep your paddle face flat for power.
- Point your finger at the ball. If your finger moves forward, step forward and vice-versa.
- Do not back pedal. For safety, turn sideways and side step back to the ball.
- Run back parallel to the flight of the ball; if the ball is hit straight over your head.
- On a high deep lob, sidestep back past your anticipated contact point and step forward to make your overhead. Your weight will be moving toward the net at the point of contact so you will have a more steady and powerful shot.

## Footwork

Never step into the non volley zone with both feet. If a ball should bounce close to the net in the NVZ, keep one foot planted outside the NVZ line and lunge forward like a sword fighter. Tip the ball over the net into your opponents' NVZ and quickly recover with both feet outside your NVZ line. If a player steps into the NVZ with both feet, it will take twice as long to get back out. A player cannot touch the ball in the air when any part of his body is in the NVZ. Good footwork at the net in this situation can shorten the time a player is in a vulnerable position.

No matter where you are on the court, always split step, putting your feet side by side and shoulder width apart, at the point of your opponent's contact with the ball. This allows you to move in either direction equally well. Do not sacrifice being balanced and ready for position on the court.

Step toward the post in either direction and cross step when the ball is hit out of your reach. Do not move your back foot and lose your position on the court. Cross stepping makes you a foot taller and gives you a wider range of coverage.

A side step first combined with a cross step is sometimes necessary and effective.

## Hitting Down Sideline

*Do not hit shots down sideline unless:*

- Your opponents poach.
- Your team is favored to win.
- Your team has a good lead.
- You have an easy ball to hit.
- You want to keep your opponents honest when they are close to center court.
- Your opponent's backhand is to the outside of the court and he is the weaker player.

A soft ball down the line is just as good, if not better, and if you can bounce the ball beside your opponent and be ready to jump on a ball hit 12" above the net.

If you make contact on a shot outside the sideline, try a shot around the post deep to the baseline corner, or put up a very high lob to give yourself time to recover. If you don't think that you will be able to recover, try to finish point with pure winner.

If you are stretched out to your limit when volleying, always go down the line in the direction that you are stepping. The shot will have more power and be more consistent. A good example would be the same as in softball, when a pitcher pitches the ball to the outside corner of the plate, the right-handed batter has a better chance of hitting the ball to right field.

Keep your elbows high when hitting the ball down the sideline.

Follow through a little shorter for a straight volley down the sideline.

When stretched to your limit to the right, volley down the right sideline. Go with the pitch.

## How to Practice

Find someone of your ability that appreciates the importance of practicing.

If you want to play your best, you must know the importance of practice, as well as playing the game.

A player should learn proper footwork to become a better player. Learn to cross step, side step and split step. Good footwork makes for easier court coverage, wider range, and better balance and shots.

You must practice a soft game at the net until you are so confident that you think that you could do it perfect for five minutes if needed.

Break the game down into segments.

Ground strokes, corner to corner and down the line.

Volleys: One player at the net and the other at the baseline. Volley balls hit from different angles. Both players volley and practice short game.

One player lobs the ball to player at net who hits overhead shots from different angles. Play points out using one-half doubles court. Go from corner to corner, not keeping score without serving and then with serving. Points should not be counted because a player tends to try to win by doing only the things that he does well, rather than practicing things he doesn't do well.

After practicing for a long period of time, play a singles match using only half of the doubles court and keeping score. Try to move your opponent around the court and out of position with ball placement and the other strategies presented earlier.

After practicing the whole game in segments, the game becomes an extension of practice and you play better Pickle Ball.

## Poaching

Make sure that your opponents are worried that you may poach. You are not doing the job if you are not giving head and shoulder fakes at the net. Occasionally poach just to make your fakes seem believable.

Make your opponent hit the ball to you. Make a head and shoulder fake in one direction and hold your position on the court. Your opponent will think that you are going to move down the net and he will hit the ball to you. Occasionally you will have to poach to make your fakes believable.

If both players on the opposing team are much better than one of the players on the other team than the stronger player of that team must poach and fake like he is about to poach to level the playing field. Only if you are playing to win, not playing for fun and the opposing team is hitting all their balls to your partner.

