



Player Manual

Essential Skills and Strategy for Pickleball Development

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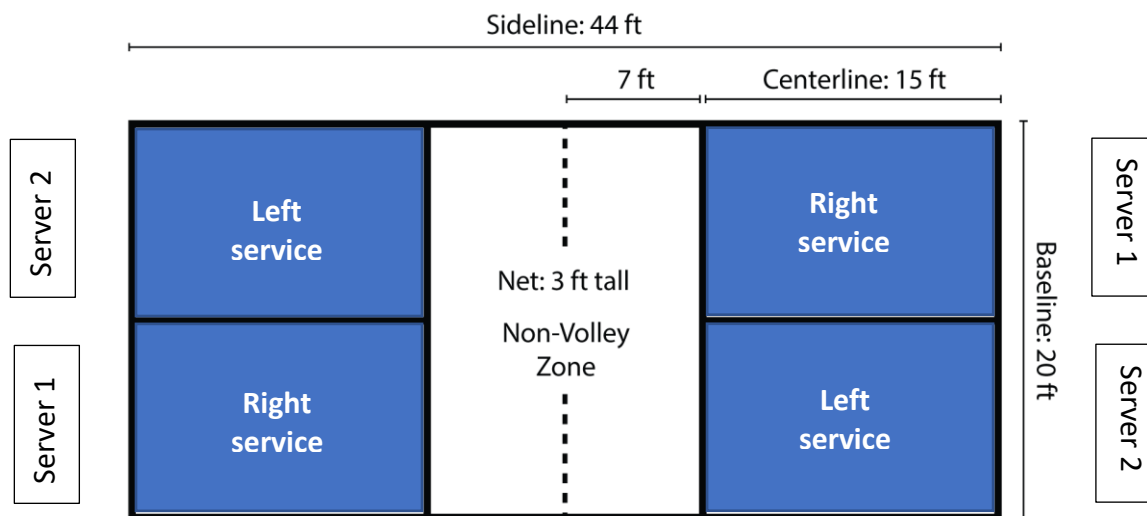
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HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

This guide provides you with a simple run down of the rules, skills, and strategies you can employ when developing your pickleball game. While some of you will be well versed in the skills and rules it always helps to have info like this on hand especially as you begin to introduce others to the game.

It includes written descriptions and links for videos if you prefer visual explanations to help you review what you already know and guide you to developing the basics of a sound pickleball game. You will receive an electronic version of this manual which has the links embedded for easy access.

THE COURT



THE BASICS

- Pickleball can be played as **singles or doubles**, most commonly as doubles.
- Each point begins with an **underarm serve**
- The **serve is performed diagonally** beginning at the right-hand service square.
- The serve must clear the non-volley-zone
- The **serve must bounce** before being hit by the receiver
- The **return of serve must also bounce** before being hit.
- The **serving position alternates** with each serve **when a point is won**.
- Volleys can only be performed outside of the Non-volley zone (see diagram above)
- Volleys can only be made after the 2 Bounce Rule has been followed.

} **The 2-bounce rule**

VIDEOS

[How To Play Pickleball: Part 1 of 3 - Intro & Definitions](#)

[What is Pickleball?](#)

[Pickleball Rules | The Definitive Beginner's Resource to How to Play Pickleball](#)

THE SERVING PROCESS

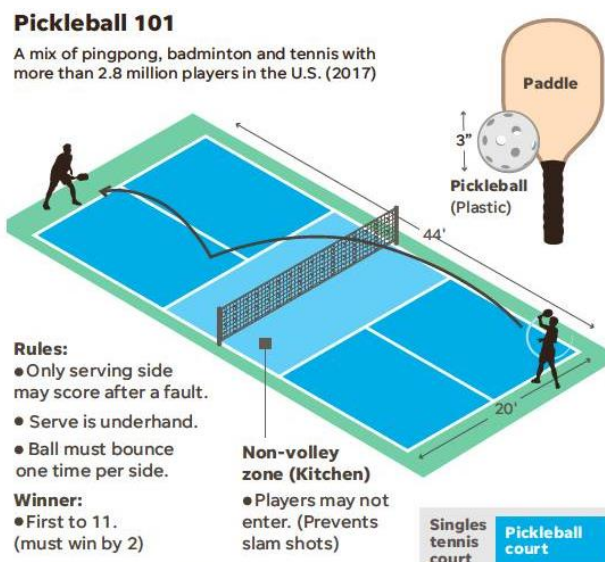
At the **start of each new game**, only one player in the 1st serving team has the opportunity to serve and score points until a fault occurs.

