

PICKLEBALL

TIPBITS

YEAR FOUR

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FOREWORD

If you've had a chance to read one of our earlier publications, TIPBITS YEAR ONE, TWO or THREE, then you would know that these publications are the result of being encouraged by PB leaders in our community to *give back* to the sport, and then subsequently, recognizing that *giving back* can be a (better) way of life...

In other words, it's become even more evident to us that...
“when you *give back* you *get back* more than you *give back*”!

TIPBITS publications are provided to you and others as a *gift* and we hope that YOU too will feel the reward you get from *giving back* in some/anyway to others, especially those in need!

We encourage you, actually, we challenge you, to find your own way to *give back*...use your own resources, your own abilities or your own time to *give back*...some HOW!

We've created a website, TIPBITS.ORG, that presents its readers with numerous options to do just that, *give back*... It provides a description of options by category and a link to them...should you be unfamiliar with them or question their effectiveness, there is also a link to Navigator, a website whose sole purpose is to evaluate and critique each charity...

Or you may already know someone right now who is in need...don't put it off, don't waste another day...they can be your family, your friends, your neighbors or anyone in need...make it YOUR goal today...that's our goal...

“HELPING OTHERS HELP OTHERS”

...and to spark that same feeling in you to try it yourself!

So thank you for *giving back*!

See HOW to *give back* (or get books/articles) at TIPBITS.ORG!

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TIPBITS #157

COUNTER SPIN!

The use of Spin has always been an integral part of almost all racket or paddle sports, whether it be platform tennis, beach tennis or regular tennis...it's even a bigger part of table tennis...and it's clearly a part of Pickleball...

Along the way, paddle manufacturers first addressed the issue of adding Power to their paddles...then, the trend went to improving Control...and most recently, the focus has shifted to Spin...what could be next?

While many players of all skill levels have played Pickleball for years without the need for or the desire to add Spin to their games, many do take advantage of its not always obvious values...perhaps some players avoid its use due to its somewhat inherent potential for introducing errors or mistakes...after all, it does require a slightly more involved stroking motion AND, often times, more precise timing which does introduce more room for error...nevertheless, Spin has found its way into Pickleball and it does add many benefits, as well as, complexities to the game...adding Spin to the ball is and has been discussed frequently...but Countering or Offsetting Spin has not!!!

Each type of Spin has its own characteristics...when you hit a Pickleball to your opponent with topspin, it has two effects...1) it dips down, possibly even drastically before bouncing and 2) when it does bounce, it tends to jump forward and bounce somewhat higher...a ball hit with under spin or back spin or slice also has two effects...1) the ball tends to float or even rise during flight and 2) when it bounces, it can skid or not come up as high...those are the traits or characteristics from the ball striker's point of view...as the "receiver" of such shots, it's imperative that you have an understanding of the consequences of these spins when it strikes your paddle!!!

Let's take top spin first...you've already noticed the ball jumps somewhat upward when it bounces...virtually the same thing

happens when it strikes your paddle(it's prone to going up)...if you simply hold your paddle steady, without swinging, with the paddle face perfectly vertical, straight up and down, the ball will bounce off the paddle and go UP...how much it goes up is directly proportional to the amount of top spin that is on the ball...

Now, back spin(under spin)...when the under spun ball bounces, it tends to skid and stay low...here again, when the ball strikes your paddle, the ball wants to go down...as above, if you hold your paddle face perfectly vertical, the ball will bounce off the paddle and go DOWN...and again, how much it goes down is directly proportional to the amount of back spin that is on the ball...

Next time, some discussion on **How to Counter these Spins...**

TIPBITS #158

HOW TO COUNTER SPIN!

Your opponents recently have been making your Pickleball life less enjoyable because they have upped their level of attack by using more and more Spin...this has forced you to be particularly sensitive of their stroke mechanics and of the effect it has on the ball and your ability to counter it...with that said, this in itself is not a bad thing...they have forced you to do something perhaps you should have been doing all along...watching closely and intently on the players across the net from you, especially while they are stroking the ball!!!

You really don't care what is causing the success of this new found weapon, whether its a change in the ball or the paddle or just the increased skill of your opponent...you just want to know how to combat it(Counter the Spin)...

Previously, we addressed the dynamics of the two most popular spins, top spin and back spin..and we talked about the predictable results when its bounces off of either the ground or a paddle...briefly, top spin goes up when it hits either the ground or your paddle...and back spin goes down when it hits either the ground or your paddle...envision the paddle held directly vertical with the paddle face perfectly vertical, straight up and down, the ball with top spin will bounce up and the ball with back spin will bounce down...

This is not rocket science, it's really simple physics!

With these simple factors in mind, one need merely counter these spins by adjusting the angle of the paddle face one way or the other...the ball approaching with top spin requires the player to tilt the paddle face downward or to a more closed position...conversely, the ball approaching with back spin requires the player to tilt the paddle face upward or to a more open position...finally, the amount of angle applied is directly proportional to the amount of Spin on the ball...

This sounds simple enough (and it works) but of course, your paddle is not being held vertical much less stationary...so the plot thickens!!!

As a player, you have a variety of Options...Option one, you can return the ball approaching you with spin by applying the opposite spin...or Option two, you can simply apply enough force (paddle head speed) to counter the spin, neutralize it...or Option three, return the ball with the same spin, reversing its rotation, the most difficult of the three...this is done by adding additional force that not only neutralizes the spin but also introduces additional counter spin to the return...

Keeping the Spin going in the same direction, Option one, is the easiest...as an example, a ball that's approaching with top spin can be quite simply returned with back spin (the ball never changes its rotational characteristics)...

For Options two and three, you must know how hard you have to hit it or how much paddle head speed you need to generate to be successful...that, of course depends on the velocity of the oncoming ball AND the amount of rotation or Spin that's already on it...getting this right is a simple matter of practice, trial and error...and lots of it...BUT, there is no better time than to start right now!

TIPBITS #159

THE SIGNALLED POACH

Looking for a way to get the occasional free point?...Want to add some variety into your game?...Want to get more involved in the point?...

If you answered "yes" to any of these questions, read on...

You've seen and heard about the benefits of "stacking", the "power formation", even the "Australian" line up...all pertain to positioning your team to take or make the most advantage of your strengths or, in some cases, hide your weaknesses...no matter the reason, it clearly works, at least some of the time!!!

Here is a mini variation on this positioning theme...(BTW: this idea is no different than the strategy used by doubles tennis players for years...the only difference is that tennis players use it ON the Serve, NOT the Return)...

Variation #1...this strategy is used by the Returning team...it is used only on the Return of Serve...the Returning team lines up as usual, the Returner at the baseline and his/her partner at the NVZ line...before the Serve is made(before the score is announced), the Net person signals the Returner his/her plans to "poach" or to "stay home", meaning this...

If the Net person signals "poach", that means that the Net person is going to cross from his/her original side to his/her opposite side, the whole time moving along the NVZ line...the timing of this move or the initiation of this move is done once the Returner has stroked the Return and it has cleared the net...the Returner, upon striking the Return will immediately proceed to the position on the NVZ line that his/her partner has vacated...whether or not the poaching player is going to intercept the Serving team's reply is irrelevant...if the occasion presents itself, then more power to him/her...

If the Net person signals to "stay home", then the point is played as

normal, no crossing back and forth...

The method you choose to signal is up to your team's personal preference...the most common signal is an open hand or closed fist...open meaning to "poach", closed meaning to "stay home"...

This strategy, done regularly, presents doubt in the opponents' mind, often or at least sometimes, causing them to lose focus(on the ball and more on you), causing an errant shot(free point)...it also adds some variety to your game and clearly keeps you and your Net man more involved in the game!!!

Yes, that was Variation #1...more Variations are yet to come!

TIPBITS #160

TIME TO RECAP

As we have done after each multiple of 9 TIPBITS, it still seems appropriate to continue to provide a review of the last 9...the rationale now is the same as it was then...many of the topics presented need time to digest or to be made a part of every day play or simply warrant repeating...so, here goes...

#151 Get a Grip...grip sizing, available products and methods for getting a better grip

#152 Goal for Today...when playing games, to improve, consider just one goal

#153 The Middle Man...the Returning team's best use of the non-Returning partner

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#157 Counter Spin...characteristics of Spin and its results when striking the ground and the paddle

#158 How to Counter Spin...changing the angle of the paddle's face and adding or reversing Spin

#159 The Signaled Poach...the value of the Returning team's use of the signaled poach

Finally...You've read this before but absolutely nothing is more important than these next few sentences...Percentage Pickleball is not making mistakes... never over hitting, being under control, being patient and being in the right place at the right time... Percentage Pickleball, it's all about putting the percentages, the overwhelming likelihood that you will be successful, on your side!!!

TIPBITS #161

ANOTHER SIGNALLED POACH

In a previous article, we discussed trying to get the occasional free point, maybe adding some variety into your game and just getting more involved in the point...we suggested that trying a formation alternative might just do that...we described a Signaled Poach!

The Signaled Poach is a strategy that is used by the Returning team and only on the Return of Serve...the Returning team lines up as usual, the Returner at the baseline and his/her partner at the NVZ line...before the Serve is made(before the score is announced), the Net person signals to the Returner his/her plans to "poach" or to "stay home", meaning this...

If the Net person signals "poach", that means that the Net person is going to cross from his/her original side to his/her opposite side, the whole time moving along the NVZ line...the timing of this move or the initiation of this move is done once the Returner has stroked the Return and it has cleared the net...the Returner, upon striking the Return will immediately proceed to the position on the NVZ line that his/her partner has vacated...whether or not the poaching player is going to intercept the Serving team's reply is irrelevant...But, if the occasion presents itself, then more power to him/her...

If the Net person signals to "stay home", then the point is played as normal, no crossing takes place...

Another variation on this theme is used again by the Returning team...and again, the Net person makes the signal...the signal advises the Returner of where the Net person would like the Return to go...the options are to go...to the player on the right, the player on the left or up the middle!

This is a form of communication that clearly accomplishes two of the three goals of poaching...not so much 1)getting a free or easy point BUT of 2)getting the Net person more involved in the point and 3)adding some variety...in this case the Net person takes

control of the point...Plus, and more importantly, it gives the Net person a heads up as to what to expect on the Return(assisting him/her in deciding on or making a more effective poach)...this strategy parallels the communication between the catcher and the pitcher in a Baseball game...the catcher really calls the pitches but the pitcher can always "shake" them off and ask for another...

The signal used is up to each player's preference but generally the Net person uses their free hand to make the signal...a right-handed Net person might signal to have the Return go to the player on the right by pointing to the right with the index finger, up the middle by pointing the thumb upwards and a closed fist to go to the player on the left(lefties reverse the hand signals)...

The Returning team might wish to mix the two types of Signaled Poach strategies or create their own...either way, they clearly
1)increase the chance for an easy point, 2)keep the Net person much more involved and 3)add variety to the game!

TIPBITS #162

GET DOWN, STAY DOWN

Getting Down and Staying Down relates to your stance, your ready position at the beginning and throughout each (and every) point...notice that it says at the Beginning and, more importantly, Throughout each and every point...this means you don't do it sometimes...you do it all the time!!!

WHAT...are we talking about?...we're talking about keeping your entire body Down(low), as opposed to standing straight Up(erect)...

WHY...the benefits from staying Down start with the mere fact that your head (and eyes) are closer to the path or flight of the ball...this gives you a better perspective of the ball's trajectory...you'll SEE it better ...further, and more importantly, it keeps your body (torso) more inline with the ball, limiting the amount you need to move down to the ball from shot to shot(you're already there)...AND, this crouched(bent knee) position readies/allows you to move more quickly than if you were standing erect...AND, being Down and staying Down helps your stroke mechanics, too...you DON'T ever want to be down by the ball AND then be moving up during your shot...essentially, you always want to keep your body movement parallel with the ground...finally, **this position will help you feel and be more engaged in each point!!!**

HOW...Getting Down starts at the knees...this means you must bend your knees...as much as you can...picture yourself as about to sit down in a chair...but lean forward a bit...the leaning forward part can be envisioned as a "crouch"...picture yourself as about to pounce on your prey...your focus is forward looking and following the path of the ball and the movements of your opponent's paddle!!!

PRACTICE...you don't need to wait until you have time to practice this strategy...you can start immediately in your very next game...BUT, consider a little practice the next chance you get(maybe simply in your warm up before play)...initially, hit some soft dinks at the NVZ, getting low by bending your knees...then

STAY LOW the whole time...next, try a volley/volley exchange, again Getting and Staying LOW...**you'll see immediately how much better you can see and react to the ball**...that's because your eyes are on the same plane as the ball!!!

Repeat to yourself..."Get Down, Stay Down"...It Works...Try it!!!

TIPBITS #163

GREAT GET! REALLY!

You've heard it, probably said it, probably done it!... Was it worth it?

Is the difference between a nice get and a great get really come down to whether you won the point or "just" put it back into play? Again, was it worth it?

Well, if you didn't pull a calf or quad or hamstring muscle, that's Part one of being worth it(that's already really one point for YOU)!...

Part two is the mere satisfaction of making the effort and accomplishing your objective(one more point for YOU)!

Part three, if YOU did win the point, that's another point for YOU and a big one for the TEAM!