An excellent poacher should poach as much as possible even if all four are of equal ability His partner should not take this as a personal affront. It is proper play and good strategy. To poach is to cut off and hit the shot that your opponent hit to your partner.

### ***Types of Poaching:***

- Waiting at the net until you actually see an easy return from your opponent and move across court to cut the shot off for a winner.
- Player anticipates an easy return from his opponent and moves across the court to cut the shot off a split second before his opponent hits the ball.
- It is important to pick the proper time in the game to poach.
- Early in the game so that your team has time to recover in case you lose the point.

- When your team is way ahead or way behind.
- When you or your partner has just hit a very difficult shot at you opponents feet and you feel the opponent will be lucky just to return the ball without being accurate.

## Reduce Unforced Errors

The safest place on the court to bounce the ball is soft, low and in the middle of the no volley zone. With this placement, your opponent may hesitate, thinking that his partner will hit the ball. Hit the ball soft so your opponents will have no pace to work with. ***This is the highest percentage shot.***

When at the net be patient. Keep hitting the ball soft back into the no volley zone until your opponents make the mistake of hitting the ball too high. Do not go for the kill unless the ball is at least 12" above the net. Eighty-Five percent of your shots should be volleys standing within 12 inches of the no volley zone. Do not try a tough angle shot until you have drawn your opponents out of position. Keep blasting the high balls at your opponents' feet until they miss it. ***Never*** try an angle shot or difficult shot when the ball is below the net. Be defensive. Try a lob when your opponent least expects. It is also a very effective shot.

Be prepared early. If you hit a fast volley to your opponent, you must prepare your paddle face for the next shot faster. The faster you hit, the faster you must prepare.

Be patient and wait for a ball that is 12" or higher over the net before trying to hit a winner. Always go for your opponents' feet, no matter where they are on the court. Foot shots are much safer than angle shots.

Only try angle shots if you get a sitter and feel that you are 150% sure that you won't make an unforced error. A sitter is an easy shot.

If you are playing properly, eighty-five percent of all your shots and your partner's shots should be volleys no further back than 12" from the no volley zone. Ground strokes are only used when returning a serve, hitting the return of your serve, or if opponent lobs and pulls you away from the no volley zone line. Get back to NVZ line as fast as you possibly can.

Hitting down the middle is a high percentage shot and is much safer than a wide angle shot.

Always allow for error never aim for the line itself.

One of the most common mistakes players makes is swinging at their volleys and punching their ground strokes. It should be the other way around.

If you cannot make a specific shot at least eight out of ten times, do not try this shot in a game until in practice you can make it consistently. Four out of ten tries is just enough to lose the game. Shot selection at key times in the game is very important. Know the shots that you are very consistent with and use them at key times in the game. Give your opponents a chance to lose. Don't beat them to it.

There is a time to try and hit a "Pure Winner", a time to hit a "¾ Winner", and time to just keep the ball alive by blocking it back to your opponent.

#### **1. Pure Winner** – (as hard as you can hit the ball).

a. When your partner is weaker than both of your opponents and you get a high ball. You must take advantage of your good opportunities.

b. When you are the favorite team.

c. When you have a decent lead in the game.

d. When playing good competition; you make hay when the sun shines because you don't get many good opportunities to go for it.

#### **2. ¾ Winner** – (¾ pace shot).

a. When you are in control of point at the net and both opponents are at baseline and are very steady players.

b. When a ball hit to you is not a high percentage shot.

c. When you feel your team is steadier and better than your opponents.

d. When your position on the court is not very good.

**3. Just keep the ball alive** by blocking the shot to opponent's feet.

a. When an exceptionally fast ball is hit to you be defensive by blocking it back rather than swing at it.

**Be Careful:** A less difficult shot to hit may sometimes cause a player to miss a shot because it looked so easy that he thought it was impossible to miss. A player tends to over hit and not concentrate as much as when hitting a difficult shot and misses it.

When it is very windy make shorter steps and keep adjusting your feet because the ball keeps moving around. Watch the ball closer than normal and make most of your shots down the middle of court.

If you feel you can hit with extreme power all the time and still not sacrifice placement and consistency then you have to decide whether you are a great Pickleball player or kidding yourself. If you decide on the latter, take a little pace off your shots.

