

PICKLEBALL

TIPBITS

YEAR TWO

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FOREWORD

If you've had a chance to read our first publication, TIPBITS YEAR ONE, 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 way of (a better) 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 #53

KEEP THE NET

This entire article is based on the supposition that you agree that control of the net in doubles Pickleball is of primary importance...that, far and away, the team that controls the net will win the vast majority of the points and subsequently virtually every game...

Getting control of the net is easy, IF you are the Returning team...and not so easy, IF you are the Serving team...there is a lot of room for discussion on just HOW to even get to the net, much less keeping it, as the Serving team...and we have presented numerous approaches to this dilemma in prior articles...but little or no time on keeping the net from the Receiving team's point of view...

Clearly, the Receiving team ALWAYS has the advantage when each point starts...they already have one player at the net and the other one soon to be on the way...so, how should they keep this advantage for as long as possible?

Without forsaking everything we have ever said about the options for the Return(high, slow and deep, center of the court, being safe, hitting the percentage shot, etc.), let's consider a little bit more of an aggressive approach to the return...the following approach is presented with the assumption that your opponents are both right-handed...

Regardless of your position as the Returning player(right or left side), consider just one target for your return...aim and hit the Return to the player on the Serving team that is on THEIR left side...this will be the player with his(her) forehand down the middle...your return must be absolutely as deep as you can make it...this forces the player that can hurt your team the most from coming forward(i.e., if he were to move forward first, his forehand will be in the center and in a better position to “hurt” you)...hence, keeping him back is strategically to your benefit...

Again, the essence of this strategy is to keep the player on their left side back, forcing him to hit less effective ground strokes from the baseline and subsequently giving your team, already at the net, the ability to control (and win) the point...

After his Third Shot, your team must follow up by keeping them both back off the net...and once again, on the Fourth Shot (and Sixth, etc.), you should hit deep AND again to that same player...repeat until you get a put away shot...then, do your thing!!!

Finally, in a similar vein, you might replace the Serving team's player on the left side with the better of the two players...this will keep the best player away from you at net...same philosophy!!!

Try this strategy and see if you can **KEEP THE NET!**

TIPBITS #54

BE CONSISTENT?

Being able to hit that same shot successfully over and over is the mark of an excellent player...doing it time after time may NOT be...if, as we said once before, you've made your favorite shot your best shot, then, what can you do to “one up” that accomplishment?

Better players will be always looking at their opponents, not just to pick out their weaknesses, but also to pick out their tendencies...this gives them that added advantage or that extra split second to better anticipate their opponent's next shot...for example, you're the receiving team, on the left side and you pin your return cross court to the left side corner forcing the serving team player to hit a difficult Third Shot...but, he's up for it and can consistently return it cross court back to your backhand and just over the net...are you surprised(again)?...OR are you waiting there for it?

How about the lengthy soft game exchange when all four players are at the net...dink after dink...players moving each other around...do you stick to your best shot, say, pulling them wider and wider, shot after each successive shot?...or do you change it up after your second angled shot and go across the middle?...OR do you go back to the opponent across from you?

If you've got a good shot, you've got to use it...if you're the opponent, you have got to pick up this pattern and capitalize on it...this is just another way of saying “DON'T BE PREDICTABLE”, regardless of how good your shot is...a simple change of pace or re-direction may just cause all the havoc your best shot could ever create...

There are two somewhat opposing points here...first, you need to learn your opponent's patterns AND you need to utilize that knowledge by anticipating the shot that you have come to expect, being ready to defend or attack...and, second, if you have developed patterns of your own during the match, recognize that and change them up before you too become too predictable!!!

Being consistent is good, being predictable is not!

TIPBITS #55

PRACTICE OR PLAY?

Playing games alone does not provide the best way to improve your game...BUT practicing specific strategies and shots will help you improve your game play...the game below lets you do both, play and practice...try it and see your game improve while having fun at the same time...it's...

THE PLUS/MINUS GAME...

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of the PLUS/MINUS Game is to emphasize the importance of Percentage Pickleball.

It is designed to award players for taking AND making the right shot at the right time.