If you didn't win the point, what could you do different the next time you put yourself "at risk"?

Great, even nice "gets" come in several varieties...the short ball you hustle forward to "get", the wide ball you go sideways off the court to "get" and the deep ball, perhaps a lob your race back to "get"...each has its own problems and solutions...

The first problem is always how to get there in the first place...the get always depends first on your alertness to the possibility or your level of anticipation of the need...simply being fast isn't always the solution...anticipating is...and the two together make for many great gets!!!

Next, your route to the ball must be considered and any obstacles that could figure into your path(the need to stop before an obstacle..a fence, a post, the net, etc.)...this goes back to the first point, the worthiness of the effort...is injury going to be an issue?

So, you've reached the ball...what now?...in all three of these scenarios(short, wide or deep), the easiest option for you is to put the ball into the air(lob) and the HIGHER the better...this "gets" the ball back into play AND buys you and your partner time to get ready to fend off the inevitable likelihood of an oncoming put away by your opponents...

Fortunately, the lob is not the only solution and while it might be the easiest, it's not always the best...putting the ball where they aren't is the best(good luck with that)...the next best is dropping the ball softly just over the net, a defensive shot that equalizes your chances to further the point...but, we'll discuss these options in more detail for each scenario next time...in the meantime...

Keep going for them!

TIPBITS #164

AFTER THE GREAT GET!

You're pulled out of position but you know you can "get" to the ball...but, what then?

Great, even nice "gets" come in several varieties...the short ball you hustle forward to "get", the wide ball you go sideways off the court to "get" and the deep ball that forces you to scamper to the back corners to "get"...each has its own problems and solutions...the Lob offers the easiest solution, both in terms of a make-able shot as well as a shot that buys you time to get back into the point...but, there may be a better solution, depending on the situation...

The Short Ball...racing(or at least hurrying) toward the net, you must pick your shot on the way...you must observe(or at least be aware of) the location of your opponents...besides the Lob, you'd like to place your shot away from the closest opponent and as low over the net and as close to the net as you possibly can...this will make your opponents next shot more likely to be a defensive one AND also buy you some time to recover!

The Wide Ball...in this case, we have a few more options than with the Short ball...once again, you MUST be aware of the location of your opponents...besides the Lob, the next option you should consider is the solution used for the Short ball...away from the closest opponent and just over the net and as close as possible to the net...from your position, this will require a fairly sharp angled shot, which may end up pulling your opponent off the court, as well...perhaps the best option, however, will once again be based on your position in relation to the court(how far off of the court are you?)...if you're far enough off the court, you probably will have the ability to go around the pipe(the net post)...this too can be considered an offensive shot actually designed to immediately change your defensive position into one that may win the point for you...you must commit to this shot if its presented to you!

The Deep Ball...this situation is absolutely no different than your

situation as the Serving team when you must decide on a Third Shot...all the same options are available to you...percentage-wise, your best shot IS the Third Shot drop...if you're unable to do justice to that shot, try a drive, hard and low and down the middle...and as a last recourse, throw the Lob up, high and deep!

During your game play, pay attention to these opportunities and practice each option to see what works best for you...Remember, the goal of any good "get" is to make it a great "get" by winning the point!

TIPBITS #165

PADDLE WEIGHT

Paddle guidelines provided by the USAPA address a number of paddle characteristics...overall size, length, deflection, and surface texture.....all those characteristics have to do specifically with performance...oddly enough, no mention of/guidelines on weight...but Paddle Weight has quite a lot to do with performance...all those other characteristics are aimed at limiting the amount of change to paddle design that might favor one player or style of player over another...and that's certainly commendable!

And then there is the ball and its guidelines...they seem even more demanding...weight, size, rebound, hardness, number of holes...all with the exact same intent...keep the game even for everyone...again, great!

The variances allowed within the ball guidelines really limit any kind of significant performance differences...their exact purpose...the variances allowed within the paddle guidelines have a similar intent...yet, the guidelines have, it seems, purposely ignored any limits on weight...BUT weight does have a significant impact on the performance of a paddle, not only how much weight but where it's located! So, while players have little they can do about the ball, they seem to have considerable leeway with their choice when it comes to Paddle Weight!

Paddles started out being pretty heavy...ever lift an old(or new) wooden paddle?...and it seemed that it wasn't too long ago that a player buying a new paddle would look for their favorite model WITH the greatest weight...why?...because it gave them more power!...yet the trends of late seem to be moving away from heavier paddles and really leaning towards lighter(and lighter) paddles...it kind of makes some sense since most players play doubles and most of the game is it at the net where quick hands are at a premium...so why not lighter?!

If you've gone down that path, you may have noticed a bit of a trade off you've had to pay to make that change...the trade off is

that you now have quicker hands BUT you can't hit the ball as deep as easily or put it away as easily...you've got to swing harder and faster to accomplish the same results you had with the heavier paddle...and maybe you lost a little control as well?

You've probably considered both of these factors and decided what works best for you...after all, it's mostly a Physics issue anyway...weight, mass, force, velocity, speed, momentum, force...all that stuff...nothing you can change about the laws of Physics...what you need is a way to out smart the laws of Physics, especially since your arm can only go so fast...we'll look at some counter measures you might consider(next time)...until then, please remember...

TIPBITS #166

OFFSETTING PADDLE WEIGHT

As we have discussed previously, paddle weights do have an impact on performance...on the plus side, lighter paddles offer quicker response times during rapid net exchanges...but on the down side, they offer less POP when a put away is required...and these characteristics simply reflect the Laws of Physics...not much can be done about them aside from accepting the consequences...

But, the consequences of the down side can be offset by applying a greater force to the paddle...that is, increasing the speed of the paddle at the time of contact with the ball(unfortunately, added paddle speed often introduces the likelihood for less control)...putting that last comment aside, the beauty of the lighter paddle is that it will be somewhat easier to increase this speed because it IS lighter...But, even more speed will be required to offset and overcome the lightness of the paddle if the expectation is to equal the force provided by the heavier paddle!

How to produce that added speed is where we're heading with this discussion...we already mentioned(above) that the lighter paddle is less effective when a put away is required...unfortunately, it applies to numerous other shots you're required to make throughout a point...it starts with the Serve...no small task since this is the only shot you must provide all the momentum yourself...then there is the Return, which you need to hit deep...the same with any Lob...and clearly more pace is required of any Overhead(forehand or backhand)...and the same for any Drive used in lieu of a Third Shot drop(again forehand and backhand)...what does that leave?...a solid Volley?!...so, lots of shots will be affected by the lighter paddle!

Creating and adding speed is really a series of movements all designed for that very purpose...starting at the feet, stepping forward...then, the body with rotation...then, the shoulder with a turn...then the arm, with the flexion or extension of the elbow...and finally, the hand with the movement of the wrist...all these elements must work together to add forward motion or speed to the paddle...the one element which can add the most significant

amount of speed to the paddle head is the action of the wrist!...contemplate that a bit and we'll discuss that in more detail...until then, please remember...

TIPBITS #167

SNAP, CRACKLE AND POP

We're referring to the strategy you may need should you have chosen to go with a lighter paddle...we recently talked about quicker hands with the lighter paddle but with less POP as a result...to finish the analogy, you'll have to CRACK off winners and SNAP away volleys now with more gusto than before...simply, you'll have to put more effort into increasing the paddle's speed if you hope to hit with the same pace or depth that you did with your heavier paddle...while "PLACE over PACE" is a Percentage Pickleball player's motto, something needs to give in order to reclaim the pace lost as a result of your paddle change...you're just going to have to develop more paddle speed but be careful not succumb to the inherent risk when it comes to placement(loss of control).

Again, the down side...we said this loss of pace and depth impacts virtually every shot in any given point..the most obvious down side impact is felt when hitting overheads for put aways, depth on ground strokes and pace on volleys...

But, on the up side...the benefits are at the net where volleys play a key role(remember volleys, won or lost, reflect the vast majority of ALL the point-ending shots)...so getting your paddle on the ball at the net is the first priority, putting it away for a winner is the second!

So, if we agree that it would be best to at least maintain the same pace we once had with the heavier paddle, we must increase the paddle speed on many or most of our shots...adding paddle speed is a must if we wish to maintain our previous pace.

Most players generate paddle speed by using good stroke mechanics...adding additional paddle speed is usually obtained by increasing the speed of the arm...this maintains the greatest degree of control...

Adding even more paddle speed is done by incorporating the wrist,

the SNAP or POP mentioned above...do NOT discount the possibilities made available by the action of your wrist...it, more than anything else, can add the most paddle head speed(and resultant pace on the ball)!!!...but let's be clear...we are not just talking about a little wrist movement...we're talking about a wrist snap, a slap, a whip...all denoting a rapid flicking motion that causes the wrist to move virtually from zero to sixty in a fraction of a second...envison the table tennis player, many of whom are capable of generating incredible pace and spin with a mere flick of the wrist...

And don't use this SNAP just on volleys...use it on Overheads(forehands and especially backhands) to add that extra POP...use it on drives(Serve,Return, Third Shot, etc.) to add pace and depth...and on Lobs to add spin and depth...a great tool, that used with reserve, can add incredible pace when a set up or fat sitter or most any ball is presented...

To add the wrist SNAP to your strokes, start with your volleys...begin slowly and build up your speed until you've developed the POP you need to offset that lighter paddle!

TIPBITS #168

A WORD OF CAUTION

It does seem like the general consensus, when it comes to the number of weapons in your Pickleball arsenal, is that the more you have, the better...similarly stated, the more arrows in your quiver the better off you are...or much more directly, the more shots you have AND the more you can DO with the ball, the better you can become...is this ALWAYS true???

NOT hardly!!! Clearly, this is NOT true in the beginning(or even later on)...in the beginning(and this does NOT mean just for a Beginner player), you must master all the basic strokes so that you can depend on the fact that each shot you make can be expected to go exactly where you want it...your one and only arrow must always be on target...your one and only arrow is consistency...doing the basics well...this comes from lots of time on the court AND using good basic mechanics!

If you attempt to hit a topspin inside-out cross court drive before you've mastered a basic Third Shot drop, you've abandoned the basics before you've mastered them...similarly, hitting with tons of pace before you can control its path or depth is just another example...your goal must be to master all aspects of control, touch, placement, angles and pace(even strategy) BEFORE you should consider some more complicated alternatives...

Getting better means simply hitting a flat ball, keeping your wrist firm, taking the percentage shot at the right time...no amount of fancy new shots will ever out perform good sound fundamentals!!!

In other words, don't succumb to popular notions that spin is a cure all for keeping the ball in play or winning points...don't think that snapping your wrist on a volley will always win you extra points...as in playing good Percentage Pickleball, you must WAIT for the percentage shot to present itself before going for the winner...so also should you WAIT for your game to fully develop by using good sound basics before adding any new dimensions...don't add even one more arrow to your quiver before

you are absolutely sure that you have mastered the use of the first one!

Finally, recognize that you do NOT need to add anything more to your game to move from a Beginner to an Intermediate OR from an Intermediate to an Advanced player...you just need to master the basics!

TIPBITS #169

WRISTY (RISKY) ACTION

Previous articles have cautioned the player to be careful about adding too many "frills" to their game before developing basic sound fundamentals...but we don't want to move backwards in our game either...especially when we've done nothing more than simply changed paddles(moving to a lighter paddle that offers greater speed at the net BUT less pace for the same level of effort).

One method of adding pace to the ball is through the use of a rapid wrist motion or SNAP...versus the preferred, sound basic fundamental of a FIRM wrist!

The wrist SNAP may be used off either side, the forehand or the backhand...the concept is identical in terms of technique, just the specific motion varies...that is, the forehand motion requires the exact opposite motion from that of the backhand.

The Forehand Motion...the same basic motion is used whether you're hitting a drive (a Serve or a Return), a volley (waist high or higher) or an overhead...here's how the Forehand SNAP is done...using the Return as an example, take the Ready Position by holding your paddle straight out and in front of your body, the paddle's leading **edge** pointed at the Server and your **wrist straight in line with your forearm**...as the ball approaches, begin your Backswing by first **bringing just your wrist backwards** (if you're right handed, to the right, and vice versa) to a fully cocked open or extended position(which causes the face of the paddle to become open to the oncoming ball), then the arm is brought back...the Execution of the shot begins with the forward motion of the arm and just immediately prior to contact with the ball, **the wrist is snapped forward**, causing the paddle head and hand to move rapidly forward...this rapid acceleration of the paddle head adds significant pace to the ball...and SNAP!

The Backhand Motion...the same basic motion is required whether you're hitting a drive (a Return), a volley (waist high or higher) or a backhand overhead...BUT, on the backhand, the wrist motion is

exactly opposite or reversed...here's how the Backhand SNAP is done...using a backhand volley at the net as an example, take the Ready Position by holding the paddle up above the waist with the paddle's **face** pointed forward and **your wrist straight in line with your** forearm...as the ball approaches, **bring your wrist backwards** toward your body into a near fully cocked closed or flexed position...this basically "loads" your wrist for action...to Execute the shot, bring your arm forward to strike the ball, just immediately before contact, the wrist is snapped forward resulting in the same impact on the ball as from the forehand side...and SNAP!