When warming up before your Pickleball game hit a couple of high lobs to check out the wind direction and speed so you don't lose a few points during the game. Try not to look into the sun if possible. The sun can cause an error.

#### **Errors:**

- Poor Footwork
- No Follow Thru
- Impatience – don't work the point.
- Predictability

## Know Your Opponents

1. Do they try and hit every ball hit to them, even balls that would have gone out? If so, hit much faster at them then you normally would. You have nothing to lose.

2. Does your opponent stay at the baseline and not move forward to the net?

3. Does your opponent hit all there volleys on the same side of their paddle. If so, they are vulnerable if you hit low to the backhand.

4. Does your opponent handle fast balls well? If so, hit soft balls to them and vice versa.

5. Does your opponent have trouble returning under spin balls?

6. Does your opponent like to poach? Be ready to hit behind him.

7. If you do not know your opponent then keep the ball as low as possible and on the backhand side until you have a chance to make a book on him.

8. Which one of your opponents is the weaker player? A team is only as strong as its weakest player and the weakest player is only as strong as his weakest shot.
9. How fast are your opponents, then you will know whether to drop or lob.

## Mental Errors

1. Improper shot selection
2. Hitting balls going out of bounds
3. Over hitting
4. Not enough patience
5. Not keeping track of wind
6. Not having a mental book on your opponents assets and deficits
7. Not communicating properly with your partner
8. Too predictable.

Mental errors are much easier to cure than technical errors when hitting the ball.

## Hitting Fast Balls

Only hit the ball as fast as it takes to win the point. Start the match hitting at an average speed and keep adding a little pace until you are winning more points then you are losing. Every opponent is different. The faster you hit the ball the less precise your placement. If you can win more than 50% of your points blasting every ball, then go for it!

Be prepared for a faster bounce of the ball if the ball seems like it might hit the painted lines on the court.

## Anticipate Out Balls

Try to anticipate when your opponents are about to hit an out of bound balls. Know when to expect an out of bounds ball before your opponents even touch the ball.

***Things to take into consideration when anticipating an out ball from your opponent.***

1. Is the wind at your opponent's back?
2. Is your opponent swinging real fast at the ball and is his contact point below net?
3. Is your opponent making a difficult shot on the full gallop?

4. Is he a very inconsistent player?

5. Is it a very hard and low percentage shot for you to try and return? If so let it go. It may go out.

Keep an ear open for yell of "no" from your partner when he thinks the ball is out.

Hitting your opponents out balls builds confidence in your opponents and a good player will make an adjustment after realizing he has just hit an out ball. You will probably lose future points without him being penalized for hitting an out ball.

If you should play someone who always tries to hit everything, even your out balls then hit at that person much faster than you normally would. You have nothing to lose.

Be aware of where you are on the court at all times. This will help you to decide whether to hit or not to hit a ball.

If you stop hitting your opponents out balls your percentage of wins will rise immediately.

## Play the Wind

Which direction should you hit toward with the wind or against the wind is a personal thing. There is no right or wrong, it is a personal thing.

***Types of Wind:***

1. A steady wind in your face is excellent for a person who likes to lob.
2. A heavy wind in your face is not good for lobbing and would be an advantage to a person with a great overhead because the ball tends to stop rather than go over their heads and drop in the court.
3. A heavy wind at your back is an advantage to a hard hitter because it could add 15-20mph to their stroke making it much harder to react.
4. If the wind is coming across the court either way, you must stay away from the side of the court that the wind is blowing toward and have the wind on your mind at all times.
5. If winds are gusty, the player must be constantly feeling the wind and play it properly.
6. Try and convince yourself the wind is bothering your opponent as much as it is bothering you.
7. The team that plays the wind the best will usually win.



# *Pickleball Techniques*

## Ground Stroke Stances

A backhand ground stroke can be hit from an open or a closed stance.

The Closed-stance is used most often. The player runs to a spot where the ball will be as close to waist high as possible and sets both his feet shoulder width apart and parallel to the net. He then steps toward the ball with his front foot and hits the ball. The Open-stance is used when you have a very fast ball hit to you and very little time to move your feet. You have only enough time to set your feet side by side at about a 45 to 180 degree angle to the net and turn your upper body at the waist so that your front shoulder is pointing at your target area.