And it penalizes players who become impatient or overly or prematurely aggressive.

Each point must begin with the successful completion of the first three shots.

The Serve and the Return of Serve must both be deep and in play.

The Third Shot MUST be a dink(drop) shot and driving or lobbing the Third Shot is a violation.

Thereafter, the Game's intent is to work the ball utilizing the SOFT GAME until a scoring

opportunity presents itself. Aggressive successful play is rewarded and premature or

unsuccessful play is penalized according to the POINT

GUIDELINES.

SPECIFICS

Games are played to 11(Plus or Minus). Players score points individually.

Each player is responsible for their own score. Negative points may occur.

Players draw lots to determine initial starting court positions.

A single play will result in just one player scoring points, either lost or gained.

Points are awarded per the POINTS GUIDELINES only. No points

scored for simply winning a point.

Controversial point scoring is resolved by group consensus(was it an unforced error or a winner).

ROTATION

One side of the court only is used for serving.

If the Server scores a point(s), his next serve will be from the side that reflects his score(even-right; odd-left).

If the Server's partner scores a point(s), the serving position remains the same.

If the Serving team losses the point, all 4 players rotate 1 position left AND, in all cases, this causes the Serving team's left side player to rotate OFF the Serving side and ONTO the Receiving side.

Player rotating ONTO the Serving side will now be the Server AND HIS score determines

whether he starts serving from the right or left side(even score, right; odd score, left).

In other words, the Server's position to serve is always based on HIS score(plus or minus).

In the event of more than 4 players, the on-deck player will replace the Serving team player that is rotating off and take his place on the Receiving side.

POINTS GUIDELINES

Unclean winner(+1)...winning shot that hits the net, opponent or opponent's paddle

Clean winner(+2)...winning shot untouched by anything

Serve error(-2)...wide, short, net or long Serve

Return error(-2)...wide, net or long Return

Third Shot error(-2)...wide or net Third Shot

Third Shot violation(-2)...hitting a drive or a lob in lieu of a Third Shot dink(drop)

Unforced error(-2)...any unsuccessful shot or unforced error that results in the loss of a point

TIPBITS #56

CHAMPIONSHIP WON WITH SOFT GAME

While we don't all aspire to playing for a National Championship, it might be interesting to see how the 2013 Mens Open National Championship was played...some of you may have already watched it, maybe even more than once...regardless, it's always useful to learn from watching this level of match versus just being concerned about the outcome...you'll witness what the best players in the country do, or attempt to do, in a Championship Match...

Let's preface the match by identifying the players...first, Tim Nelson, a multiple Open Championship Gold Medalist and arguably the best player in the world, is wearing the orange hoodie...his partner, Billy Jacobsen, also with many Open Championship Titles, in the blue t-shirt...their opponents are Brian Staub in the orange sleeveless t-shirt(no Open titles, as yet) and his partner, Phil Bagley in the white t-shirt(no Open titles, as yet)...Tim and Billy are from the West Coast(Seattle area) and Brian and Phil are from Florida(The Villages)...

Going into the match, all four players recognize that Tim and Phil are clearly the top 2 players...that will become evident as you watch the vast majority of the balls going to Billy or Brian...you'll also note that Tim and Billy always play the Power formation letting Tim have his forehand down the middle...Phil and Brian, on the other hand, play the classic formation, except that Phil is so fast that he will often poach in front of his partner(much more so in the first game then in the second)...next, and most importantly, you will see the constant and continued use of the short/soft game in order to equalize or neutralize each others strengths...they can all hit big shots for winners but their objective is to win the match by being patient and keeping the opponent on the defense until an opening presents itself...they're playing the percentages...

The rationale for viewing these videos now is by way of introduction to our follow up series of articles on the soft game, stroke techniques and strategies...

If you don't have these videos on your Favorites list, here are 2 versions...the first contains both the Womens AND the Mens Gold Medal National Open Championship matches...please forward to 23:00 minutes to skip to(for now) the Mens final...the second is just the Mens final but taken from just one direction only...