Thereafter both members of each team will serve and fault before the ball is turned over to the opposing team. When a team wins the serve, the player in the right-hand court will always start play.

- Server 1 serves until a point is lost
- Server 2 then repeats this process.

The **first server** is the person standing at the right-hand service square.

- One attempt per service.
- The server alternates their position after every serve when a point is won.
- The server continues to serve until they lose a point while serving.
- The **second server** then serves, alternating position until they lose a point on their serve.
- The serve then goes to the opposition.



FAULTS

A fault is any action that stops play due to a rule violation.

A fault by the receiving team results in the servers earning a point

A fault by the serving team results in the server's loss of service and/ or side out.

A fault is committed when the ball:

- touches any part of the non-volley zone (including the line) or is hit out of bounds during the serve
- does not clear the net
- is volleyed from the non-volley zone
- is volleyed before a bounce has occurred on each side
- is hit out of bounds
- strikes a player or a permanent object before bouncing on the court

OR when:

- the player, their clothing or paddle contact the net during play
- the player, their clothing or paddle contact the NVZ during a volley.

SCORING

- A team shall score a point only when serving.
- The server calls the score.
- A player who is serving shall continue to do so until a fault is made by his/her team.
- The game is played to 11 points; however, a team must win by 2 points.
- When playing doubles:
 - Each player on a team shall keep serving until their team makes a fault, then the serve moves to the opposing team - this is called a Side Out.
 - At the **start of each new game**, the 1st serving team is allowed only one fault (**one person serves**).

CALLING THE SCORE

This is often the most confusing part of the game but not difficult and you will master it quite quickly once you have played a few games.

The guidelines for scoring are:

- The server calls the score.
- When calling the score, the server's score is called first.
- When playing doubles:
 - The score is called followed by either number 1 or 2 indicating whether Server 1 or Server 2 is serving.
 - E.G. 6 – 4, 1
 - This indicates that the serving team has won 6 points
 - The receiving team has won 4 points
 - 1 indicates the first server is serving – if they lose the point (the team commits a fault)....
 - The score becomes 6 – 4, 2
 - 2 indicates the second server is serving
 - The number 2 being called indicates that when a point is lost (a fault occurs) the ball goes to the other team to begin serving.

The Doubles Scoring Confusion

At the beginning of a doubles game only one team member is given the opportunity to serve.

So, when calling their serve it begins as 0 – 0 Start OR 0 – 0, 2

This number 2 being called indicates that after losing their serve the ball goes to the opposition.

VIDEOS

[How To Play Pickleball: Part 2 of 3 - Serving & Scoring](#)

[How To Play Pickleball: Part 3 of 3 - Rules and Gameplay](#)

[Pickleball Scoring](#)

[Pickleball Scoring another video](#)

THE SHOTS

There are several essential shots in pickleball but even more important is the “ready position” This is the stance that should be taken before and after each shot is played.

THE READY POSITION

Often called the athletic stance the ready position is the balanced position a player takes in preparation to set up for a shot. Main elements include:

- Feet should be width apart
- Weight slightly forward with player balanced on balls of feet
- Knees slightly bent
- Paddle up and in front with paddle head pointing at 11 o’clock
- Both hands on the handle

As a player moves forward on court they should:

- Always be prepared to take the ready position before preparing to hit a shot.
- Stop by performing a split step - landing into the ready position
- Move forward keeping the paddle up in the ready position even as moving.

THE SERVE

The following are requirements for a legal serve:

- Both feet behind the back line
- Both feet within the width of the sidelines
- At impact the paddle head must be below the wrist.
- At impact the paddle must be traveling in an underarm upward motion.
- The ball must be hit without it bouncing
- Ball and paddle meet below the waist
- The most important component of a good serve is to hit it as deep as possible into the opponents court.

In 2021 an additional serving style was introduced that does not follow the above guidelines.

- The Drop Serve
- The ball is to be dropped from any height and bounces on the ground.
- The player hits the ball after it has bounced.
- There can be no downward movement in the hand or wrist as the ball is released.