Right handed player hitting a forehand would point his left shoulder toward his target and when hitting his backhand would point his right shoulder toward his target and follow through towards target.

## Serving Techniques

1. Use a bowling motion.
2. Point your paddle toward the ground with bent knees.
3. Toss the ball in front of your body in the direction of target. Your target should be the very center of the serving box. This will give you a lot of leeway for error. Never Ever miss your serve because it probably will be the difference in a close game.
4. Step toward the target with your front shoulder pointing at your target.
5. Swing in an upward motion with the paddle below the wrist and watch the ball contact your paddle below the waist.
6. Make a soft sound to yourself at the point of contact with the ball to prevent you from lifting your head before contact.
7. Follow through in the direction of your target.
8. Step back on foot behind the baseline after serving to assure the return of serve will land in front of you. If you step into the court after serving the ball it could land at your feet or behind you and you will have to make a difficult shot because you had to backpedal to make a shot.

## Forehand Groundstroke

### *Right Handed Players:*

1. Ready your paddle back into position to stroke the ball with your left hand. The paddle grip should be a continental grip with the butt end of the handle pointing towards the oncoming ball and the paddle is level.
2. Step toward the ball with your left foot and make contact with the ball opposite the spot that your planted your foot. Point your left shoulder at your target.
3. Keep your left hand out in front of your body with your palm facing the ground at the same height as your paddle and this will help keep you balanced.
4. Watch the ball make contact on your paddle and make sound to yourself at the exact moment the ball touches your paddle. This will help you watch the ball more consistently.
5. Keep a firm wrist and pretend you are hitting four balls lined up in a row during your follow through. Follow through in the direction of your target.
6. When hitting a low forehand shot bend your knees with your right knee as close to the ground as possible that stay down all the way through the shot.
7. Quickly return to your ready position.

## Backhand Groundstroke

### *Right Handed Players:*

1. Run to a spot where the ball will be waist high or as close to waist high as possible in your ready position.
2. Set your feet in a closed stance position (side by side) pointing your right shoulder and looking over your right shoulder toward your target then step with your front foot toward your target.
3. Bend your knees on low balls and keep your head and body down all through the shot and follow thru.
4. Point the butt end of your handle like a gun at the ball.
5. Paddle face should be perpendicular to ground.
6. Contact point should be out in front of the spot you plant your front foot.
7. Keep a firm wrist at contact and you will be more consistent. (do not roll your wrist at contact unless you are an advanced player)
8. Watch the ball hit your paddle.(making a sound to yourself at exactly the point of contact of ball on your paddle will help)
9. Make a long follow through in the direction of your target. Pretend you are hitting four balls in a row will help.
10. Quickly after your full follow thru get back to your ready position for the next shot.

## Overhead Technique

1. Grip – Continental Grip (same as all other strokes).
2. Turn your body so that your shoulders and body are parallel to the flight of the lobed ball.
3. Keep your feet parallel and move them forward and back until the ball in the air is a little more in front of your body and as high in the air as the center of your paddle can reach.
4. Point your left hand at the ball while readying your paddle. About ear height and making sure paddle face is completely flat at the point of contact for extra power.
5. Keep head and chin up and watch the spot that the ball contacts the paddle long after your follow through.
6. A split second before contacting the ball, pronate your wrist to disguise your shot and the paddle will contact the ball flat and this will get more power on the overhead.
7. After setting the paddle, the overhead is all wrist. Just step towards your target, point your left shoulder towards the target and snap your wrist with same motion as you would snap a whip. Pretend you are throwing the paddle at the ball.
8. If you don't have time to move your feet at least turn your shoulders and waist for more power and placement.
9. If you have to jump in the air to hit the overhead use the scissors kick method. If you live in The Villages in Florida, find "Mo" and ask him. It is too hard to explain, it must be demonstrated and you must be able to leave the ground with both feet.