To gain proficiency at this technique, you'll need either a ball machine or a hitting partner that can feed you balls, both while you're at the net from the baseline or while you're at the baseline and they're at the net...start slowly, adding more wrist motion as you get the feel for it...hit ground strokes off either side as well as both forehand and backhand volleys...don't forget to hit some high volleys as well as some overheads off both sides(you'll note that as you become more proficient at the wrist snap that your backhand overhead might even become a weapon)...Adding this SNAP will add fun, variety and maybe even improvement into your game!

TIPBITS #170

TIME TO RECAP

As we have done after each multiple of 9 TIPBITS, it still seems appropriate to continue to provide a review of the last 9...the rationale now is the same as it was then...many of the topics presented need time to digest or to be made a part of every day play or simply warrant repeating...so, here goes...

#161 Another Signaled Poach...using a signal to indicate the location for the Return

#162 Get Down, Stay Down...the benefits of and how to keep and stay low while playing

#163 Great Get! Really!...a description of a variety of great retrievals

#164 After the Great Get...options once you've reached a ball you weren't likely to get

#165 Paddle Weight...paddle characteristics, guidelines and pros/cons of paddle weight

#166 Offsetting Paddle Weight...basic mechanics needed to offset power lost using a lighter paddle

#167 Snap, Crackle and Pop...the value of using the wrist to add paddle head speed

#168 A Word of Caution...the importance of mastering the basics before trying new frills

#169 Wrist (Risky) Action...how to create paddle head speed using your wrist

REPEAT...You've read this before but absolutely nothing is more important than these next few sentences...Percentage Pickleball is not making mistakes... never over hitting, being under control, being patient and being in the right place at the right time... Percentage Pickleball, it's all about putting the percentages, the overwhelming likelihood that you will be successful, on your side!!!

TIPBITS #171

LEARN FROM THE BEST

Sometimes opportunity knocks...when you are given the chance to benefit by something special, you don't want to miss out...If you want to improve your Pickleball game, you can read articles, you can watch videos, you can take a clinic, you can attend drills, you can take a private lesson, you can even simply watch the best players...But rarely do you have the opportunity to learn from the very best and touch upon virtually every aspect of the game in just one session...we're describing an intense boot camp environment workshop on court with arguably one of the best teaching pros anywhere...given such an opportunity, you should not pass it up...that describes the soon to be offered Intense Pickleball Camp presented by Deb Harrison...

For those that don't know that name, welcome to our sport...not only is Deb well known throughout the Pickleball community as an incredible player with countless medals in every aspect of the sport but her teaching commitment is second to none...her playing accolades include too many to mention National Championships in every possible category(Womens Doubles, Mixed Doubles and Singles)... and to make things even more challenging, Deb frequently plays down several age levels to push her self even harder...this describes her approach to teaching as well...in The Villages, her current hometown, NO ONE but NO ONE spends more time teaching, day after day, than Deb...she has nearly 40 years of experience teaching racket sports to all levels and to all ages...she knows WHAT she's doing and she knows HOW to do it!

This camp reflects her uncompromising drive to excel...whether its her approach to the basics and fundamentals, her discussion and presentation of every possible shot and variation there of, the why's and wherefore's of using spins and pace, court positioning and strategies or the mental side of the game...no where else can you get these kind of focused insights and training...it's coming to your town SOON but you'll need to sign up to get in...don't let this opportunity pass you by!!!

TIPBITS #172

INSIGHTS FROM A NATIONAL CHAMPION

(This TIPBITS format presents some Background and Insights from the Best Players in the Country)

DAVE WEINBACH

Where were you born?

I was born in Kansas City, MO and raised in Milwaukee, WI. I currently reside in Madison, WI with my wife Dina and 3 boys Jake , Ryan , and Sam (all have the Pickleball Addiction).

Did you play other sports?

I grew up playing tennis and basketball and now enjoy Golf and Platform tennis as well as Pickleball.

Do you remember where and when you first played PB?

I was first introduced to our great sport in Surprise, AZ at Sun City Grand when my parents moved from Milwaukee in 2007. Then, I started playing in Madison , WI in 2013.

We built a pickleball court at our house a year ago as my wife and 3 boys all love to play and it gets used on a daily basis. We really enjoy introducing this great game to our friends. Madison just built a 6 Dedicated Pickleball Court Complex, so we are excited to spread the Pickleball love to many more !!!

What is your favorite shot?

My favorite shot is hitting a well executed Third Shot drop.

What paddle(s) do you currently use?

I use The Tempest Wave paddle by Paddletek (7.55 oz) and I use the Bantam Ex-L (7.75 oz) by Paddletek for singles.

Do you have a warm up routine or a shot you practice or a drill you like?

When I warm up or drill I am focusing on hitting unattackable dinks, consistent serves and service returns into the second half of

court, and of course executing effective Third Shot drops. I also like to incorporate some skinny singles drilling as well where we are utilizing half the court only.

What do you think is the most important shot in PB and why?

The most important shot in the game is the Third Shot drop because this is the shot that enables you and your partner to get from the baseline to the kitchen line where you need to be to play winning pickleball. In my clinics, we spend the most time on executing the proper mechanics and strategy regarding the Third Shot.

Would you care to add anything(suggestions/comments) you'd like the readers to hear?

Pickleball is such a wonderful form of exercise , great way to meet new friends as it's very social with four players on a small court, and we are usually in a beautiful setting when playing outdoors. Now get on the courts and have some fun and remember to Respect The Net !

HITTING UNATTACKABLE DINKS

This title was borrowed from our previous National Champion article that provided Insights from Dave Weinbach...his comment above says volumes about the importance of developing your soft game...the single word "unattackable" makes all the difference between a winning strategy versus a nearly certain losing approach...it makes no difference whether you are talking about the Third Shot or just one of many soft dinks during a net rally...if you get the ball up too high or put it too close to your opponents' strength, you'll lose the point right then and there(or at best a shot or two later)...

Dave emphasizes this fundamental principle in his discussion of what's important and what to practice...if you didn't catch this in your first reading of this article, it really bears repeating...not just this one point about the soft game but about the basis for fundamentally sound Pickleball strategy... as we call it, Percentage Pickleball!!!

Master these strokes/strategies FIRST!!!

They are the strokes and strategies that Dave feels are the most important to practice and to master...hitting "unattackable" dinks, consistent Serves and Service Returns into the second half of the court, and of course executing effective Third Shot drops...other key words..."consistent" and barely noticeable "second half" of the court...clearly what Dave is saying here is that consistently "effective" Serves and Return **MUST** land in the "second half" of the court...to "MOVE ON" in your game you **MUST** master these fundamentals...Dave has!!!

Finally, did you see this comment? "Remember to Respect The Net!"?

What's your take on that statement?

TIPBITS #174

SKY HOOK?

What should you do when your opponents hit a well placed Lob up the middle and pretty much out of reach of both players? Normally, you have a couple of options; hit an overhead(forehand or backhand) or scramble back and do your best...BUT what if the Lob is just high enough to be out of reach of an overhead but moving too fast for you to chase it down?

Consider the Sky Hook...yes the famous shot popularized by Jimmy Connors years ago...its namesake, the hook shot from basketball, describes the "look" of the shot...its single biggest benefit...being able to hit a ball that has already passed over your head out of reach of a normal overhead but still reachable with your outstretched(and straight) arm...

Actually, the Sky Hook is much easier to execute and more controllable than the conventional overhead...for these very reasons, it could be considered for use under many more circumstances...if your goal is to place the overhead rather than attempt to make a put away, consider the Sky Hook...if it's windy, you'll find it much easier to control than the conventional overhead(far fewer moving parts)...again, making it more reliable and easier to place effectively...of course, if your only objective, when you get an overhead opportunity, is to crush the ball, the Sky Hook is probably not for you...at least until you have no other choice...isn't that reason enough to add it to your "bag"?

To execute the Sky Hook, you'll need to start with a pivot to the right(if you're right-handed) and a step back with your right foot...if you need to step further back, shuffle as needed...you'll keep the same grip you use for all your other shots, stretch your arm and paddle straight back and pointed to the back of the court...keeping your whole arm straight and firm, begin the stroke by bringing your whole arm upward and forward in a smooth and steady motion until contact...only a limited follow through is necessary, another benefit as this allows you to return to the ready position much more quickly...should it be necessary to redirect the ball, consider adding

a last second wrist snap or flick!!!

The Sky Hook will not only keep you in the point it will offer you another opportunity to win the point...why not give it a try?...what have you got to lose?

OVERHEAD OR SKY HOOK

We previously discussed the use of the Sky Hook to solve the problem of effectively reaching a Lob placed out of reach of a conventional overhead...we even suggested that the Sky Hook could be used to replace, in some cases, the conventional overhead...let's give that some further thought...

Similarities:

Both strokes are used to hit an oncoming ball that is too high to hit with a ground stroke or volley...

Both strokes are used to hit downward on the ball...

Both strokes can be used to hit a winner off of an oncoming high ball...

Differences:

The Passed Ball...the conventional overhead cannot be used effectively to reach a high ball that has passed or gotten behind us, whereas the Sky Hook can effectively reach the passed ball...

Mechanics/Execution...simplification is the key to consistency in performance and results and the Sky Hook is far easier to execute than the conventional overhead...in the case of the Sky Hook, the player need simply pivot or turn, extend the paddle and arm straight back and then, with a stiff and extended arm, bring the paddle forward and upward until contact and finish with an abbreviated follow through...but the conventional overhead mechanics are more complex, more elements are involved and greater timing is required for successful execution...like the Sky Hook, the conventional overhead begins with the pivot or turn and that's where the similarities end...the power for the conventional overhead comes from a chain of events or a series of rotations that starts with the legs, continues through the mid-section, then by the rotation of the shoulders, then from a severely bent elbow that is rotated rapidly upwards and finally the very quick motion of the wrist snapping at exactly the proper point of contact.

Placement/Control...clearly a stroke that merely requires a straight arm to find that proper contact point is far less involved and less complicated than that of the conventional overhead described above, consequently resulting in far better control and success.

Pace/Power...here the conventional overhead far outweighs its counterpart simply because the power that can be produced by the Sky Hook is limited by the speed at which the straight arm can be rotated by the shoulder versus the combined rotations of virtually the whole body used by the conventional overhead.

Shoulder Strain...constant repetition of either of these strokes will lead to the potential for shoulder strain and both should be limited in their use especially during drills...of the two, however, the Sky Hook does pose the greatest threat to shoulder strain and injury.

As a player, you've undoubtedly developed a conventional overhead but why not give the Sky Hook a try?...it could improve your percentages of points won versus points lost!?

THINK OF THE POSSIBILITIES

Where's your game at right now?...by chance, are you ready to go Indoors for the season?...or are you getting ready to play an Indoor event?...Whatever the case may be, here is some interesting information that could result in a new trend in our game!

In previous articles, we have discussed the pros and cons (pluses and minuses) of Indoor play versus Outdoor play...while there were many pros and cons each way, the single biggest difference or most influential difference was The Ball...If you are exclusively an Outdoor player and never plan to play Indoors, you might choose to not read on...Otherwise, consider this(BTW: while it might be nice, we are not going to talk about some newly introduced Ball that will be sanctioned for both Indoor and Outdoor play!)...

This is about the towns that have indoor tennis facilities...yes, some towns have none, but most towns have some, and some towns have many...what an opportunity to grow the sport!

"We just need more courts!""? Opportunity is knocking!

Indoor tennis courts were all designed and built with the exact components needed by a Pickleball court...to begin with, they all have well thought out and bright lighting...solid color backgrounds that provide contrast for even better visibility...high ceilings, not by accident but by design...plenty of space, as dictated by the sport's governing body...and, most importantly, a consistent and predictable playing surface...of note here, also, is the fact that most Outdoor Pickleball courts are built on what used to be tennis courts...being Outdoors, they are particularly susceptible to climate conditions; cracking, heaving, puddling, staining, and the list goes on...not so with Indoor tennis courts!

Finally...you can use the Same Ball used Outdoors to play Indoors!

Do you "need more courts"? Isn't it time to start knocking on some doors?

TIPBITS #177

THE THUD

The Thud...we are referring to the sound your paddle makes when you hit an off-center shot...you've heard it, no doubt...the question is, have you heard it more often lately OR more frequently on one particular day?...The Thud is not only a distinctive sound, it usually results in an errant shot and that shot is usually off target, not necessarily by a lot but just enough to cost you the point!

If it happens once, it's really no big deal...you were simply less attentive than you should have been and/or you miss read the approaching ball!

But if it happens repeatedly on a single day or in a single game, you've got a problem...and you need to fix it!

So, The Thud has gotten your attention...here's a few reasons it's happening...you just got a new paddle and it's quite different from your previous paddle...you're playing against a player(s) you're unfamiliar with and they are better than you...your opponent hits the ball harder than you are accustomed to...you haven't had your eyes checked lately and you probably need new glasses...you're not watching the ball well enough...that gives you quite a few "excuses"...

But, some of these reasons are acceptable and there is nothing you can do to fix or change them right here and now...the new paddle, you'll get used to it and The Thud will go away...there will always be better players than you, so you'll just have to accept that...you'll eventually be able to handle balls coming faster but today, you'll just have to accept that, too... seriously, if you DO think it's your eyes, get a check up just to be sure...