THE DRIVE/ RETURN OF SERVE

The main goal of the drive is to hit a strong shot deep into the court. Points to remember include:

- Side on position
- Use whole body to create power.
- Backswing is essential
- Bent knees and drive from the legs and core as you swing through
- Meet the ball in front.

- Follow through over your opposite shoulder.

The focus of the return of service is to drive deep into the opponents' court keeping the serving team at the baseline and allowing the receiver to reach the Non-volley zone (NVZ) line where the partner is already in position.

Points to remember are:

- Power is not as important as control.
- The serve must bounce before being returned.
- A short return brings the serving team forward, allowing them to reach the NVZ line, negating the receiving team's advantage.
- Wait behind the baseline for the serve in as moving forward allows you to hit the return with momentum.
- The preferred service return stroke is a forehand with a backswing and follow through.
- Step forward and meet the ball in front of the body.
- A shot lofted deep to the opponent's backhand gives the receiver time to reach the NVZ line and keep the serving team back.
- Watch the ball.
- **If you realize you can't make it all the way to the NVZ line before the ball is hit by the opponent, stop, and assume the ready position.** Return the ball, then continue to the NVZ line. Stop again if necessary.

THE DINK

Dinking is an effective necessary doubles strategy involving hitting the pickleball softly while generally being as close to the Non-volley zone as possible, you try to position the ball just over the net and land in your opponent's non-volley zone or at your opponent's feet.

- The aims of the dink are:
 - 1) extend the rally and force your opponent to make the mistake.
 - 2) to force your opponent to 'pop' the ball up so it can be easily put away.
 - 3) To put your opponent out of position on the court.
- The dink is a strategic shot used to set up winning plays for your team. Dink rallies require patience, waiting for the best ball to speed up the game or put a shot away.

Skill Components to Consider for the Dink

For a successful dink keep in mind the following pointers:

- You should always be front on to the ball. This means turning your shoulders to face the ball wherever it is on the court.
- Keep your feet as close to the Non-volley zone as possible
- Meet the ball in front
- Use 'soft hands' – loosen your grip on the paddle to soften the shot.
- Arc the ball over the net but with the high point on your side of the net.
- Try to make the dink bounce in your opponent's non-volley zone – close to the net is better.
- Remember to make your opponents move when you dink – do not dink straight to them.
- Volley dink when you can, this cuts down your opponent's time to react to the shot. The volley dink is when you take the ball on the full. You will be standing behind the NVZ line and reaching forward to meet the ball before it bounces.

When to Dink

The dink is a strategic shot that you can use for the following reasons:

1. Your opponents' have played a good dink shot, your most sensible response is to return with a dink.
2. Your opponents are driving the ball hard at you and you are not managing to handle this, slow the game down with a dink shot – reset the point to gain control.
3. You are having trouble moving in to the NVZ, play long dink – or 3rd shot drop to give you time to reach the net.
4. Use the dink to move your players out of position allowing you to make a more effective winning shot.

When Not to Dink

The dink is typically a strategic, effective shot. However, there are times when other shots are more effective when you and your partner are at the net.

1. When one or both of your opposition are at the baseline and you are at the NVZ line, you have a distinct advantage. Keep your opponent/s pinned to the baseline by driving the ball back to them, aiming for the ball to bounce at their feet especially if they try to move forward. Work to prevent them coming forward.

If the ball is popped up or hit into the “green” zone, then you have the opportunity to play a more attacking shot to speed up the game or win a point.

THE LONG DINK or THIRD SHOT DROP

The long dink is the most important shot to master in pickleball. This shot is essential to learn if your quality of play is to improve.

The long dink is simply a dink but from further away with the purpose of:

- 1) dropping the ball over the net or at the opponents' feet.
- 2) landing in the NVZ.
- 3) Providing time and the shot for the hitting (usually serving team) to reach the net.

The long dink is a soft shot that arcs upward and lands softly into the kitchen. This will force your opponent to dink the ball instead of driving it.

To complete an effective long dink focus on the following points:

- Hit the ball as it is falling after the bounce, let it come down to your paddle
- Use a short pendulum swing with a smooth follow through.
- Contact the ball in front of you.
- Aim for the apex of the arc of the ball to be on your side of the net, just the same as the dink.