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UmP6NQotYUdI&list=UU2HmpKPxdCOF0tuYgFjzXxw>

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yhkjNsEA9_w

TIPBITS #57

YOUR TURN TO HELP ANOTHER

We all know one of the reasons we play Pickleball is because of its social aspects...we've not only learned a new game, we've met a ton of new friends...its opened the door to many new relationships and experiences...let's keep the ball rolling...

How?...by helping others...here are a couple of ways to do this...

BRING NEW FRIENDS: this one's easy...maybe start by introducing others to the sport...this is just not for our benefit but for theirs...bring them along with you on your next trip to the courts...or sneak out in the afternoon sometime when no one else is around...totally non-threatening...show them the game...be understanding...remember your first time...be encouraging...help them to get a lesson or find a clinic...But, make sure you get them to come back!!!

BE A COACH: this one's NOT so easy...every day that you play, there is a chance to help someone...surely you've been there yourself...can't seem to win a point, can't get the ball into play or over the net...you've been frustrated...you're struggling...others notice...you need some help...had someone “stepped up” and helped out, wouldn't you have appreciated the gesture???

Well, here's YOUR chance...it could be your partner, your opponent or just someone you're watching...you clearly see the problem...you KNOW you can help, so why not? It could be as simple as a strategy change, a position to stand on the court, a way to hold the paddle, a place to aim, a drill to practice or just a person to talk to...

YOU can do this...pick the right time...after a match or at the end of the playing session...take the time, make the effort...share your experience (after all, you've been there) and provide the help, make the suggestion, point them in a direction, be a friend...that's how it all started, isn't it...didn't someone help you??? Isn't it time to pass it forward?!

TIPBITS #58

DON'T GET ACED

This question was presented recently and deserves a response sooner rather than later...as the Receiver, how can I best avoid being aced on the Serve?...or where should I stand when waiting for the Serve?

For some players, coming to the game from tennis, it's second nature...for others, it's not so obvious...in tennis, the Receiver has more area to defend on the Serve and often time has to deal with much more pace, besides...so the tennis player must stand where he can cover as much of the Service Box area as possible...but he can't cover it all...so he cheats, keeping in mind several factors...

First, AND FOREMOST, he watches where the Server is going to stand to hit the Serve...then, he adjusts his position, accordingly, by drawing an imaginary line between the Server's position and through the middle of the Receiver's Service Box...this is where he will stand...

Another way to envision this strategy is as follows...the more the Server moves toward the center line, the more the Receiver should move toward the center line AND, the more the Server moves toward his side line, the more the Receiver should move toward his side line...that's because this, and the method above, divides the area where the Serve can land equally, giving the Receiver the ability to reach and hit most Serves landing to the right or the left or down the middle...only perfectly hit Serves to either the far right or the far left will be unreachable...

This brings us to the second factor...once the Receiver has determined this position, he can then cheat a little in one direction or another...that direction depends on the Receiver's abilities to cover one side better than the other...such as a better backhand or more reach on the forehand, etc...

And finally, the third factor...this comes from the Receiver's observations of the Server's tendencies...where does the Server

prefer to hit his Serve, which side does he tend to go to when he's trying to hit an ace, what's been his most effective Service placement so far?...that's probably where he is going to go, so cheat to that side(of course, not so he'll notice)...

And this strategy applies in EXACTLY the same manner in Pickleball...except, the Pickleball Service Box is much smaller...so, you should never get “aced” if you follow these suggestions!!!

TIPBITS #59

WHY THE SOFT GAME

Your opponents fall into one of three categories...of course, you may not recognize which category they are until you're well into your match...but, sooner or later, it will become evident...and what you do with that knowledge will probably determine the outcome of the match...

What are they?....your opponents are either 1) better than you, 2) equal or nearly equal to you, or 3) you are better than them...this is not an over-simplification, it's just the way it is...

In case #1, when you're clearly the underdog, the results are generally predictable, you're out classed and out gunned...especially if you attempt to over power(out hit) the stronger team...it's just a no win situation...unless???

In case #2, when you're matched fairly even, getting into a hitter's dual(trying to over power the other team) can only result in a 50-50 chance of your team winning...not good odds...