Finally, you're not watching the ball well enough...THIS is the one you can do something about right now...What does "well enough" mean?...**(NOTE: please read these slowly)**...are you seeing(picking up) the ball as it's heading TOWARD your opponent's paddle?...are you watching WHAT your opponent is doing with the paddle right

BEFORE impact?...are you watching its flight through the air
READING its pace and spin?...when will you DECIDE whether to
bounce it or hit it in the air?...are you watching the ball INTO your
paddle?...these are all questions you must ask yourself sometimes
in a fraction of a second...it REQUIRES your full and undivided
attention...so this begs the next very important question...are you or
can you be that focused?...because that is what it takes to prevent
The Thud...a commitment to be as focused on each of these
components of watching the ball "well enough"!

TIPBITS #178

PADDLE MAINTENANCE

When was the last time you gave your paddle some special attention? Like your car, you use it for hours on end...and you know, even though the car seems to be working just fine, it DOES need periodic maintenance...your paddle is no different...and just like your car, if you continue to avoid giving it some TLC, it will come back to haunt you...here's some things you should check AND do for your paddle...and, just like your car, the more often you use it, the more often you need to attend to it!

What do you need to maintain?...first, you need to examine your paddle's Grip, your paddle's Face and your paddle's Edge Guard...and then take the necessary action!

The GRIP: the grip on your paddle is constantly being subjected to the pressure of your hand and the torque and impact from hitting with spin and pace...if you use a glove, the grip's surface will be impacted even further...aside from the grip simply getting dirty, it will lose its tackiness(its ability to resist twisting and turning in your hand)...and the longer you avoid attending to it, the more wear it will have received...it will not only be less resistant to twisting but will have also lost its original circumference(it's gotten smaller)...what to do?

Well, you do have options... first off, grips come in 2 basic varieties...either a "replacement" grip or an "overwrap" or "overgrip"...the difference is that the "replacement" grip is similar in thickness to the grip that came with your paddle..."overgrips" are as the name implies and are much thinner, usually one-half to one-third the thickness of the "replacement" grip...while the "replacement" grips usually only come in Henry Ford's favorite color, "overgrips" come in just about any color(and even patterns)...if you liked the size(thickness), texture(flat, grooved, etc) and color(black) of your current grip, go to your local sporting goods store(or online supply store) and purchase a "replacement" grip exactly the same as your old one...

But, you may wish to consider some other options...if you find you're going through grips quickly(they lose their tackiness quickly), you might wish to consider "overgrips"...they are one-sixth the cost(they are sold in packets of three) of a single "replacement" grip and are MUCH easier to remove and replace...another reason to consider an "overgrip" is that they allow you to modify the size (circumference) of your grip...and they can be used in combination with the "replacement" grip or with other "overgrips" allowing you to fine tune the size of your grip...grip size does have an impact on control, pace, spin, comfort AND can serve as a safeguard from injury or relief from injury...but, another time for those topics...

Now, replacing your own grip is NOT rocket science...you CAN do it yourself...simply, pay attention to the way your original grip was applied when you're removing the old one...and then put the new one on in reverse order...note especially the direction and angle of the grip's rotation on the handle...almost all grips are applied initially at time of manufacture and they are applied as if they are to be used by right-handed players...start by removing the thin tape that binds the grip to the handle(near the bottom of the paddle's Face (the top of the handle))...then, simply unwind the grip from the handle until it comes off the end.....as of this writing, these grips are somewhat generic for all racket sports, so the grip you purchase will need to be trimmed(they're all too long)...a simple scissors is your best tool for this job...

Probably the most important factor in doing this job well, is to pay particular attention at the start...almost all grips, either "replacement" grips or "overgrips" are cut at the factory in a similar manner...many have a tapered end sometimes with an inch or so of tacky surface at the very end to help you attach it and then the other end is either straight or tapered...it's really a matter of personal choice as to which end you start with...for Pickleball paddles, you are always going to need to trim the end, anyway...

The best results when replacing your grip are achieved by applying a great degree of tension while re-wrapping the grip(done by stretching the material)...to be successful, you must start by overlapping the first full turn totally parallel to the butt of the

paddle...once you've done this, you should be able to tug on the grip as you continue to apply it on the diagonal upwards until you reach the edge of the paddle's Face...now it's time to trim it off, preferably at an angle and then secure the wrap in place...this is done by applying the tape provided onto the top turn of the wrap...that's it!

If this is the first time you've tried this, be patient...you may need to restart several times until you get it just right...and that's no problem...few get it just right the first time!

TIPBITS #179

PADDLE MAINTENANCE(2 of 2)

We previously talked about the similarities between your car's needs and those of your paddle...both get plenty of use and both need attention...if they don't get proper and timely attention, their performance can and will be affected...

And we talked at some length about the paddle's Grip...why it needs attention, the two basic options (replacement grips or overgrips), the choices each provides AND how to actually replace your grip yourself...we also touched on the fact that you might wish to alter the size of your grip, but did not go into detail as to the various reasons for such a change...we will cover that subject at another time...

Of course, the Grip was just one component of your paddle that needs your attention...the paddle's Face and the paddle's Edge and/or Edge Guard also need to be addressed...

The paddle's Face clearly bears the blunt of all your hitting activities...it's constantly impacted or bombarded by every conceivable type of shot...balls with pace, balls with every imaginable spin, probably even different types of balls(indoor or outdoor, soft or hard, etc.) and probably balls coming off of every conceivable surface...does that suggest anything?...kind of the likes of what your car goes through on a trip, even just to the grocery store...messy streets, bugs, the weather's elements...how long do you let IT go before you attend to IT?

What we are talking about here is the need to give your paddle's face a wash job...the surface can become infused with the dirt off the court that constantly comes off the ball...how can your paddle's surface possibly provide a clean, crisp contact area if it hasn't been cleaned for who knows how long?

What should you do?...start by locating some very mild dish detergent, perhaps the one you see ads for that are used to clean up birds caught up in oil spills(for example)...find a clean soft

cloth(preferably cotton)...then dampen the cloth with warm water, add a spot of your detergent and gently rub the surface of your paddle...a circular motion works the best but don't skip over any of the area...do both sides(of course)...buff off the entire area...if you haven't done this for awhile, you'll clearly notice the difference, both in looks and in feel...

Now, the paddle's Edge and/or Edge Guard...as far as receiving abuse, your paddle's Edge is the most susceptible to damage...it is the weak spot on your paddle, especially the upper end of the paddle...first, examine within one inch of the paddle's edge...do this all the way around but pay the most attention to the upper end of the paddle....take notice of any areas that seem less than perfectly flat or feel in any way softer than the surrounding areas...if you find inconsistent thickness or a softness in an area, you have a problem...these areas can no longer provide a predictable stable hitting surface and must be addressed...further, continued use of the paddle will only worsen this situation...if you have not had your paddle for too long, it's time to contact your paddle's manufacturer and ask them to replace it...most manufacturers guarantee the playing surface against such defects...should they be unwilling to replace your paddle, consider a manufacturer that offers a longer/stronger guarantee...

Presuming you have not spotted any such defects, now examine the Edge Guard itself(assuming your paddle has one)...gently pull on the Edge Guard to be certain that it is firmly attached to the paddle...it is not the least bit uncommon for the Edge Guard to become loose from either (way) off center hits or contact with the ground...if you notice ANY area where the guard seems loose, you must also attend to this ASAP...not doing so will inevitably result in damage to the paddle AND at the very least WILL impact the paddle's performance...if you are uncomfortable with this kind of repair, seek out an expert in your area OR contact your paddle's manufacturer and ask for their recommendation...most manufacturers will provide this service...but don't wait!

Your car and your paddle...they both need your attention!

TIPBITS #180

TIME TO RECAP

As we have done after each multiple of 9 TIPBITS, it still seems appropriate to continue to provide a review of the last 9...the rationale now is the same as it was then...many of the topics presented need time to digest or to be made a part of every day play or simply warrant repeating...so, here goes...

#171 Learn from the Best...If you ever have an opportunity, take an intense PB camp

#172 Insights from a National Champion-Dave Weinbach...hitting unattackable dink shots

#173 Hitting Unattackable Dinks...the most important shot of all the basics

#174 Sky Hook?...Use this shot adapted from Tennis to reach balls that get beyond your overhead

#175 Overhead or Sky Hook...the similarities and differences and the pros and cons of each

#176 Think of the Possibilities...using indoor tennis facilities opens the door to more than new courts

#177 The Thud...that sound you hear on an off-center hit and why it happens

#178 Paddle Maintenance...why and how to maintain your paddle's Grip

#179 Paddle Maintenance (2 of 2)...why and how to maintain your paddle's Face and Edge/Guard

REPEAT...You've read this before but absolutely nothing is more important than these next few sentences...Percentage Pickleball is not making mistakes... never over hitting, being under control, being patient and being in the right place at the right time... Percentage Pickleball, it's all about putting the percentages, the overwhelming likelihood that you will be successful, on your side!!!

TIPBITS #181

TIPBITS MANTRA

In virtually all the preceding TIPBITS articles, no one single theme has been professed more than that of the notion of Percentage Pickleball...and its definition has been repeated time and time again...Percentage Pickleball is (1) not making mistakes...(2) never over hitting, (3) being under control, (4) being patient and (5) being in the right place at the right time... Percentage Pickleball, it's all about putting the percentages, the overwhelming likelihood that you will be successful, on your side!!!

Five (5) Points...these 5 points all have one thing in common...they're "all about you"...what YOU do to be successful...not one point addresses your playing opponents...and #1 on the list, Not Making Mistakes, really is the most crucial point of all...the team that makes the least number of mistakes is almost always, percentage-wise, the team that is going to win!!!

If Not Making Mistakes IS the most important point in winning, what can you do to prevent mistakes from happening?...you must recognize and understand that making mistakes begins and ends by always getting and keeping the ball in play...this has nothing to do with your opponents across the net...IT IS THE NET!

Your first opponent IS the NET and you must get the ball over the net...if you don't get the ball over the net, you have ZERO chance of winning the point...even getting the ball too high over the net is far better than not at all...remember that the next time you try to cut your drop shot too close to the net...it's not worth it!

Your next opponent IS the court itself...or more precisely, the LINES...going for the Lines is not Percentage Pickleball...not making mistakes means keeping the ball INSIDE the lines...give yourself a margin for error of at least a foot on every shot you hit...you'll make far fewer errors or mistakes that cost you the point...and you'll add considerably to your winning percentage!

Know your opponent...Count those 2 errors and see!!!

TIPBITS #182

NEW BALL OBSERVATIONS

If you have not seen or heard about the "new ball", we're discussing the pickleball recently introduced by ONIX...it's called the Pure 2 ball...

Its introduction was preceded by the ONIX Pure 1 ball...the Pure 1 was well received by the PB community for the same reasons the Pure 2 ball has now been labeled the "new ball"...it's popularity and rapid rise to fame have contributed to its nickname ...unfortunately for ONIX, the Pure 1 ball did not meet our governing body's(the UASPA) criteria for acceptance...it did not meet their standards in 2 notable areas...it was too heavy and it bounced too high...hence, the Pure 2 ball which meets the USAPA guidelines...

What did they do to fix it?...they probably just shaved some weight off...that made it slightly lighter...and the loss of that extra weight resulted in a ball that no longer bounced too high...

There is a bit of a catch, here however...the Pure 2 ball does bounce too high right out of the carton..it has to be "conditioned" in order to bounce to within the guidelines...you can do this "conditioning" before using it by simply pressing down on the ball some 1/2 inch or so all around the ball...or you can play with it for 4 or 5 games and it will pretty much "condition" itself...

So, why did this ball become so popular so quickly?... this "new ball" has its own set of pro's and con's...but, let's talk features first...some obvious features of the "new ball" is that all the holes are the same size and somewhat larger and it tends to resemble the indoor ball(though the holes ARE smaller than the indoor ball, however)...the ball feels and IS much softer to the touch, again similar to the indoor ball but NOT quite as soft...its color is much more pronounced(brighter), again similar to many indoor balls...these are obvious features one first notices...how do they affect its use?

Pro's: 1) it's brighter color clearly makes the ball easier to see, 2)

because it is softer, it make far less noise then the "old ball", 3) because its softer, it's easier to add spin to the ball, meaning that you can initially create more spin than with the "old ball", 4) here's a good one...because its softer, it doesn't hurt you as much when you get tagged, 5) because the holes are bigger, again, it's easier to add (more) spin on the ball, 6) because of its overall design, the ball follows a more consistent trajectory, 7) because of its overall design, the ball has a far more predictable and consistent bounce, 8) because of its overall design, the ball lasts MUCH longer...it's clearly cost justifiable, and the really big positive, 9) because of its overall design, points last longer and its much easier to keep in play...this makes the ball a great equalizer, benefiting some players more than others

Con's: 1) because of its overall design, points last longer...

The points last longer because the design of the ball causes the "new ball" to lose both its pace and spin much more quickly than the "old ball"...in other words, the effectiveness of pace and spin are of less significance...a great equalizer! Your thoughts?

TIPBITS #183

WRIST RESCUE

When learning many of the basics of the game, most coaches recommend keeping the use of your wrist out of most shots...it's not consistent with sound stroke fundamentals...as a matter of fact, a very firm wrist is strongly encouraged during development of virtually every stroke!