## Drop Volley Technique

1. Use Continental Grip with the bottom two fingers tight and the top three fingers a light grip.
2. Paddle motion is from high to low (half moon,) paddle face finishes parallel to the ground.
3. Elbow and knee are bent.
4. Short backswing.
5. Punch the ball (which is full extension at elbow joint).
6. Meet the ball early and out in front of the body.
7. Do not drop the paddle head below your wrist. If paddle face is locked firm above your wrist then skin wrinkles can be seen on your wrist.
8. Slide your paddle under the ball (like turning a key in a door) to put an underspin on the ball. The ball will bounce low when it drops over the net.

9. Keep your head down and eyes glued to the spot that you made contact with the ball for as long as possible.
10. Paddle head should follow through in the direction you want the ball to go.
11. Tip – Make a sound to yourself at exactly the time the ball makes contact with your paddle. Not too soon or too late. This will make sure you are watching the ball hit the paddle.

## Additional Information

### Extra Strategies

1. When you are learning to play pickleball, never avoid hitting your backhand ground strokes or volleys. If you avoid hitting your backhand you will never master the stroke.
2. When playing during a windy day keep track of the wind speed and direction constantly because it does change at times. If you play the wind properly then it will build confidence in yourself, in that, the wind is bothering your opponent more than yourself.
3. When you are feeling a little tight during a match, don't hit tentatively or too slow. Hit at your normal steady pace, but give yourself more leeway to hit your target until your confidence returns.
4. Make a mental book on your own attributes and deficits. Only hit shots that you feel are a high percentage for your own ability. Know what shots you can make more than 50% of the time. Do what you do well and practice the things that you don't do well then use them when you can make them 50% of the time.
5. Bounce up onto the balls of your feet, in the ready position, at the point of contact of the ball on your opponents paddle. A moving body reacts quicker than a stationary body.
6. If both backhands of your opponents are at the middle of the court, hit down the middle of the court.
7. If your shot makes your opponent take two steps or more your chance for winning the point increases immensely.
8. Don't back up to play a dink off the bounce, when you can hit the ball in the air. Always try and hit the ball with your weight going towards the net.
9. Make contact with the ball at the highest possible point in the air when volleying and waist high on the bounce for your ground stroke. It will be a higher percentage shot and open up more angles with less chance of putting balls into the net.
10. Give your opponents a lot of chances to miss and they will not let you down.
11. It is not how hard you hit the ball, but where.

12. Expect to win – Refuse to lose.

**Play Steady:** The team with the most unforced errors loses. Not the team with the fewest winners.

**Placement is more important than power.**

Keep the ball as low as possible for every hit, unless you must make a defensive lob.

Place the ball at the opponent's feet or bounce the ball right beside your opponent. He must hit the ball up, which quickly puts him on the defensive and you on the offensive. The team which must hit the ball up most of the time will lose. Keep the ball at your opponent's feet no matter where he is on the court.

Only hit the ball as hard as you can control the placement. Do not sacrifice placement for power. Hit  $\frac{3}{4}$  winners unless you get a put away shot for a full power winner.

When an opponent is planted at the net and you can't make a shot at his feet, the next best place to hit it is at the right hip pocket of a right-handed player. This is a very difficult shot to return.

***Patience is a virtue in Pickleball***

Do not try to win the point from the baseline. Just hit the ball softly and bounce the ball in the no volley zone and follow it to net.

Pick a good time to move forward, not when your opponent has an easy shot. Every second that you are playing, your goal should be to get to the net on a minimum of one step forward and split step at every touch of the ball by your opponent. Split step is when both feet are side by side and shoulder width apart.

The team that plays from the baseline exposes their feet to their opponents and will lose to a team as good as or better than they are.

If your partner is drawn out of the court on his side, you must move over to protect his area until he can get back into the court. If you think that you are playing an intelligent opponent, then give a head and shoulder fake, giving the impression that you are moving to cover for your partner. Don't move from your position, however, and your opponent will probably put the ball on your paddle.

If you feel an opponent is anticipating your shot by watching the face of your paddle and moving before you make contact, then have your paddle face straight ahead and then at the last second, go cross court before your opponent has time to react. Do not have your paddle "read" cross court then try and surprise your opponent and go down line because paddle must be brought back first and the extra time it takes gives your opponent more time to react to your fake.

