

PS+ Summary of Skills/Fundamentals

Following the principle of Keep It Simple Stupid (KISS)... Here is a brief summary of key skills/fundamentals of Pickleball that we should use as a guide in teaching our PS+ classes:

- ✓ **GRIP** -Recommended for all Pickleball skills... Continental (shake hands); 'V' formed between thumb/index finger on top of grip; trigger finger (index finger); thumb rest on side of middle finger; relaxed but firm (don't choke the bird).
- ✓ **READY POSITION** - Feet approximately shoulder width apart; body square to ball/opponent; weight on balls of feet as opponent strikes ball; at the baseline, paddle chest height/slightly extended towards ball, elbows tucked in; at NVZ, paddle chest height/ parallel to chest, elbows tucked in; the paddle head may rest on the fingers of the non-paddle hand. For maximum efficiency and best results, begin every stroke from the ready position and return (recovery) to it after every shot.
- ✓ **FOOTWORK** - For right handed player (reverse for lefty), On all forehand groundstrokes, drops, approaches, dinks, volleys, smashes and serves...weight on front/left foot as striking ball. On all backhand groundstrokes, drops, approaches, dinks, volleys and smashes...weight on front/right foot as striking ball. Weight transfer in direction of intended target. (Law of Opposites). *Note: Footwork may be modified when near the NVZ.
- ✓ **SERVE** - Opposite foot forward; underhand motion; paddle lower than wrist/ball contact lower than waist; follow through to target/weight shift to target; recover to ready position slightly behind baseline. Height over net adds to depth of serve.
- ✓ **RETURN of SERVE (ROS)** - see groundstrokes; ready position square to server; advanced players should be moving forward as stroking return on way to No Volley Zone (NVZ). Height of ROS adds to depth of the shot and allows the receiver more time to advance to the NVZ.
- ✓ **GROUNDSTROKES** - Turn shoulders/paddle back BEFORE ball bounces on your side of court (load up); contact ball at top of bounce, bend those knees; for right handed players (reverse for lefty), On forehand, contact point by left knee; on backhand, slightly in front of right knee; accelerate through contact (unload); weight transfer towards target; follow through towards target; recover to ready position. SWING... don't punch/chop!
- ✓ **DINKS** - From No Volley Zone (NVZ); a softer/shortened groundstroke; paddle slightly open at contact; may hold the ball longer on contact (contact point may be slightly lower than top of bounce); lift (push) the ball; soft hands; happy feet; recover to ready position.
- ✓ **DROPS** - From mid court to baseline (more advanced shot than dinks); slightly shortened groundstroke; paddle slightly open at contact; apex of balls arc before approaching net; take pace off of incoming shot/soft hands; recover to ready position (may use to approach the No Volley Zone (NVZ)...quality of shot determines potential success of advancing!
- ✓ **LOB** - Full groundstroke; swing low to high/open paddle face; high follow through at finish; apex of balls arc over opponent; return to ready position (may follow to No Volley Zone if the quality of the lob is offensive, opponents retreat to their baseline).
- ✓ **VOLLEYS** - Usually by No Volley Zone (NVZ); both forehand and backhand volleys, turn shoulders/ shorten back swing; contact point at eye level/out in front; bend knees as needed; short follow through; return to ready position. PUNCH/BLOCK... don't swing!

- ✓ **DROP VOLLEY** - At NVZ, a soft volley into the opponent's NVZ hit before the ball bounces; both forehand and backhand drop volleys, the paddle face slightly open; no backswing/follow through; absorb the force of the shot so the ball drops over the net softly.
- ✓ **HALF VOLLEYS** - Usually occurs around no man's land/near No Volley Zone (NVZ); turn shoulders/shortened back swing; contact point just after ball bounces/on the rise; bend knees; short follow through; return to ready position. **BLOCK** don't swing!
- ✓ **OVERHEADS/SMASH** - For right handed player (reverse for lefty); turn shoulders/paddle up while executing a drop step with the right foot/leg; point index finger of left hand/chin at ball; move back sideways (**VERY IMPORTANT SAFETY FACTOR**); keep ball between you and net; hit up/over ball; follow through to left side of body; return to ready position by NVZ).

PS+ Basic Strategies and Tactics

The following are basic pickleball strategies and tactics that we should be emphasizing in our PS+ classes. Remember that strategies are an overall plan, may be complex, involves decision making that govern the execution of specific tactics. While tactics are the actual means to gain an objective (strategy). Briefly... strategies are the thinking, the plan; while tactics are the doing, achieving the plan.

- I. Strategy: Good Player Positioning...Increases Successful Performance
 1. Serving team stands behind the baseline to serve and remains there or just inside to hit serve return after it bounces (Double Bounce Rule).
 2. Receiver typically stands at or near the baseline to return serve; however, be alert for the possible need to move forward to return a shorter serve.
 3. Receiver's partner may stand anywhere, but is usually positioned at the NVZ line on his/her side of court.
 4. Face the action. Move your feet so your body is facing toward the opponent who is about to hit the ball.
 5. Don't plant your feet when in the ready position. Keep your feet active (happy feet), weight on the balls of the feet as your opponent hit's the ball allowing you quicker movement in any direction. Be ready...hold paddle at chest level, non-dominate hand touching paddle, eyes on the ball.
 6. Try to be in a good position to hit your best shot (usually the forehand) when ever possible.
- II. Strategy: Control the NVZ Line...The team that controls the NVZ wins the Majority of the Points.
 1. After returning the serve the receiver should quickly move forward to the NVZ line to a position parallel with their partner.
 2. A return made higher (loft) over the net is both safer and allows the receiver more time to advance to the NVZ line. A deep return is strongly emphasized, whether driven or lofted.
 3. The serving team should both move toward the NVZ line together as soon as possible after the third shot (return of serve return). The quality of the shot determines the choice to move forward (elicits a defensive return by opponents).