Now, that's not to say that use of the wrist is not of value in many circumstances...because it has many uses with many strokes...IT'S JUST NOT EASY TO MASTER...it does not EASILY lend itself to the level of consistency that's required for winning Pickleball percentages...with that said, however, we are going to look at just ONE use of this often forbidden technique...

It's not that the wrist usage isn't of value because many shots or strokes can be enhanced by its use...some common benefits, probably in order of value or effectiveness, include 1) significantly greater pace, 2) control over direction and/or redirection of the ball's path and 3) rescuing balls (keeping them in play) when no other option exists...

the ONE use for this article is #3, the Wrist Rescue...we'll discuss the others in subsequent articles...

What's a Wrist Rescue anyway?...it's needed when you were fooled by a shot or got caught moving the wrong way or?...in any event, the ball got past you...and it makes no difference which side you got passed on(backhand or forehand), you've got next to no time to salvage this point!...you're going to have to RESCUE it from behind your body with very little time...certainly no stroke you've been taught can save you...until NOW!

How?...turn your body to the side the ball has passed you on and take a step or two towards the back(not backward), if you have time...stretch your hand and paddle back as far as you can (hopefully at least far enough to get your paddle past (behind) the ball)...then, the Wrist Rescue...your paddle is now pointing to the

back fence with your wrist straight, in line with your paddle and PARALLEL to the path of the ball...if you were to swing with your ARM now, the ball would go off to the side...BUT, if you simply flick or snap your WRIST forward, the paddle's plane will now be PERPENDICULAR to the ball's path and, timed just right, the ball will be catapulted back over the net...this works equally well off of either side...

Before you start play, try this a few times on both sides...do it during your soft dink/drop shots at the net during warm-up...you'll be pleasantly surprised how easy it is to do and how effective it can be when you get in trouble...use the Wrist Rescue!

TIPBITS #184

STACK ON DEFENSE

Stacking or the use of the Power Formation is a strategy often used to highlight or make the best use of the strengths of the better player...this topic has been discussed in prior articles(refer to articles #34 and #35)...in essence, it's putting the strongest player into the position on the court where he or she can have the greatest degree of influence on the result of the point...namely, winning the point!

Some of the most common situations for Stacking, in earlier days, was to put the forehands of teams having a left handed player and a right handed player always in the middle...this put, what is typically the strongest/most effective stroke of both players down the middle...the middle being the desired target of most point ending shots!

This thinking evolved to placing the stronger overall player on the side of the court where that player would always have his or her forehand in the middle(for the same reasoning as the lefty/righty scenario)...and this strategy was almost always used in Mixed Doubles matches...and is still, probably the most prominent use of the Stacking strategy today!

And the logic behind using Stacking for Mixed Doubles naturally evolved even further...it now meant simply putting the best strengths of both players where they can be the most effective...it no longer meant getting the best forehand in the middle BUT getting and keeping the best/most effective line up on the court each and every time!

The sole purpose, almost always, to put the best, most effective point winning line up out to win points...highlighting their OFFENSE!

But, how about Defense?...consider this...for whatever reason, your team has a player that does not do well against ONE of your opponents...and it's not just once in a while, it's more often than

not...it's hurting you and your ability to score points or defend when receiving...you lose almost all those head to head rallies...what can you do?

Here's another reason to Stack...the Defensive Stack...instead of letting this situation continue, change it up by Stacking your way OUT of the less than successful alignment...never or rarely have that unsuccessful pairing take place...and do it by moving your player around so the unsuccessful alignment is avoided...simple solution...Stack on Defense!..

TIPBITS #185

THINK OR REACT

As the ball approaches, do you Think about where you should place your shot or do you simply React?

Having a plan might actually lend itself to a Thoughtful placement versus a reflex Reaction...you might get lucky some of the time but a plan probably would provide you with consistently better results, don't you think?...let's address the need for that plan...and call it a strategy!

It really doesn't make any difference if you're just playing a single game in open play...whether you're playing with a regular partner or the player next in line...or if you're in a league or tournament match... you'd just like to win...and to do that, you should have a strategy...something that may take just a few seconds of your time...a talk with your partner before the game begins...it could start with something as simple as "What should we do to win this match?".

If you think this makes sense, then consider a few topics...if you know your opponents, this discussion becomes a lot easier...start with your overall analysis of your opponents...your first question might be to decide whether to go with a power game or a soft game?...do you know your opponents' strengths?...do you know their weaknesses?...do you know which player is the stronger?...which one can hurt you the most?...which one keeps the ball in play?...which one has a weak spot?...where is the weak spot?...who are you going to attack?...do you dare attack either player?...should you always go up the middle?

The answers to these questions(and others) will help you form a game plan...your strategy!

Talk these points over with your partner AND then, agree on your approach!

If you don't know your opponents, you can still feel your way into

the match...make note as soon as possible about the very same questions asked above...discuss what you see with your partner...see if you agree...then, adopt that plan, that strategy and GO with it!

Either way, you now have a plan and you can THINK about your placements instead of merely REACTING when the ball comes your way...

Finally, if you find that your strategy isn't working, don't wait until you're too far behind...the consensus is that anytime you get behind by 3 is time to reconsider your plan...STOP and discuss it...don't simply React but Think about it...and then, DO something about it!

TIPBITS #186

LET IT GO

With pace becoming more and more an element of the game, it seems time to take a look at one of the strategies you might consider far more often...way too many long and wide balls are being kept in play when an easy point could be made by simply letting the ball go!

We're talking about "free" points...the ones you either give away or accept...usually there is one or two a game...BUT, they're usually on a errant Serve, or worse yet, an errant Return, the worst kind of "free" point...aside from not going for too much on your Serve or your Return, there is not much you can do during a match to avoid these kind of costly errors...

But that's not really the exact example we are talking about...it's about those balls you can't (don't) get out of the way of that will make the difference between winning and losing a hotly contested (close) match...certainly that's where communication is vital...however, this is NOT to say that ALL out balls that are erroneously kept in play can be avoided by your partner's timely reproach...but some can, so work on that!

The out balls we are talking about can be saved erroneously just about anywhere you are standing on the court...don't just think that because you're at the NVZ line that you're immune from this kind of give away...balls hit at you with pace from your opponents on their NVZ line are just as likely to go long as the one that's hit at your knees when your approaching the net...you must be aware of all these situations!

Can you really practice these situations?...Yes you can!...And you should!

Just take as little as 5 minutes with your partner(say during your last bit of warm up)...one player will be the feeder, the other the student...the feeder will hit balls near the student, the student will simply stand still in various spots on the court while the feeder

drives balls PAST the student...some will be in, some will be out...make note and LEARN...next the feeder will drive balls PAST the student on the diagonal...you'll be amazed how quickly the sideline will come into play...again, make note and LEARN...reverse roles and repeat!

Another slight variation...the feeder standing inside the base line drives balls AT the student...student stands at various spots and learns to move, turn, duck or do whatever maneuver is necessary to avoid the ball...make note and LEARN...reverse roles and repeat!

A little bit of this exercise may both help you more quickly recognize out balls as well as condition you to avoid them...to LET IT GO!

TIPBITS #187

RATINGS WEBSITE

Knowing your Pickleball Rating has distinct advantages when it comes to all sorts of playing options, from where do I fit in with my local groups, to which leagues should I get in, to what clinics and drills are suited for my level, to where should I sign up to play in upcoming tournaments...knowing your rating has definite value!

If you've played in just about any sizable tournament, you're in someone's website with a numerical value assigned to your skill level...a rating!

As we discussed in several other articles, ratings numbers, similar to those used for tennis and other sports, equate to a predefined set of documented criteria or skills...often a little difficult to judge accurately...hence, the somewhat wide range of skills players have that are identified, say, as 3.5...of course, there are thousands and thousands of 3.5 players...some are barely 3.5 and some are probably 3.99...yet, on that website, a 3.5 is a 3.5, regardless of your performance or results!

This situation may be changing...an industrious group of Pickleball folks have seen the need for something more...something, perhaps, a little more accurate...not that these folks are trying to re-invent the wheel...certainly other rating systems have existed throughout the competitive world for years, even decades...hence, the introduction of the ELO system to Pickleball ratings...with just the least little bit of research, one could see the inherent benefits of such a system as it relates to our current Pickleball ratings.

The new website is easy to find...it's simply called PickleballRatings.com...what could be more straight forward...and it gets much of its data from nowhere else but PickleballTournaments.com...some 13,000 plus particulars on day one...and ongoing data as new results become available... PickleballTournaments.com maintains results from all tournaments that utilize its resources for tournament management and tracking.

In its simplest form, players are assigned a (very large) base number dependent upon their old skill rating (EG., 4.0 = 2000) and then the recorded results of play against opponents increase or decrease that number to obtain a "ranking"...this process goes on (and on) as long as the player continues to have recorded play...that's it in a nutshell...the rating is ALSO now a "ranking" ...we'll delve into it a little deeper next time!

TIPBITS #188

RATINGS WRINKLES

Previously we discussed the benefits of knowing your rating, the somewhat vagueness of the currently used rating number scheme and then, touched upon a new website that addresses this vagueness by proposing a somewhat more scientific, less subjective approach.

The group of Pickleball folks who have presented this alternative scheme have borrowed a system used for many other games and sports called the ELO system, named after its founder Arpad Elo, an American physics professor...the scheme or system uses a not too complicated series of calculations that compares results of completed head to head matches to update each involved player's rating number.

The rating system website is PickleballRatings.com and the results website used to update ratings is PickleballTournaments.com...separate and unique ratings are maintained for 5 categories of play, Mens Doubles, Womens Doubles, Mixed Doubles, Mens Singles and Womens Singles.

The rating number scheme currently uses a 4 digit number, *starting* at 1000 that equates to the USAPA rating of 2.0 and it continues on up to a *starting* number of 2500 for USAPA ratings of 5.0...note that number is a *starting* number, meaning that this number serves as a base point where results of matches played will increase or decrease that number...the results of all your matches, past, present and future, will provide you with your rating number...or maybe more precisely, it gives you your ranking as it relates to all other players in the system, of which there are some 13,000 plus players .

While the system clearly offers a scientific method for ranking players in relation to each other, the calculations may still need some more thought, especially in the areas of Doubles ratings/rankings...

Singles rankings present a far less complicated scenario than

Doubles...in Singles, the only calculation issue is just "how much" do you add or subtract from each player as a result of their match...in Doubles, the calculation is far more complex...

The Doubles approach used consists, in some variation thereof, of adding both players rating numbers from each team together, and then determining just "how much" to add or subtract based on their results...this becomes particularly cumbersome when partners are of different levels...the numbers could easily become skewed.

One of the many benefits of the system, for starters, is that it's a computer based system...it can easily maintain tons of historical information and make it known to its user in any number of ways...a player can look back on all factors(matches) that have had an impact on his/her rating number...they can see his/her partner name and the opponents' names...they can see all their rating numbers going into the match...and they can see the resultant number after the match of all players involved...the use of this kind and amount of information is only limited by the imagination of the user!

Yet, there still is work to be done...but, the beauty of this effort is that all involved realize that this is still a work in progress...that its many benefits far outweigh the current scheme and that time will get the WRINKLES worked out!

TIPBITS #189

CASUAL PLAY PRACTICE

Getting better means spending time working on and perfecting your skills...it means adding arrows to your quiver(new shots, new “twists”(no pun intended) and new strategies) and making them part of your daily games...

Carving out time each week for practice may not always be an option for you...you may not have the time each week to set aside an hour or two for practice...you might not have a partner or foursome that's available on a regular basis...you might not have the court time available due to limited resources...or, if your limited to indoor play, you might not have adequate resources of your own to justify paying for extra court time just to practice!

And you certainly can't “experiment” with your game during tournaments, league matches, round robins or challenging matches...but that still does leave lots of time during casual play to practice! You just need to make the commitment to yourself to DO IT!

Every ball that comes to you presents an opportunity to practice...especially if you go into today's play with that attitude/goal...work on something!

And there are so many options available to you...you can practice your angles, don't hit every ball that comes to you back where it came from but angle it off one way or the other...don't hit every ball flat but add side, top or under spin to each one...don't just hit the ball back at the pace it came to you, but add some more pace of your own...don't just hit the ball over the net but hit it with depth whenever it makes good sense...don't settle for putting the ball anywhere, look for the opening and place it there!

Focus on the shots you really want to add or work on...there is certainly no reason why you cannot work on 1) your Serve every chance you get(and during an hour of play, you get plenty of chances)...you can work on 2) the placement and depth of your

Return...on the Third Shot, 3) you can hit a soft drop shot every time the Return lands near the baseline...or, if the Return is short, 4) you can drive your Third Shot up the middle...5) you can add a lob to virtually any point...a well timed and placed lob can be very effective, IF it's executed successfully...6) try taking all the pace OFF the ball and place it strategically out of reach of your opponents...or 7) use that same touch to work your way into the net using a series of soft drop volleys as you approach...work on your footwork/positioning, 8) your side shuffle, 9) your movement forward and 10) your position relative to your partner...or...???