If you are playing a former racquet ball player (who very quickly flicks his paddle at the ball), you must prepare your ready position even earlier or you will be late punching your volleys or ground strokes.

Give your partner a second opinion on whether a ball is in or out. Do it early enough to give him time to back away from it.

Every once in a while, change the spin and speed of all your shots. The element of surprise will pay dividends.

Sometimes the best shot is no shot at all. When playing with a much better partner than yourself, let your partner take as many shots as he possible can, especially if he yells, "I have it." Chances are good you are probably going to get the lion's share of all the hits anyway. So the more your partner touches the ball, the better chance you will win.

There should be only positive communication between you and your partner. "Good try" "I have it" "Switch" "Yours" and "Bounce it" are as examples. Never say anything negative to your partner if he isn't doing well because it will just make things worse. It shows you are not a confident player, and you are looking for an excuse to lose.

The second to last shot before the end of a point by you or your partner usually decides if your team either wins or loses the point. If you do not keep your shot low enough or placed well enough and your opponent slams a shot at your partner and he misses, the shot, then the point was lost by you. Sometimes the point could have been lost by the third or fourth to last shot because the team never could recover from being put on the defensive earlier in the point.

Keep a book in your mind about the people that you play regularly. Know what they are good at and also know their weaknesses. Many players always make certain shots in particular situations, and if you can anticipate these shots, you will have an edge. For

example, some players, when running in for a ball that bounces near the post in the no volley zone, always try a cross court topspin shot to the other post.

When your team is a heavy favorite, play a whole game without being interested about winning and concentrate on just placing every single ball at your opponent's feet or beside them. Practice not going for winners and being patient. No matter where your opponents are on the court, go for their feet. It is a safe shot, and it will steady your game and pay dividends.

On a cross court volley make contact a little farther out in front of you.

All strokes taken with your Pickleball paddle are technically the same as all the tennis strokes with one exception, the serve. The only differences between the two are the feel of the ball on the paddle and the distance from your hand to the contact point of the ball on the paddle. A person wanting to improve his Pickleball strokes should read tennis books and magazines and become a student of the game.

Determine if your opponents are left-handed before the start of the game so that you won't be hitting to their strength.

Before starting each game, let your partner know that you don't mind his overruling any call you make as long as he is 100% sure you were wrong. If one person on a team feels a ball was in and the other doesn't, then the point goes to the other team. If your feelings about the score or whether the ball is in or out are different from the other three players on the court, then right or wrong, you should concede.

Never yell anything that may help your opponent. Think of the shot that you just hit that was wrong. Don't yell because your opponent may hit your out ball if you do not bring his attention to that possibility that it may go out.

Learn all the proper tennis stroking techniques to help improve your pickle ball game.

If two players with the same natural ability play pickle ball any and one uses the proper tennis technique, that player will be a steadier and better player.

If both players are self taught players then the one with the most athletic sense and ability will be the

better player. Learn proper technique. It will give you an edge over your opponent.

A player should try not to have any bad out bursts after missing their shots. This type of reaction builds confidence in your opponents. Your partner will also lose confidence in you.

When two right hand players are playing together, the player facing the net on the left, who has his forehand to the middle of the court, takes the balls on his side of the court plus about 8 to 12 inches toward the center line.

When two left hand players are playing together, the player with his forehand toward the center of the court should take any ball on his side of the court plus any ball 8 to 12 inches to the left of center court.

When a right handed and a left handed player are playing together and both players backhands are to the middle of the court, the player facing the net on the on the left side should be considered the fore hand and cover his side plus 8 to 12 inches to the right of center court unless both players agree the other player has the stronger backhand.

If you like to hit with power and if your opponents cannot recognize when a ball is going out and they hit every ball that they can get their paddles on, then it is to your advantage to have the heavy wind at your back.

When your opponents stop hitting you the ball intentionally every time you play, it means your partners are very weak or you have become a very good player. Feel good about it.

There is no right or wrong way to play Pickleball. You should do things that work for you. Some advanced players have their unconventional ways of playing Pickleball and because they have exceptional athletic ability, they are successful more than 50% of the time. Beginners with average ability would be more successful if they used conventional tennis strokes and strategy before they pick up bad habits and are not able to change.

