

Pickleball Skill Level Guidelines

The following skill level sets are a **guide** for evaluating your own level. They were developed utilizing both existing guidelines listed by the USAPA on their website (www.usapa.org) and refinements by larger pickleball clubs.

2.5 Skill Level

- Has had a lesson or has played with other pickleball players who have taught them the basic rules of how to play the game.
- Learning to move around the court in a balanced and safe manner, as opposed to running at great speed or backwards, thus becoming a danger to themselves and others.
- Learning how to get their serve in regularly.
- Usually will let the ball bounce before returning the serve or returning the return of serve (2 bounce rule), but not always.
- Learning where to stand on the court during serves, returns and point play.
- Knows the basics of how to keep score, but may struggle to do so.
- Has not yet learned how to effectively “dink”, but could be attempting to do so.
- Placing more emphasis on keeping the ball in play, as opposed to trying to hit it low, hard or placing the ball.
- Occasionally may lob with a forehand, although probably not well.

3.0 Skill Level

- Knows some of the rules and how to refigure the score after losing track.
- Getting about 75% of their serves in.
- Striving to return more than half of their backhands and overheads.
- Working towards serving to both sides of the opponent.
- Striving to place their serves and returns deep in the court (nearer to the baseline).
- Usually moves to the non-volley zone line quickly after the return of serve.
- Uses deeper and higher returns of serve to allow time to approach the non-volley zone line.
- Working to develop consistent forehand and backhand ground strokes.
- Should not be hitting returns up in the air (after the return of serve); but making flatter returns.
- Becoming more aware of their partner’s position on the court relative to themselves, and how to move in concert with a partner.
- Not consistent in the overhead smash.

- Beginning to use the forehand lob with some success.
- Can sustain a short volley session at the net, but has little, if any, ability to place their volleys.
- Developing more power in their shots, and the ability to return a ball hit lower and harder.
- Developing a sustained “dink” exchange at the net.
- Not yet thinking about varying the speed of shots and does not handle differing ball speeds consistently.

3.5 Skill Level

- Continuing to improve their knowledge of the rules of pickleball. Knows all the main rules at this point.
- Generally able to get their serve in play and return most serves.
- Regularly serving deep and returning the serve deep.
- Understands **most** basic match strategy and the tactics that apply to skills that they either possess or are trying to learn; however, employment of such strategy and tactics is still inconsistent.
- Improving their skill to play with partners effectively, with proper communication and good team coverage of the court.
- Moves to the net quickly after returning serve, but may occasionally still lag back too long.
- Hits to the weak side of opponents somewhat regularly.
- Possesses shots such as forehand and backhand ground strokes, forehand lob, overhead smash, net volleys and sustained “dinking”, and hits them with a fair level of consistency.
- Developing the ability to place their shots with some accuracy.
- Starting to practice drop shots from $\frac{3}{4}$ court and using them with some success to get to the net.
- Developing the backhand lob.
- Improving their knowledge of when to make specific shots.
- Learning when to use soft shots versus power shots to their advantage.
- Gaining the reflexes and judgment to avoid hitting balls which may be going out of bounds.
- Comfortable with putting more velocity on balls but less comfortable returning high velocity balls softly.

4.0 Skill Level

4.0 skill level describes players who are capable of consistently executing at above a 3.5 skill level. The 4.0 player will distinguish themselves from the 3.5

player by possessing increased skills and strategy, or by more speed, power or consistency.

- Comfortable with all the rules of pickleball.
- Controls and places both the serve and return of serve.
- Generally consistent in their play, understands match strategy and uses a variety of specific shots to affect their strategy.
- Moves effectively with a partner and easily switches courts to cover their partner's side when required.
- Comfortable playing at the non-volley zone line. Works with their doubles partner to control the line by keeping their opponents back, driving them off the line, or controlling the speed or placement of the ball.
- Consistently hits to their opponents' weak side when possible.
- Can block strong volleys directed at them at the non-volley zone line or elsewhere, and can place their volleys with a good degree of accuracy.
- Has excellent footwork and moves forward, backward and laterally with ease and quickness.
- Understands the strategy of "dinking", employs it on a regular basis, can sustain a "dinking" session until receipt of a "put away" shot, recognizes the "put away" shot, and usually succeeds in ending the rally with it.
- Hits overheads consistently "in", often with high velocity, and striving to place them more effectively. Developing the ability to return overheads hit at them or their feet.
- Fair to good ability to change from a soft shot strategy to a hard shot strategy during any given rally, or vice versa.
- Utilizes both forehand and backhand lobs, striving to employ lobs from anywhere on the court. Has good accuracy in placing lobs.
- Consistently makes drop-shots successfully from $\frac{3}{4}$ court and frequently makes successful drop-shots from the baseline as their preferred method of getting to and gaining control of the net.
- Good at avoiding returned shots which may be going out of bounds.
- Can handle a good deal of speed on shots without over-hitting or hitting out-of-bounds too often.
- Usually recognizes and exploits the weaknesses in their opponent's game.
- Generally poaches effectively.
- Developing their use of spin on a variety of shots.

4.5+ Skill Level

The 4.5+ skill level player is consistently capable of executing at the 4.5 and/or 5.0 levels. The 4.5+ player is distinguish from the 4.0 player by increased skills,

a higher level of strategy, quickness of hands, judicious use of power, superior placement of shots and consistently fewer unforced errors.

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