Remember, though, whether you're playing or practicing, your RESULTS will always REFLECT the level of COMMITMENT you make and the amount of FOCUS you bring to the court!

TIPBITS #190

TIME TO RECAP

As we have done after each multiple of 9 TIPBITS, it still seems appropriate to continue to provide a review of the last 9...the rationale now is the same as it was then...many of the topics presented need time to digest or to be made a part of every day play or simply warrant repeating...so, here goes...

#181 The TIPBITS Mantra...Not making mistakes, etc, etc...the meaning of Percentage Pickleball

#182 New Ball Observations...Comparing the new style balls' pro's and con's to the DURA ball

#183 Wrist Rescue...Using your wrist when you've been fooled and the ball gets past you

#184 Stack on Defense...Early stacking rationale was for offense...now it can benefit your defense too

#185 Think or React...When playing with a partner, you need to be on the same page with a plan

#186 Let It Go...No more free points...tips and ideas on how to learn to let the ball go out

#187 Ratings Website...An introduction to a new and improved rating and ranking system

#188 Ratings Wrinkles...An in-depth look at the new rating system and some pro's and con's

#189 Casual Play Practice...Use your non-competitive play time to add to and improve your game

REPEAT...You've read this before but absolutely nothing is more important than these next few sentences...Percentage Pickleball is not making mistakes... never over hitting, being under control, being patient and being in the right place at the right time... Percentage Pickleball, it's all about putting the percentages, the overwhelming likelihood that you will be successful, on your side!!!

TIPBITS #191

OFFSETTING THE AGE THING

You never know when you may run into an opponent who's younger than you...(unless you signed up in an OPEN bracket of some tournament)...maybe you haven't had much of a chance to play against younger players...maybe you're thinking that your previously unsuccessful encounters with younger players was nothing more than that YOU had a bad day!

Unfortunately, this is just an unavoidable fact of life....all else being equal, the younger players always have the EDGE...don't want to accept that?...we did say “all else being equal”, same skill level, same gender, same everything except AGE...

Let's define younger players a bit...most larger tournaments break down categories of players into skill level AND age groupings...now, just to be clear, we are NOT talking about all the different age groups in the Under 35 group...nor are we talking about the 35 to 50 year old group...we are talking about any 70 year old playing a 50 year old in their skill level...or a 50 year old playing an under 35 year old...you get the picture...a 15 to 20 year swing of someone at least 50!

Let's look at what those AGE benefits might be...younger players almost always have quicker reflexes, they have better foot speed and they have more power...the younger players will out duel you on virtually every rapid fire exchange, they'll chase down every winner you thought you hit and if you set one up for them, run for cover!

Does this sound like a plus for you if you're the older team? Not likely!

Just like every other match you play, you need a PLAN at the offset...makes no difference if they're your peers, they're weaker players, they're better players or they're younger players...a PLAN is needed!

If it is a younger team you're going to play, consider this...if they can out duel you, chase down your winners and out hit you, what does that leave?...maybe you can actually use your age as a weapon???Really?!!...here's your ammunition...you've been around longer so you know more and you have more patience...let's put that to work!

First off, what NOT to do...Don't try to just give them Your best shot...Don't try to out hit them...Don't even think about outright winners because you're not going to get them!

Here's what TO DO...your best strength is that you're far more patient and you can wait for the eventual and inevitable error to occur...take advantage of that (your age thing)!

The crux of your PLAN...1) start by not letting them hurt you...2) don't give them anything to work with...3) keep it LOW and SLOW...4) keep it SHORT and CLOSE to the net...5) don't try any heroics(what NOT to do)...5) stay with the plan!

Use your age thing to make a difference!

TIPBITS #192

THE SERVE RULE

How can something that has caused so many discussions and so much conflict get so little attention in the rule book?...as of this writing, the Official IFP Rulebook has 68 pages of rules and such...But just three sentences on the Serve...NO OFFENSE meant whatsoever to the writer!!

Is the conflict an interpretation issue or is it an enforcement issue?

It seems almost every tournament director needs to discuss the plan for enforcement of or indifference towards THE RULE...it's not that it's simply a Beginner player's rule to learn(that's easy), its probably more an Advanced player's duty to respect and follow...the Serve motion has always been an issue and even some of the top players in the country question the "legality" of many of their opponents' Serves (to the point of utilizing slow motion videos to make their points)...in other words, sometimes it's just a tough call to make!

Further, there is no other specific stroke or shot in the whole game that is regulated or restricted in ANY WAY!!!

With all other shots/strokes, you're free to start your swing, hit the ball and/or follow through in any way you see fit...it makes NO difference...here is the Serve Rule...a direct and exact excerpt from Section 4 of the Official IFP Rulebook...

“4.A. Serve Motion. The serve must be made with an underhand stroke so that contact with the ball is made below waist level (waist is defined as navel level).(revised Feb. 1, 2013)

4.A.1. Underhand Defined. The arm must be moving in an upward arc and the paddle head shall be below the wrist when it strikes the ball (paddle head is that part of the paddle excluding handle. The highest point of the paddle head cannot be above any part of line formed where the wrist joint bends). (revised Feb. 1, 2013)”

No where does it say how much or how little lift or spin or pace you can put on the ball...nor does it say how you should impart (bestow) any of those qualities on it...nor does it say anything about what the paddle does after impact with the ball!

But what it does say is that, at the exact point of contact with the ball, 1) your arm must be moving in an upward motion, 2) the impact must be below the navel and 3) the paddle's head must be in the correct relation to your wrist!

Pretty much everyone gets the picture...it's probably more important that we all do right by it...

TIPBITS #193

SKINNY SINGLES

What is Skinny Singles?...it's a topic we've addressed briefly before but it warrants further review...it's a drill that just two players can use to improve almost all aspects of their game!

HOW is it played?...to begin with, each player stands at their respective base line on opposite sides of the net...they stand directly across from one another, as opposed to diagonally and all play will be straight across AND on one side of the court only...Rally scoring is used...either player may start serving and thereafter the player that wins the point will Serve...a point is awarded at the end of each point, without regard as to which player Served...the game is to 7, win by 1 only!

WHY is this such a valuable drill?...first off, it addresses the most basic of all the components of good Pickleball play...and, while it appears on the surface to be a drill for Singles players, it clearly is NOT...it is a drill designed specifically to improve your Doubles game!

SERVER: Start with a deep Serve(Note...it's straight across so you must focus more on placement)...keep it deep and with good pace so that you can keep your opponent back at the baseline for as long as possible!

RETURNER: Be ready, deep behind the baseline so that you can react instantly and aggressively to a deep well placed Serve...above all, Return the ball deep and note that you can't just hit it anywhere in this drill...you must hit it deep and within the 10 foot confines of your half of the court...follow the Return in ALL the way to the NVZ line taking your ready position immediately in front of the line!

SERVER: Stay behind the baseline and focused on the Returner's paddle...be ready to react at the instant the ball is struck...judge the location, depth, spin and pace of the Return...prepare your paddle for your response and move to the ball...notice your opponent's

position on the court...decide on your response(will you always stay with a Third shot drop strategy or will you be flexible, for example and drive the short Return or Lob one up because your opponent's all over the net)...again you must be aware of your now much smaller target...this makes shot selection and execution so important!

RETURNER: What is the Server doing with his Third shot? And is he approaching the net? If he's hit a successful Third shot drop and he's almost at the net, be prepared to exchange a series of slow dink shots keeping yours low enough to avoid offering a sitter and wait for your opportunity...if he has NOT been able to reach the net, don't invite him in...keep him at bay(away from the net) by driving the ball at his feet...repeat until you get a sitter and can put it away!

SERVER: Was your Third shot a success and did you make it to the net? If so, you are undoubtedly engaged in a soft game duel and you know what to do...if you didn't make it to the net on your Third shot, you are now forced to fend off shots at mid court aimed at your feet or body...keep low, paddle in front at your knees and attempt to soft pedal the drives being hit at you until you can split step and soft touch your way to the net!

What have you learned through this exercise?...Control, placement, pace with depth, improved hand to eye and reflexes(hitting eye to eye with one player on half a court), keeping with an accepted strategy, foot speed required to get you to the net, a higher level of competition, and greater endurance(you're hitting every ball versus just half of them because you have no partner..this part you'll have to experience to believe)...try it!

TIPBITS #194

THE NVZ LINE

Lines, they are every where...they dictate the boundaries of our game...where we can stand and where we can hit...they're targets we aim for, either with our feet or with our shots...but, we need to have a good understanding of how best to use them!

The baselines and sidelines constrain where we can stand and where we can put the ball...the NVZ line and center line further restrict where we can Serve...oh yeah...and the NVZ line dictates what we can do and where we can stand!

Yes, when we Serve, really both players SHOULD stand behind the baseline...when we Receive, we should really stand behind the baseline...thereafter, with the exception of the NVZ line, none of the lines really have any bearing on where we can stand...so it's the NVZ line that's got our attention...

Often, Beginners and even some Intermediate players develop some not so good habits that are formed out of, perhaps, fear...fear of a couple of things...if you stand too close to the NVZ line, you may inadvertently step on or over it and be called for a Fault...OR you may just be fearful of getting whacked by a high speed ball and standing back away from the NVZ line buys you time to prepare(or duck)...however, neither of these approaches will help you win more points or games!

Why?...well, you might accept the fact that winning at Pickleball is often more about not losing(not making mistakes) than it is about winning(hitting winners)...BUT to win consistently, you cannot let winning opportunities pass you by! This is where your position at the NVZ line becomes critical(not just an interesting idea) but a very real fact and benefit!

First off, you must shake off your fears...if you're worried about stepping into the kitchen or of being a target, then you've got to get comfortable with being there...that begins with your stance...1) keep your feet just two to three inches from the NVZ line and keep

them more than just comfortably apart(take your shoulder width and add six inches or so to that length to use as your base)...this will give you a firm base...2) then crouch down, bending your knees(comfortably)...your posture will help you be capable of hitting without moving your feet AND it will allow you to better see and react to balls hit at you!

Why is it so important to stay as close to the net as possible?...it seems that many players stand back a foot or more when rallying at the net...as we said earlier, this can be seen in many Beginning and even in some Intermediate level players!

But if you take a somewhat more aggressive position closer to the net, you WILL be able to hit down on the ball more often AND sooner than you could if you're a foot or more behind the NVZ line...a simple fact you CANNOT ignore!...this is PB101...And if you're not doing it yet, it's not too late...add this to your game and you'll see your winning results improve over night!

TIPBITS #195

DOWN THE MIDDLE

Where should you aim to hit a winner? “Down the Middle will Solve the Riddle”...How many times have you heard this phrase? Tons, but what exactly does it mean?

Clearly, the meaning is simple...your best chances, your best odds, your highest percentages for success is to hit the ball down the middle...all other options are less likely to produce point ending winning results!

Doesn't going down the middle all the time become predictable and then, a less favorable choice? Sure, but who said anything about always? Most points don't end on the first shot...many don't end for quite a few shots...are all those other shots all down the middle?...not likely...they're everywhere...it's just that when you want to go for a winner, the odds on favorite is...”Down the Middle”!

Here are some very common scenarios...

1)Close Up and Big Opening...you're close to the net, inches from the NVZ line...you've moved your opponents apart and there's an opening...a simple slow and carefully placed ball will get you a winner almost every time...a good percentage option!

2)Close Up and Little Opening...again, now you need to force the ball through the middle...but it's better to go for the opening in the middle than going wide(and being out) or at the opponent(and having it come back)...the best option for the situation!

3)Way Back and Big Opening...you're on the base line and both opponents are at the net, just NOT that close together...HELLO...where are you going?...obviously down the middle but this time you need plenty of pace to get the ball into the opening before they close it off...a good option but remember that the pace you add reduces your chances for success!

4)Way Back and Little Opening...you're on the base line and both opponents are at the net, NOT giving you much room...while your percentage shot IS a soft dink, almost anywhere, one down the middle has a greater degree for success(not a winner but a chance to play your way further into the point)!

But, just on occasion, why not drive one hard and low right down the middle?...add some top spin to make it all the more difficult to reach...IF that shot does go over the net, it IS low, and it IS dipping from spin, you have now created a great possibility for a winner!

One other note...it's no riddle, you'll need to practice this shot for best results!

TIPBITS #196

INSIGHTS FROM A NATIONAL CHAMPION

(This TIPBITS format presents some Background and Insights from the Best Players in the Country)

ERNIE TOMLINSON

Where were you born?

I was born in Clarinda Iowa

Did you play other sports?

I played virtually everything I possibly could as a kid from swimming, baseball, basketball, football, tennis and enjoyed competing in each of the above.

Do you remember where and when you first played PB?

I first played Pickleball in The Villages and my tennis skills transferred very well. However, I did have to learn a new strategy and also shorten my tennis strokes. Adding in the soft game and the third shot drop where a challenge but one I very much enjoyed, learning techniques to keep the ball short and keep the ball down.

What is your favorite shot and why?

My favorite shot is anything with topspin...whether it be a forehand drive, a backhand drive, a forehand topspin volley or backhand topspin volley or the topspin lob from either side.

What paddle(s) do you currently use?

I currently use the Engage Pickleball Encore paddle. It was one of the first paddles that Rob Elliott made and it is my go to paddle.

Do you have a shot you practice or a drill you like?