A player should not be one dimensional; they should try to develop a complete game of hitting with placement as well as power. Develop a good lob and drop volley as well a good soft game. A player will not be predictable if he is able to have a variety in his Pickleball game.

If your partner is a much weaker player than you are and your opponents are hitting as many balls as possible to him, then a soft dink into the no volley zone is not to your advantage because it gives your opponent more time to hit another ball to your partner.

After hitting the ball toward your opponent follow the same line that the ball is traveling when advancing toward the no volley line. This will give you a good angle and position for your opponents return shot.

If your team should hit the ball close to the opponent's right sideline and the ball will be a volley or ground stroke then you and your partner should divide the court into 3 equal thirds when you are waiting at the NVZ line for the return. The player on the right side of the court protects his sideline and the right 1/3 of the court. The other player protects the middle third of the court and you leave the far left third of the court open. A crosscourt shot is a low percentage, it's a sharp angle and the ball must have a lot of top spin. Most players cannot make this shot consistently so protect down the line and you will win much more points than you lose.

The better you get at Pickleball the less balls will be hit to you so it becomes harder to win. The thing to do to try and get your opponents to hit more balls to you only if your partner is weaker than your opponents and is interested in winning:

- A. Fake like you are going to poach but hold your spot and they will hit you the ball by mistake.
- B. Really poach occasionally to get into the point but tell your partner before you do so he or she will be ready to switch sides and coer for you. This will make your fakes more believable.
- C. When you get a ball you must make hay when the sun shines and hit with a little more pace than you normally do and hope for the best.

## Guide In-Review

- 1: Be in ready position early! Stopped with feet parallel to each other at the point of contact of ball on your opponents paddle.
- 2: Placement is more important than power. Hit at your opponents feet or bounce the ball beside them. Do not sacrifice placement for power.
- 3: Hit to your opponents' weakest players weakest shot.
- 4: Play steady - Do not over hit or make unforced errors. Never miss your serve or return of serve. Have patience.
- 5: Try and anticipate your opponents out balls.
- 6: Punch your volleys and swing at your ground strokes.
- 7: When hitting a ball step toward your target. Point your front shoulder towards your target, follow through towards your target, and watch closely at the point of contact of the ball on your paddle.
- 8: 80% of all your hits should be volleys at the NVZ line if you are playing to win.

## Definitions

Ground Stroke - A ball that is hit after it bounces.

Volley - A ball that is hit before it touches the ground.

Lob - A ball that is hit over your opponents head and bounces inside the baseline.

Unforced Error - When a player misses a shot that is not very difficult.

No Volley Zone - (NVZ or Kitchen) - The area of the court between the net and the front line of the serving boxes.

Backhand - When hitting the ball on your left side of your body for right handed players and the opposite for left hand players.

Forehand - When hitting the ball on your right side of your body for right handed players and the opposite for left hand players.

3/4 Winner - Not hitting a shot the fastest that you are capable of hitting so you will not sacrifice placement for power.

Split Step - When both feet are parallel to each other and ready to cross in either direction.

Cross Step - From a split step position moving your right foot toward the left post or left foot toward the right post without moving your other foot at all.

Pure Winner - When your opponent never even touches your shot.

Top Spin - When a player makes the ball spin away from him low to high, the ball tends to drop because the contact of paddle of the ball is up and over the ball.

Underpin - A player makes the ball spin toward his body high to low; the ball tends to rise because the contact point of paddle is high to low.

Overhead - A ball hit at center of paddle from a point as high as you can reach over your head.

Drop Volley - A soft hit ball that is placed just over the net with an under spin on the ball so it won't bounce high.

Poach - When a player cuts in front of his partner to take his shot.

Continental Grip - When the point of the V between your thumb and index finger is placed at the middle of the top of the handle when your paddle is perpendicular to the ground.

## Conclusion

Have Fun! It is only a game.

Richard Movsessian is a former USTA 4.5 ranked doubles player and tennis teaching professional. He is a certified member of the United States Professional Tennis Association. He was a Boys Varsity Tennis Coach and a Tennis Teaching Pro for 30 years. He now resides in The Villages in Florida where he loves playing, learning and teaching others about Pickleball.

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## Notes