In case #3, when your team clearly has the edge, the general consensus is to go for big shots from almost anywhere because the opponents will just not be able to counter...your best scenario, for sure...

But, what about the first two scenarios...what should you do?...and why?

In both of these other cases, the soft game can be the great equalizer...it brings all four players to the net (the WHAT should you do) where each team has the same chances at winning the point (the WHY)...

This assumes your team has reached the net and has probably used a soft third shot(or series of soft shots) to get to the net...DO NOT take this assumption too lightly...getting to the net, on equal terms, is of utmost importance...over hitting your way to the net is not

likely to happen if YOU ARE the equal or lesser opponent...

Once you're there, you have got to be steady and patient(remember the “low and slow”)...you've got to be constantly focused on watching for that ball you can attack(the “high and hard” part)...THIS is the way you can beat any team...NOT by exchanging blows...but by using strategy to defeat them!!!

TIPBITS #60

TIME TO RECAP

As we have done after each multiple of 9 TIPBITS, it 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 to be made a part of every day play and warrant repeating...so, here goes...

#51 Learn from Your Losses...categorize your losses, then make an appropriate change

#52 Learn “More” from Your Losses...what to consider in making your own “Loss Q and A”

#53 Keep the Net...considerations for keeping control of the net if you're the Receiving team

#54 Be Consistent...use your best shots, learn your opponents' and try not to be predictable

#55 Practice or Play...combine both with the Plus/Minus Game

#56 Championship Won with the Soft Game...summary of the Final's strategy and the Video

#57 Your Turn to Help Another...bring in some new players and help out some others...be a Coach

#58 Don't Get Aced...where to stand and why when you are the Receiving team

#59 Why the Soft Game...use the soft game to even your chances against most opponents

Finally, this just needs to be repeated one more time...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 #61

SOFT GAME MECHANICS

Recently, we provided some rationale for using the Soft Game...that using the Soft Game will simply better your chances at defeating teams that are at least equal or even better than you...whether you are able to make this happen will depend upon just how well you (consistently and repeatedly) can execute your soft shots at the net...

BY execute, we simply mean placing the ball where you intend and putting the ball where your opponent must reply with a similar defensive shot (versus providing them with a “fat sitter” that's just begging to be hit away for a winner)...

So, how do you execute that shot...there are lots of options...and every good player has their own version of an effective stroke or the mechanics needed to successfully hit it...but, our concern here, is to get started...by that we mean...how to hit the intended shot over and over again exactly where we want it...

Yes, you're thinking practice will do it...for sure...but practicing the wrong mechanics may prevent you from ever reaching your goal...consistency!

Let's look at the basics...it starts with the grip...and if you've seen any of these TIPBITS, you know using the same grip throughout is highly encouraged...AND using the Continental grip is also highly recommended as it is the grip of choice for some 90 percent of all players...

Holding your paddle with the proper (Continental) grip, cock your wrist back AND upwards until you can see the wrinkles (as they say) in your wrist (try this without your paddle as you read this)...stroke the ball keeping your wrist firm, without moving it at all...you'll be using mostly your arm and shoulder to make the stroke...use very little, if any, back swing and little or no follow through...

Now, it's not to say that there are not numerous other ways to stroke or hit a soft shot at the net...BUT this approach is as basic as it comes...AND if you cannot master this, you should NOT try something more "exotic"...

each of these principles, the "same" grip each time, the use of the Continental grip, and keeping your wrist in a cocked AND firm position all support one other principle or strategy that will serve you well...they LIMIT THE VARIABLES...the simplest way to do ANYTHING repeatedly the same way, time after time...AND that's your goal!!!

TIPBITS #62

SOFT GAME STROKES

The Soft Game, used to better our chances of defeating teams of equal or better skill levels, requires practice, persistence and patience...AND some very basic and proper mechanics, which we discussed in a previous article(using the proper grip, cocking the wrist and keeping the wrist firm)...

Given that you have now garnered considerable reliability with hitting the basic soft shot at the net, and can repeat it at least 10 or 20 times (repeat, at least!), you are ready to move on to a little more elaborate approach or technique...