4. Player's should attempt to get to the NVZ line in time to be ready to return the next ball hit to them by the opposing team. However, if caught mid court (no man's land), stop and assume the ready position as your opponent hit's the ball (split step). It may take two or three shots to get to the NVZ line safely, on balance and in good position to take advantage of a weak shot by your opponents.
5. Once at the NVZ, stay there. Don't move back unless it is necessary to return a lob, then return to the NVZ line as soon as possible.

III. Strategy: Move as a Team...The Team that Moves Together, Wins Together!

1. The partner hitting the ball determines when and where the team moves (the quality of the shot is the determining factor).
2. At the baseline, when one partner hits the ball and moves toward the NVZ at the angle of their shot (follow the ball), their partner should move forward also, but not *before!*
3. With partners separated - one at baseline and one at the NVZ line- an inviting gap is created for opponents to place a winning shot.
4. When one partner is pulled wide towards the sideline to return a shot their partner moves toward the centerline to close the gap in the middle, which is a higher percentage shot for the opponent than trying to pass down the other sideline, which is often left open.
5. When a team at the NVZ line is lobbed, they move back together, play the lob, and return to the NVZ line, as a team, as soon as possible.

IV. Strategy: Placement Over Power...More points are Won by Accurate Placement of a Shot than Power.

1. Keep the ball in play. The team that makes the least number of unforced errors is most likely to win.
2. More rallies are won because of errors than won by a good shot.
3. Rather than trying to hit a winner every shot, it is better to place the ball back over the net in control and let the opponents make the fault, or wait for a chance to hit a sure winner (patience is a virtue).
4. The safest place to hit a ball in doubles is deep, down the middle; this minimizes the chances of hitting wide and may cause confusion over which opponent should return the ball.
5. Hitting the ball in a line back where it came from is easier than changing the ball flight's direction.
6. Try to hit to your opponent's weakness (usually their backhand)... especially on the serve.
7. Keep the ball low to avoid setting up a winner for your opponent. Angle shots downward so your opponent must hit upward.
8. With soft shots (dinks and drops), clear the net with enough height to land the ball in the NVZ rather than risk hitting into the net.

V. Strategy: Success is Based on Good Team Communication...A Team that Talks Together, Wins Together.

1. Get in the habit of calling "Mine", "Yours", "I Got It", "You" or something similar for every shot, especially if playing with an unfamiliar partner and if one partner right handed and the other left handed.

2. Decide who will take lobs - it may be the faster partner even if the lob is on the other side of the court.
3. Call "Switch" if you move to your partner's side of the court - it is quicker to stay there for the next shot than to run back to your side. Be sure to be in the right position for the next serve/point (based on score).
4. Decide who handles shots coming down the middle of the court. How far over the center line will the partner with the forehand or the better player take balls?
5. Warn your partner by calling "Bounce It" if a ball hit high appears as if it may land out. Yell "No" or "Out" *before the ball strikes the court* if you are sure it is going out. (Calling "Out" after the ball strikes the court is a line call and the ball is dead.)
6. Bolster team confidence by complimenting your partner on good play - *after the rally ends*. Never criticize your partner for faults - it just makes matters worse.
7. Discussing team tactics, such as which opponent to hit to, before a game starts, between points, or during a timeout; or how and where to hit the third shot by the serving team prior to serving, gives a team a common goal and demonstrates that the players are united as a team and not playing as individuals.
8. Although the correct player to take a shot is not always the one in the forehand position, if the ball is heading in your partner's direction, don't take away their best shot (usually the forehand) with your backhand (usually the weakest shot) unless your partner is obviously unable to reach the shot or calls "Yours". *Poaching is a more advanced tactic*.

PS+ The Mental Game

As pickleball instructors we are responsible for not only teaching the physical component of how to play the game, but the mental component, including how to learn, as well.

- Keep in mind that pickleball is a social game for the vast majority of players; they do not aspire to win tournaments, or in most cases, even want to play in any but a local fun event. They just want to get out on the court, get some exercise and play well enough to have some *fun* with their friends.
- A positive attitude is the first step to improving one's game. Note: Teachers need to maintain a positive attitude in their classes by continually reinforcing students with verbal praise for successes and constructive instruction for less than perfect performance. Keep it simple, but on point.
- Students continually compare themselves to others in the class. Negative comparisons can discourage slower learners. When possible group players of similar skill level on the same court.
- Players need to focus on the ball rather than the opponents.
- Dwelling on a mistake distracts from focus on the next point. Encourage students to acknowledge a mistake, learn from it, and then move on mentally and emotionally. This is very important for winning play.
- It's counterproductive to blame one's partner for a mistake, and destructive to the partner relationship to express these thoughts verbally and/or through body language. Teach students to move beyond their partner's mistakes as well as their own. Express support with positive words such as "Good Try", "You'll Get It Next Time", "Good Idea", etc.

- Don't expect students to remember and be able to work on everything you teach in a session. Suggest that between classes they concentrate on mastering one element of the game at a time and move on to another only when they have achieved a level of comfort with that one. After sufficient practice, muscle memory occurs and the subconscious takes over; then the conscious mind becomes free to focus on and absorb more facets of the game.
- For the above reason it is imperative that we teach proper mechanics (pickleball fundamentals). Once improper strokes become ingrained in the subconscious, *it's much more difficult to retrain the muscles*. Do it correctly from the start!
- Encourage practice, practice, practice! Even off court students can practice by visualizing themselves performing proper strokes for successful strategies.