

Pickleball Strategies

(There are exceptions to all advice, but this will serve you well until you learn those exceptions!)

General:

- Keep the ball low over the net. High balls are attackable.
- Good ball placement is more important than hitting the ball hard.
- Up at the NVZ/kitchen line is the best place to be. Take every good opportunity to move forward! (Though the instant your opponent is hitting the ball is not a good time to be moving up. Stop and get ready!)
- Try not to be running/moving on the court when you hit the ball. Set, then hit.
- Have your paddle in front of you ready to hit. Don't let it hang down during a point.
- Sooner or later, read the rulebook at USAPA.org. Then read it again at least once a year.

Serving:

- If you aren't very mobile, serve high and deep.
- If serving slow and high, always serve deep.
- If serving hard, serve toward the middle of the target service court like the pros do.
- It's better to be safe and get the ball in than to be fancy and end up with a service fault.
- Do not step in after you serve. They are going to try to return your serve back deep!
- If you can with a high rate of success, serve toward the receiver's backhand frequently.
- Try not to serve the same way every time. Switch up hard with soft, left with right, high with low, etc.
- When calling the score, do so loud enough for your opponents to easily hear. (It's polite.)

Returning the serve:

- Return deep, but not so deep that you risk hitting it out.
- If you aren't very mobile, hit your return high as well as deep to give yourself more time to move up.
- Try to hit toward your opponent's left foot near the middle of the court. Mix it up though, so your opponent doesn't always know what to expect.

3rd Shot (a.k.a. Return of service return):

Typically, the receivers will be at the net by the time you act on this ball.

- If it's high and short, drive the ball hard and low at your opponents. If it's high enough for you to hit it down too, all the better.
- If the ball is returned deep, hit a drop shot into the opponent's kitchen.
- If the ball is returned low and short, hit a drop shot into the opponent's kitchen.
- A drop shot is not an easy shot. Expect to miss many of them. It'll come with practice. If you can, drill this shot with a friend. It's a shot you will want in your repertoire.

Drop Shots:

- It's better to hit too high than too low. Too low and the point is over. Too high and it'll get attacked, but there's still hope to win the point.
- Take at least a step (or two) forward immediately after you hit your drop shot. If your drop isn't great and you have to do yet another drop on your next shot, it'll be easier since you'll be closer to the net.

Dinking:

- Be gentle, but follow through on your swing.
- Don't hit to the same spot over and over. Mix it up—in front, middle, cross-court.
- Be *very* patient. Only attack balls that are really high enough to attack.

Partnering/Tracking:

- Partners should be about the same distance back from the net. (Not one back, one up.)
- You should keep about 8 feet laterally between you and your partner. If your partner goes to the right, you should also go the right and vice versa.
- Physically follow ("track") the ball. For example, if the ball is on the right side of your opponent's court, and you are on the right, you should move to protect the right sideline and your partner should move to protect/prevent the shot down the middle.
- If your partner is drawn off the court by a wide shot, cross over a step (or more) into your partner's side of the court to cover the gap.
- If shot is successfully hit cross-court down the middle, it's the fault of the player diagonally from the hitter for not closing up the middle gap.

Safety:

- Never back up for a lob while still facing the net . . . unless you want a broken wrist or worse! Turn and walk/jog/run, but always turn.
- If you see a ball rolling onto a court, yell "Ball on!" to make all players aware of the danger. If a ball rolls on your court, pick it up and return it in a safe manner.
- Protective eyewear is recommended. (*I was hit square in the eye off a hard drive at the net that glanced off of the edge of my paddle. Scary! After that, I never intentionally play without sunglasses or some form of eyewear. I heard of one player who suffered a detached cornea. What is your sight worth to you? Mine is worth a lot.*)
- Always be ready for the ball to come at you fast, even when you don't expect it to! Your opponent is waiting for the opportunity for you to not be paying attention or you to have your paddle down!

Pickleball Terms and Phrases:

<https://pickleballjourney.com/pickleball-terminology/>