As for practicing certain shots, I try to practice a variety of shots as I play socially and I try to perfect them during casual play. I figure if I don't practice them in casual and social play, I will be hesitant to use them in a match that's competitive. One of the shots I look forward to hitting in a practice situation is taking the ball in the air as it drops below my knees and then I try to topspin it with a

forehand or a backhand with a quick slap. It took a while to get consistent but it is a very surprising attack which has produced many winners. It is a high risk shot and it has taken lots of practice to be able to keep it down, keep it in and still hit with some pace.

Do you have a warm up routine?

As for a warm-up routine, if I am playing socially I just kind of warm up and stretch as I participate, knowing that I am not going to push too hard for anything too soon. If I am in a competitive tournament, my warm-up becomes both physically doing some stretching and preparing different muscle groups as well as mentally and spiritually getting myself in the proper frame of mind.

What do you think is the most important shot in PB?

There are many important shots in the game of Pickleball but probably the worst mistake is failure to return serve. The most important shot is making the right shot at the right time in the right location to win the point.

Would you care to add anything(suggestions/comments) you'd like the readers to hear?

In competition, I really enjoy strategizing an attack and then concentrating on high percentage shots, elimination of errors and knowing when to take a risk (generally basing a risk on the score of the match and which team is serving). The one thing I would recommend to players who are trying to get better is to learn a variety of shots and then put them into your game plan. This would also include different spins, different pace and different heights as well as being able to place the ball where you want it.

Also, I would encourage everyone to give back to the game by teaching others, getting out of their comfort zone and volunteering in some capacity. Consider being a referee, a tournament director, a league organizer or something of that nature. Or even being an instructor or just a friend helping others learn how to play or improve their abilities. But for sure play for fun and enjoy the fellowship of those around.

Finally, I pray often as I play and my relationship with Jesus is a very important part of my life.

TIPBITS #197

INSIGHTS FOLLOW UP (1 of 3)

ERNIE TOMLINSON

Our last article, Insights from a National Champion, was filled with more common sense thinking than almost any other single article from other National Champions...but we have come to expect nothing less from this larger than life(literally) player...for those who haven't as yet had the privilege to meet with or having had the misfortune of competing against him, he's a 6'6" gentle giant.

To amplify the comment above addressing the caliber of Insights in virtually every paragraph, you could start with his Sports Background...he "enjoyed competing" in every sport he played...the emphasis here is NOT on the word "competing" but on the word "enjoyed"...it's this constant attitude that prevails, that defines the person!

Let's review some of the other notable comments...for Ernie, an accomplished tennis coach and player, for Pickleball, those strokes (notice) needed to be shortened!...further, several new strategies needed to be developed, namely the Soft Game and the Third Shot Drop...this required learning to keep the ball short and keep it low!!!

When discussing his favorite shot, you really don't see any one single shot...but a myriad of shots condensed with one common thread...TOPSPIN...if you can imagine an imposing figure driving the ball almost always with topspin (a forward spin that adds even more forward motion after it bounces), you can understand why most of those shots don't come back...a winning combination, without doubt!

If this is a winning combination for him, why can't it be for everyone? Dumb question since not everyone is 6'6" but everyone can learn topspin...something we've talked about numerous other times...but no one ever said "use it whenever possible"...this learning curve could be a short one or a long one...that's all

dependent on where you're at right now...if you never hit topspin and you want to add it, you may have a ways to go...if you already use some, you're probably not that far away.

For most, adding topspin comes more easily on a forehand drive...the low to high path of the paddle that mimics the great tennis players of our time (of course with a much more compact swing (See above))...yes it requires practice but it's so much fun to see your own progress...if for no other reason, try it for the pure enjoyment you'll get during the learning process...start slow, then add more spin AND more pace to see how effective it can be...to do that, simply accelerate your motion, both upwards and forward...clearly, this is an over simplification but you get the drift.

Adding topspin to other shots is a bit more difficult, usually requiring much greater timing (in the case of a volley), learning some all new techniques for the backhand side OR hitting lobs with topspin which require considerably greater timing because you must control the direction, the depth AND the height...are those enough challenges for this week?

TIPBITS #198

INSIGHTS FOLLOW UP (2 of 3)

ERNIE TOMLINSON

So many of the points/comments that this Champion has made are all integral with the basic concepts of winning Percentage Pickleball...that's the purpose of this Follow Up article...to restate these concepts so that they are not overlooked.

Ernie distinguishes types of play into at least 3 categories...practice, social and competitive...and suggests, at least, a difference in attitude during each...some points to remember...

In Practice, use this time to get better by 1) learning a variety of shots and then 2) putting them into your game plan...you should include learning 3) different spins, 4) different pace and 5) different heights as well as being able to 6) place the ball where you want it...the practice setting, something you should do at least once a week and for at least two hours, is the time and place to grow your game .

In Social Play, try to practice a variety of shots as you play and try to perfect them during this more casual play...if you don't practice them in casual and social play, you'll be hesitant to use them in a match that's competitive...this is also the time to bring out those higher risk shots you've tried only in your practice sessions.

In Competition, 1) his first focus is on a plan or strategy that will be used against his immediate opponents...as we have discussed previously, a game without a plan is like a trip without a map...how can you get where you're going, if you don't know how to get there?

Next, 2) concentrate on high percentage shots...using only shots you can make the vast majority (80 to 90%) of the time, 3) eliminate virtually all errors by focusing on keeping the ball over the net and inside the lines on every shot (don't make the worst mistake of missing a Return of Serve) and 4) if you must, learn

when to take a risk...a risk is something you might consider taking only based on the score in the match and also based on which team is serving.

Finally, 5) recognize that the most important shot is making the right shot at the right time in the right location to win the point.

No Champion earns that distinction without following these basics!

TIPBITS #199

INSIGHTS FOLLOW UP (3 of 3)

ERNIE TOMLINSON

While this is the already the third recap of National Champion's Insights we've had from Ernie, this IS the last one...it was saved for the last because the last point that was made is probably why you're reading this article now...but first, some other last minute thoughts...

The Warm Up...

This is one aspect many players overlook and sometimes pay the price for later on...that's warm-up...warming up for safety's sake is a must especially as each year goes bye...the key to continual injury free play means always warming up and stretching muscles before ever pushing too hard...always easing into play...and, when in competition, warm up includes physical warm up as well a mental and spiritual warm up to put yourself into the proper frame of mind!

The Old and The New...

Comments on paddles(The Old)...Ernie, for the vast majority of his competitive play has stayed with just two paddles...his first, a POP paddle that he used in earlier years and now his current, the Engage Encore paddle, the one he has used the last two years(his most productive years)...it's being described under "The Old" category because he has chosen to stick with a paddle (tried and true) that works for him instead of jumping around from new one to another!

Shot variety(The New)...Ernie mentioned the enjoyment he gets from always adding new shots to his arsenal (more arrows for the quiver)...one of the shots he looks forward to practicing is taking the ball in the air as it drops below his knees and then trying to topspin it with a forehand or a backhand with a quick slap...successful implementation has been a long slow process (it's taken a while to get consistent)...but it has become a surprising and effective attack which can often produce winners...it's these kinds

of new ideas that need to be a constant part of your efforts to improve your skills.

This final point has more to do with these articles in general than with a specific strategy or technique for winning Pickleball...but, it is, in part, why these articles are written...the whole notion of “giving back” to your fellow Pickleball friends (or to others you have never met)!

Ernie encourages everyone to give back to the game by teaching others, getting out of their comfort zone and volunteering in some/any capacity...consider being a referee, a tournament director, a league organizer or something of that nature...even being an instructor or just a friend helping others learn how to play or improve their abilities...and when it comes to “giving back”, be **PRO-ACTIVE!**

TIPBITS #200

TIME TO RECAP

As we have done after each multiple of 9 TIPBITS, it still seems appropriate to continue to provide a review of the last 9...the rationale now is the same as it was then...many of the topics presented need time to digest or to be made a part of every day play or simply warrant repeating...so, here goes...

#191 Offsetting the Age Thing...Don't let them hurt you and wait for your chance to attack

#192 The Serve Rule...clarifying the sometimes misunderstood and abused service motion rule

#193 Skinny Singles...use this drill to improve your control and work on the first three shots

#194 The NVZ Line...the simple rationale for staying as close as possible to the NVZ line

#195 Down the Middle...rationale for and why hitting down the middle is so effective

#196 National Champion Insights-Ernie Tomlinson...topspin value; wise court time usage; giving back

#197 Insights Follow Up (1 of 3)...the value of and circumstances for adding and using topspin

#198 Insights Follow Up (2 of 3)...making the best of your practice, social and competitive play

#199 Insights Follow Up (3 of 3)...thoughts on paddles, shot variety and giving back

REPEAT...You've read this before but absolutely nothing is more important than these next few sentences...Percentage Pickleball is not making mistakes... never over hitting, being under control, being patient and being in the right place at the right time... Percentage Pickleball, it's all about putting the percentages, the overwhelming likelihood that you will be successful, on your side!!!

TIPBITS #201

GRUNTING

A grunt or grunting, by definition, means a short low guttural tone or sound...we may have all experienced someone, even ourselves, generating this “noise”...it can be triggered while inhaling, when surprised...or, more commonly, while exhaling when you need more power or force, such as lifting a heavier than expected object.

So, how does this relate, in any way, to Pickleball?

The use of grunting in athletics has been chronicled for many years...perhaps the most widely discussed area of sport where grunting has been used (and debated) is in Tennis...but it's quite common in other sports such as weight lifting, the shot put, and martial arts...just to name a few.

Grunting in Tennis became popularized when Jimmy Connors and Monica Seles “introduced” it in the 80's and 90's...from that time on, more and more players adopted it...many of these proteges came out of a single Tennis training camp, lending some credence to its use...but controversy soon followed as many players felt it was a form of cheating...the grunting soon became yelling and screaming...it not only became a distraction to some but also prevented many players from being able to use the sound generated on impact on the ball to judge its pace...rule changes were debated for years.

But, was (is) there any real value to grunting, aside from the distraction aspect?...many players felt that they were able to hit the ball harder when they grunted...many weight lifters felt they could lift more weight...shot putters could get more length...but none of this was particularly scientific...just conjecture!

That is until a couple of fellows from Drexel University's Health Sciences Program did an experiment, which went on to win a Biomedical Sciences Award...this experiment had 30 people use three different methods to squeeze a hand grip that recorded FORCE...method 1, just squeezed it, method 2 squeezed it while

exhaling at the same time and method 3 squeezed it while exhaling and grunting(in any way they chose)...the tests were repeated numerous times and in varying order.

The results were truly enlightening...first, more force was generated while merely exhaling...second, a full 10% more force was generated when exhaling and grunting were combined!

Why?...it's still debated but many feel that the grunting triggers the flight or fight instinct within us, which in turn triggers a bit of an adrenalin rush...you get the picture.

Regardless of why this happens, it does seem that grunting at impact may have value on the Pickleball court...if you were to do the math, would that mean that if the average pace of your drive propels the Pickleball at 60 MPH, that adding grunting could add 10% more speed or 6 MPH?

TIPBITS #202

THE POACHER

Sooner or later, if not already, you'll be or have been confronted by The Poacher... it could be male or female...most often, just one on a team...and you'll know just who it is...they make themselves known, initially, when you least expect it...shame on them...but, as the saying goes, if you're caught a second time, shame on you!

If you were to categorize The Poachers, you could probably put them into two distinct categories...the ones that are obsessive and the ones that are opportunistic...there is a big difference in these two categories...one will try to hurt you with their ploy under most any circumstance...the other waits for the most opportune or most appropriate time to impose themselves upon you!

Which is the most dangerous?...that might depend on how you define dangerous...to you, if dangerous means physical harm, the obsessive poacher is going to be involved in every possible point, possibly to the detriment of their own effectiveness.....they may be poaching at all costs, taking shots that are difficult to predict and/or control and literally, putting their opponents in harms way...this, of course is the extreme...this scenario usually occurs in mixed doubles or when the poaching teammates are of a somewhat different skill level (at least in the mind of The Poacher)!

The Poacher's DNA usually represents the player on the team who is 1)more aggressive, has 2)greater mobility or foot speed and hopefully for them, the 3) better and stronger player....you can only hope that The Poacher does not have all those components and has less control of their shots and will miss more often than not!

If not, then what?...common practice suggests total avoidance of The Poacher, hitting wide or away from him or her...another tactic, of course, is to go behind The Poacher, foiling their plot...unfortunately, this tactic is usually only thought of after the fact...too late!

The best approach, perhaps, may be the not so obvious...don't avoid

The Poacher...go at The Poacher whenever possible...keep him or her right where they belong...let them attempt to win the point with their own merits and skill...not a surprise attack...the surprise attack may be all they really have going for themselves...it's clearly more than worth the try...remember, fool me once, shame on you...!!!

TIPBITS #203

WHY PICKLEBALL

Why?...it's the best way we have to get our exercise...and EXERCISE is the key to a longer and happier life...what a great excuse to enjoy a couple of hours of fun with friends and family...and here's why!

Pickleball both requires and builds fitness...the more fit we are, the more exercise we can perform and the more exercise we perform, the more fit we become...an ever evolving cycle of building endurance and strength...and it doesn't end with physical fitness...it improves our health, not only our heart and mind but our entire body.

