

PICKLEBALL SKILL LEVEL DEFINITIONS

Updated April 17, 2011

The following skill level sets are intended to be used as a **guide** when either instructing a clinic, teaching friends to play or as a helpful mechanism in determining a player's level for entering Ladder play. It is not intended, for example, that all A Players have the skills listed, nor B, C or Novice. It is useful to know, however, what you should strive for at any given skill level. Each player's level of success will vary widely for each of the skills within each set. Some of the "Open" players may be very successful at many of these skills while a lower level A player may have only limited success at many of these skills. The same holds true for the B, C and Novice player. The point is that you can use this list as a guide to improve your game.

OPEN / 5.0 and/or 4.5 PLAYERS

- Knows the rules of pickleball.
- Can control and place the ball effectively.
- Are consistent in their play, understands the match strategy of the game and when to use specific shots.
- Can move effectively with a partner and easily switch court positions to cover their partner's side when required.
- Plays effectively at the non-volley line to control the point.
- Can block strong volleys directed at them at the non-volley zone, or "kitchen" and has the skill to place their volleys.
- Can consistently execute a drop-shot from $\frac{3}{4}$ court and from the baseline, to begin and sustain "dinks".
- Have effective "put away" shots.
- Can consistently change from a hard shot strategy to a soft shot strategy during any given point play or vice versa.
- Can consistently avoid returned shots which may be going out of bounds.
- Can poach effectively.
- Can recognize and exploit weaknesses in their opponent's game.

A / 4.0 PLAYERS

- Should know most of the rules of pickleball.
- Are generally able to control and place both the serve and return of serve.
- Are generally consistent in their play and understand the match strategy of the game and when to use specific shots.
- Can move effectively with a partner and can generally switch court positions to cover their partner's side when required.
- Are comfortable playing at the non-volley line and work with their partner to control the non-volley line.

- Can usually block strong volleys directed at them at the non-volley zone, or “kitchen” and are developing their skill to place their volleys.
- Should be developing excellent footwork to move forward, backward and laterally with ease and quickness.
- Can generally sustain “dinks” and at times “put away” their shots.
- Can generally hit overheads and are striving to place them.
- Are striving to be able to change from a soft shot strategy to a hard shot strategy during any given point play or vice versa.
- Are working towards mastering the drop shot as a tool to effectively approach the non-volley line.
- Should generally be able to initiate a drop-shot from $\frac{3}{4}$ court and from the baseline.
- Are very good at avoiding returned shots which may be going out of bounds.
- Can generally poach effectively.
- Can generally recognize and exploit weaknesses in their opponent's game.

B / 3.5 PLAYERS

- Should be continuing to improve their knowledge of the rules of pickleball.
- Should generally be able to get their serve in play and return most serves.
- Should be regularly serving deep and returning a serve deep.
- Should understand **most** match strategy and tactics that apply to skills that they either possess or are trying to learn.
- Should be improving their skill to play with partners effectively.
- Should possess all shots; such as forehand and backhand, lob, overhead smash and continued dink, and hit them with a high level of consistency.
- Should be starting to regularly use a drop-shot from $\frac{3}{4}$ court and from the baseline.
- Are improving in knowing when to make specific shots.
- Should be learning when to use soft shots versus power shots to their advantage.
- Should be gaining the reflexes and judgment to avoid returned shots which may be going out of bounds.

C / 3.0 PLAYERS

- Know some of the rules and how to score after losing track.
- Will strive to get most of their serves in and to return more than half of backhands or overheads.
- Should be working towards serving deep and be attempting to serve to the forehand and backhand of the receiver.
- Will move to the non-volley zone line after the return of serve.
- Is striving to develop consistent strokes.
- Should not be hitting returns up in the air, but making flatter returns.
- Should be trying to increase their skill in the lob, overhead smash and dinks as well as in hitting the ball lower and harder.
- Should be developing a sustained “dink” exchange at the net.

NOVICE / 2.5 PLAYERS

- Has taken the introductory lesson or has played with other pickleball players who have taught them the very basic rules of how to play the game.
- Should be learning to move around the court in a balanced and safe manner as opposed to running at great speed, totally out of control, thereby becoming a danger to themselves and others.
- Are learning how to get their serve in regularly.
- Are learning where to stand on the court during serves, returns and point play.
- Are using deeper and higher serves and/or returns to allow themselves time to move to the non-volley zone, or “kitchen” and should be allowed some freedom in staying back so they can improve their ground strokes.
- Should know how to keep score and where to stand at the beginning of each point.
- May not have learned how to effectively dink but should be attempting to do so.
- Should place more emphasis on keeping the ball in play as opposed to trying to hit it low and hard or trying to place the ball better than the player’s skill allows.
- Should be able to lob with a forehand when desired, although probably not well.

NEWBIES & BEGINNERS

To assist the new club member in determining their level of skill, please follow these guidelines:

Newby is a person who may not be able to hit the ball across the net or return balls, doesn't know the rules of play, scoring, etc. This person probably has not played another racquet sport such as tennis, racquetball, paddleball, etc. This person should be encouraged to take the free introductory lesson prior to playing during drop-in. The term “newbie” is only used during clinic instruction and certain mixers. Newbie’s should not join the Novice Ladder until their skills improve commensurate with the Novice Player Skill List above. Refer to the Ladder Management Rules on the "League/Ladder" menu link on the website for further information.

Beginner either has had experience in other racquet sports, or has taken the free introductory lesson, or has been playing with others for a while who have taught the person the basic rules of play and scoring, etc. Beginners should consider joining the Novice Ladder when their skills improve commensurate with the Novice Player Skill List above. Refer to the Ladder Management Rules on the "League/Ladder" menu link on the website for further information.

[Back to Home Page](#)