VOLLEYS

To volley means to hit a ball in the air without first letting it bounce.

The following are requirements for a legal volley:

- The player's feet are outside the non-volley zone (seven feet behind the net).
- The player must have both feet grounded outside the non-volley zone before hitting the volley.
- No part of the player or their equipment can touch the non-volley zone (including the Non-Volley line) during or after the volleying movement.
- The line indicating the non-volley zone is part of the non-volley zone.

There are a few different volleys which can be played depending upon the strategy behind the volley you are playing. The two most significant are:

- Block volley – meet the ball out in front, push your paddle forward to send the ball firmly back over the net – usually played at the NVZ
- Drive volley – has more of a swing and is a powerful shot used to push your opponent back or play a hard, hopefully winning shot. Often played when ball is popped up or as moving forward from the back of the court. Needs more time for recovery so important that player selects the time to play this shot wisely.

VIDEO

The Pickleball Non-Volley Zone Rules Video (Well worth a watch)

NOTE: This is not an exhaustive list of the shots used in pickleball but rather the most commonly used shots and important for success.

Other shots include: Lobs (offensive and defensive), and the overhead smash

Find a complete guide to the rules of Pickleball at: [IFP Official Rules](https://www.ifp.org.au/rules)

THE STRATEGIES

This is a very simple summary of the basic strategies behind an effective game of pickleball. It focusses solely on doubles strategy as this is the most common form of play and differs greatly from singles strategy. A good start is to watch the following video of a single point with a simple analysis of the strategies used to play effective doubles.

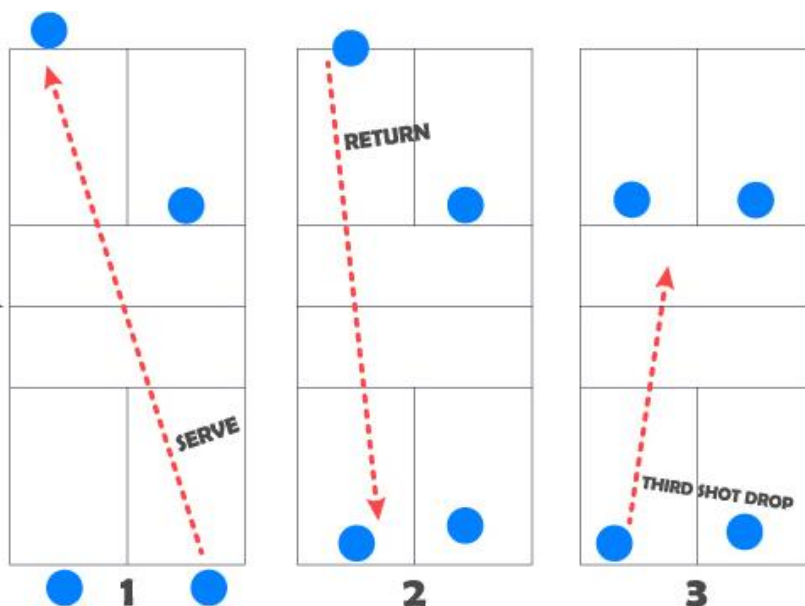
VIDEO

Single Point Strategy Analysis

OPENING SEQUENCE

The opening sequence strategy for most pickleball points can be seen in the diagram.

1. A deep serve to keep the receiver back as long as possible
2. A deep return which allows the receiving team the advantage of getting to the NVZ line first.
3. The long dink that minimises the opponents' attacking opportunities and allows the serving team to also get to the NVZ line.



FURTHER STRATEGIES AND TIPS

Other strategies to get your doubles game improving are:

- Consistent and accurate serving and deep returning of the ball if you are to get to the NVZ line and have an impact on the game.
- Allow the forehand player to have primary responsibility for shots coming down the middle
- Anticipation of return shots to cover potential angles
- Use angles, placement, and control with your shots over power and speed to achieve success
- Continue to include soft hands and dinks to reset points – See video to understand this fully
- Always face the ball on the other side of the net
- Work to push your opponents back in the court, off the NVZ line or out wide to provide options for putting away a shot.
- Play shots down the middle of the court to create confusion between the opponents.

FURTHER VIDEOS

Have a look at [The Pickleball Channel 411](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC411) for a wide range of videos to help you with the development of your game.

Enjoy and all the best with your game