The least little bit of research will provide you with almost endless ammunition for regular exercise...WebMD lists several significant reasons for exercise, any one of which is justification alone...exercise can help prevent or improve these conditions:

1. Heart Disease: Regular exercise strengthens your heart muscle, lowers blood pressure, increases good cholesterol, reduces bad cholesterol, enhances blood flow and helps your heart function more efficiently...in conclusion, the Journal of Medicine researchers found that ANY exercise is better than none...but MORE is better!
2. Stroke: Regular exercise reduces your risk of having and dying from a stroke...again the Journal of Medicine study shows active individuals had 20% less risk of stroke than their less active counterparts.
3. Diabetes: With the increase of diabetes in the general population, more and more emphasis is being placed on exercise as a way to ward off the risk of contracting Type II diabetes...studies show a reduction of risk by upwards of 34%...further, those already diagnosed with diabetes can use exercise as a means to reduce weight, increase insulin sensitivity, improve blood sugar and cholesterol levels and reduce blood pressure, all of which enhance

the health of those with diabetes.

4. Obesity: Becoming overweight can be prevented or treated with regular exercise along with a healthy diet...exercise reduces body fat and increases muscle mass...reducing your body mass index is a sure way to reduce your risk of dying early and to live a longer healthier life.

5. Osteoporosis: Weight-bearing exercise (walking, running, stairs, dancing, or even Pickleball) helps prevent osteoporosis or bone loss, particularly in women...the Journal of Medicine sites studies of women that have regular exercise at least four times per week have a 41% less chance of hip fractures.

6. Psychological: One of the single most beneficial aspects of regular exercise is the impact it has on your emotional well being...stress has been linked to so many physical maladies that any activity that can be used to limit its negative impact must be emphasized...and regular exercise is that activity!

In summary, it's not just about adding regular exercise to your daily routine, it's about limiting your daily amount of sedentary time...the more you sit, the shorter your life!!! Play Pickleball!

TIPBITS #204

YOUR CHOICE

At the beginning of EVERY Pickleball game, you have a choice...the choice is whether you will Serve, Receive and start on one Side or the other...many times, in casual open play this choice is almost made for you...you really have no choice...in more competitive (league or tournament) play, you get to make a choice...what do you do?

Casual Play: In casual play, your opportunity to play may be dictated simply by the number of players waiting in line to play...further, many local procedures/policies may be followed that dictate the rotation of players on and off the courts...sometimes, only two players rotate off the court and two go on...sometimes the players remaining continue to play together, sometimes local policies suggest they split...other policies might determine the location of the Serving team and no choices are available..but, sometimes no such policies exist or they are ignored...that's when you get to make your choice...but what do you do?

Competitive Play: In competitive league or tournament play, you are always given the opportunity to make your choice...further, you must make a choice before play can begin...what do you do?

Choices: Should you A) win the toss(meaning you have the first choice), you have a number of options from which to chose from...you can chose to be 1) the first team to Serve, 2) the first team to Receive or 3) you can chose the Side of the court where you would like to start!

If you B) lose the toss, your choices are more limited...if they chose to Serve or Return, you get the choice of 1) the Side of the court where you would like to start...if they chose the Side to start, you can either chose to 2) Serve or 3) Receive!

NOTE: Unlike Tennis, no accommodation is provided for the winner of the toss to Defer or relinquish his choice to his opponent (see rules below)...

Rules: “A coin flip or any other fair method will determine first choice of service or side. If the winner chooses to serve or receive, the loser picks starting side. If the winner chooses starting side, the loser chooses to serve or receive.”

Factors: this can include 1) the wind...is it with or against you or blowing cross court...a cross court wind usually does not benefit one team over the other...but a wind either with or against you could seriously impact one team versus the other...you must take this consideration into account when you make your choice...2) the sun or lighting...is it better on one side than the other...if this is a factor, you must take this into consideration... and 3) the backdrop...is it better on one side than the other...if this is a factor, you must take this into consideration...if none of these factors impact you, then your only real choice/decision is whether you view Serving first as a benefit or not...if they do have an impact on your game, then you must consider those factors by the choice/decision you make...what do you do?

These are the Choices, the Rules and the Factors...we will discuss the Considerations (what do you do?) next time.

TIPBITS #205

YOUR CHOICE (Finish Well)

Last time, we said that at the beginning of Every Pickleball game, you have a choice...the choice is whether you will Serve, Receive or start on one Side or the other.

We talked about the differences between Casual Play and Competitive Play...that often in Casual Play, your choices are made for you but that Competitive Play requires that YOU make the choice.

We talked about the specifics of the Choices you can make...all the options you have whether you win the toss or lose the toss...the benefits of winning the toss and the results of losing the toss.

We presented the specific rule that covers the Choices...and we reiterate...“A coin flip or any other fair method will determine first choice of service or side. If the winner chooses to serve or receive, the loser picks starting side. If the winner chooses starting side, the loser chooses to serve or receive.”

Then we talked about the Factors that might impact your choice...1) the wind...is it with or against you or blowing cross court...2) the sun, lighting or shadows...is it better on one side than the other...and 3) the backdrop...is it better on one side than the other...

Then we said that if any of these Factors had an impact on your play, you must Consider them before making your choice...if they do NOT have an impact on your play, then your choice comes down to nothing more than your personal preference...do you prefer to Serve first or Receive first?

Considerations: Let's start with what appears to be the easiest choice...

1) that none of the factors mentioned above impact your play...do you Serve first or Receive first? Seems simple, you either believe

that having the Serve first is a benefit or it's not...a) many players believe that getting an early lead is a psychological advantage, that most players are less than totally ready to play their best in the beginning or that Serving first may result in the other team never getting a chance to Serve at all(it happens)...all this thinking implies Serving first is best... or b) other players feel that wresting away the Serve from the Serving team in the beginning gives them the chance to run off a number of points utilizing their benefit of being the first team to have two Servers.

2) what if some or all of the factors mentioned above DO impact your play...now, suddenly the Side you choose may be far more important than any possible potential benefit of Serving first... if your team has distinct advantages in playing with the wind(or against the wind), then your primary Consideration is to take advantage of that factor...similarly, if lighting or backdrops hamper your team's ability to play, then that becomes your primary Consideration...choosing the Side that best benefits these factors for your team is crucial...a) recognizing the consequences of these factors is only the first step...whether you're playing just one game(say to 15) or the best of three (to 11), b) how you Finish may be your key Consideration...so, if you want to finish your match by winning the last point, perhaps choosing the Side that allows you the best chance to win that last point would be your best choice...and finally, keep in mind that if the final game goes into overtime (say 17-15), you'd be far better off finishing on your favorite side because the vast majority of the points would be played on that side...so, Finishing Well is always to your advantage!

TIPBITS #206

FOR SAFETY'S SAKE

Way too many stories are told or heard that share the sad news of injuries from Pickleball...from ER rooms to Orthopedic centers...unfortunately, many of these stories should never have happened...some simple precautions could make the difference...here are some typical injuries...

Some of the Most Common...strains and sprains are clearly the most common....if they are minor in nature, simple RICE (Rest, Ice, Compression and Elevation) can get you back on the courts in short order...more severe injuries often require the service of medical professionals...ALWAYS best to get their advice ASAP...but avoidance of injury is the best defense...and, as we've discussed numerous times before, proper warm up along with stretching is essential.

Some of the Worst...this category of injury has little to do with warm up and stretching but more to do with proper footwork...and perhaps footwear, as well!...we're talking about FALLS on the court...these happen almost out of nowhere but have many common causes...but mostly because of poor or (even worse) improper footwork...

A Simple Problem...when moving sideways, you may be inclined to use a cross over step or steps...The Solution...choose side stepping to maintain better balance and quicker recovery to a ready position.

A Serious Problem...a far more dangerous and often too common mistake is made against the Lob...for almost any Senior player, it's almost imperative that you do NOT attempt to back pedal to reach a Lob or any shot that's over your head and out of your reach...catching a heel triggers the worst of all FALLS you can incur...and the most serious of injuries...The Solution...immediately turn or pivot toward the back of the court and then, take only forward steps toward the back of the court.

Another Problem...Your Shoes...it's clearly important to get a proper fitting shoe, the right support for your individual needs and a shoe that will give you reasonable wear...and, of course the right style and color...these are all important...BUT for Pickleball you MUST also get the proper tread for the outer sole...it should be a court shoe, NOT a cross trainer and NOT a running shoe...you need stability, pure and simple.

Some of the Most Avoidable...don't put this off...it's so simple...get protective eye wear!...go most anywhere to get them...a reputable eyeglass provider, a sporting goods store that offers approved racquetball or squash glasses or your home improvement store's safety glasses department...they all work...you just never know how easily and quickly an innocent ball can become a life changing experience...do it before it's too late!

TIPBITS #207

HYDRATION

Our body is made up of approximately 70 percent water...that balance is crucial to virtually everything we do...maintaining proper hydration is key to our every activity. Conversely, if we fail to maintain proper levels (become dehydrated), we risk fatigue, muscle cramps, dizziness and many other even more serious consequences.

When playing Pickleball, whether you are competing or just getting your exercise in open play, it's important that you hydrate before, during AND after to keep the right balance in your system...water regulates your body temperature and lubricates your joints...to function properly, every system in your body requires proper hydration to maintain peak performance...every cell in your body must be properly hydrated; your muscles, your brain, your heart and every other organ in your body...if you're not properly hydrated, your body can't perform at its highest level! Take a moment to let that all sink in!

Caution: Older players are much more susceptible to dehydration for at least two reasons..1) the older you are, the more difficult it becomes to maintain proper hydration...it becomes harder to adapt to longer periods of activity or warmer temperatures...2) the sense of thirst also diminishes with age...it's often not recognized until it's too late!

Keeping Hydrated: For most, drinking plenty of fluids and eating foods with high water content is a great way to keep our bodies properly hydrated...most adults need about two quarts (8 glasses or 64 ounces) of fluids every day...BUT that amount increases with heat and humidity, with increased levels of activity and can also change because of various medications...while drinking water is the most common solution for maintaining proper hydration, there are a number of other food sources that are high in water content...these include cucumbers, tomatoes, watermelon, bell peppers, grapes, cantaloupe, oranges, and to a lesser degree, apples and blue berries.

Avoiding Dehydration: Dehydration is simple...it happens when you lose more fluid than you drink...it happens when you exercise longer or harder than normal or the weather or conditions are warmer than usual...preventing dehydration requires awareness of these situations! When your body doesn't have enough water, it can't work properly.

Recognizing Dehydration: Dehydration can range from mild to severe...symptoms of dehydration include...dizziness or a lightheaded feeling, nausea or vomiting, muscle spasms and cramps, dry mouth or being thirsty, dry skin(loss of elasticity), a lack of sweating, rapid breathing and increased heart rate, low blood pressure, confusion, weakness, overheating, chills, cold hands and feet, general fatigue, muscle fatigue and loss of coordination...any one of these symptoms is cause for concern and should trigger your immediate attention!

In Conclusion: If you wait until these symptoms become apparent, you will have already compromised your body's full performance potential...this article's very purpose...The Value of Proper Hydration!

TIPBITS #208

LOB or DROP

The Lob is used both on defense as well as on offense and the Drop is used almost exclusively on defense...what they each offer is a means to deal with 1) when you have been unable to leave the baseline or 2) when you're forced BACK to the baseline or 3) when a hard drive has been directly right at you when you have little or no time to react...they both offer you an outlet or a recovery mechanism.

We have already painstakingly discussed situation 1) when you're trying to get to the net...we have also discussed the value of the Drop versus the Lob for situation 2) when you're forced back to the baseline...so let's look at more detail on the rationale for using one option (the Lob) versus the other (the Drop) when dealing with situation 3) when you're the target of a hard drive by your opponents...

When you're standing anywhere between mid-court and the NVZ line, you are a prime target for a well driven ball...it might be a surprise or it may be expected but the common thread is that you have very little time and you must react in some manner...simply volleying the ball back really buys you nothing and since you have little time, a put away volley is out of the question...that leaves the Lob and the Drop.

The Lob: the easiest to execute of these two options is the Lob...it requires little more than tilting the paddle face into an open position and letting the ball strike it... the height and depth are pretty much predetermined based on the pace of the approaching ball...getting the height and depth just right is the trick...unfortunately, on the down side, too low of a ball will result in a point-ending overhead shot by your opponents...further, too deep of a ball will be out and you suffer the same consequence...the percentages of this shot being successful are consistently too low to warrant its use...finally, hitting too many short Lobs will NOT endear your partner to your efforts!

The Drop: as you might have guessed, the Drop is the far more difficult shot to execute and master...while the Lob requires some touch, the Drop requires even more...but it is so much more effective...by effective, it means that you are not only able to get the ball back into play, but even an average Drop presents little or no danger to you from your opponents...it neutralizes their previous advantage and it does not put you into another disadvantaged position...the goal of the Drop is to take all the pace OFF the ball, keeping it LOW, SLOW and JUST over the net...this does take tons of practice and it should be practiced from all positions, from mid-court to the NVZ line...this is one shot that will pay dividends against virtually every opponent you encounter and should be added to your quiver!