The basic soft shot, stroked as described in the Basic Mechanics article, will allow you to hit that stroke in most any direction, straight ahead, on the diagonal or simply over the center of the net...what we have not introduced, as yet, is the use of spins that provide more options for your Soft Game...

The most commonly used spins you can use are top spin, under spin and side spin(which can be used by itself, OR combined with top or under spin)...we've examined spins before and discussed how they are to be applied and what affect they have on the ball...

As a quick refresher, top spin is added to the ball when your paddle starts out below the ball and finishes above the ball...you come over the top of OR rollover the ball with your paddle...under spin is added to the ball when your paddle starts out above the ball and finishes below the ball...you come under the ball with your paddle...side spin is added to the ball when your paddle starts out and finishes on the side of the ball...you come across the ball with your paddle...all shots hit with spin require added paddle head speed(versus the use of the basic stroke mechanics) in order to impart the desired spin...

Let's apply spin to the Soft Game...keep in mind, the timing required to add any spin is going to INITIALLY reduce your consistency but practice will eventually offset this temporary set

back...adding spins is best done or utilized when hitting soft shots on the diagonal...this is for several reasons, not the least of which is the fact that you have a much larger target AND that you are hitting over the lowest part of the net...

Get a hitting partner...stand diagonally across from each other at the far edge of the NVZ...if you are both right handed or both left handed, try using your backhands first...begin by slowly hitting a small amount of top spin and hit the ball over but as close to the net as possible and as close to your opponent's side line...do this repeatedly, adding a little more spin and a little more pace each time...you'll gradually get the feel for how much spin you can add and how much pace you can add...

Remember, be persistent and be patient, AND don't give up until you feel you have made some real progress...keep at it...both of you...BUT just try to master this one new element before you try something else...next time!!!

TIPBITS #63

MORE SOFT GAME STROKES

One last time(perhaps)...the Soft Game is used to better our chances of defeating teams of equal or better skill levels BUT it requires practice, persistence and patience...

Last time we assumed that we had developed the ability to hit basic dink shots at the NVZ on a repeatable basis, say 10 or more times without error...then we introduced the added concept of Spins, briefly explaining each and their method of production...finally, we challenged you to get a hitting partner and begin practicing using a little topspin, on the back hand side and hitting diagonally across the court, from NVZ corner to NVZ corner...How'd that go?

One thing that you may have noticed or need to know...in order to be successful, this “drill” requires fairly intense focus AND good footwork skills...if you can up the ante in these two areas, you will see immediate improvement in your consistency and placements...

Another observation you may have noticed is this...if your footwork is a bit slow or you've been caught off guard by a more forceful shot, you will be forced to hit many balls in a half volley (or on the rise) manner...doing this repeatedly, you will become more adept at the shot and it will serve you well in many other cases...you may even note that it is easier to hit the ball from this position...your goal!!!

But you can't stop yet...getting consistent is one thing, getting more effective is another...continue this drill until you're more comfortable with the stroke...then, add a little competition to the process by playing a game to 5...ALL shots must be top spin backhands hit diagonally across the net AND must land inside the NVZ...

Done with that?...let's add one new wrinkle...keeping the notion of hitting only top spin backhands, let's add a little side spin to the shot at the same time...there are two kinds of side spin we should consider...and each has its own purpose...

Side spin, again, is added to the ball by hitting the ball on one side of the ball or the other...it's often called "inside-out" or to a lesser degree "outside-in" depending on how the ball is struck...as you try this, you'll see that it is quite difficult to hit the backhand with both top spin and inside-out side spin...AND its effectiveness or usefulness is suspect, anyway...BUT adding outside-in spin is much easier to do and has the added benefit of causing the ball to have a greater angle and stay closer to the net, pulling your opponent out wider and closer to the net...in a game, this opens up lots of court, most of which neither of your opponents can cover...

Remember, be persistent and be patient, AND don't give up until you feel you have made some real progress...keep at it...until next time!!!

TIPBITS #64

BACKHAND DIAGONAL SHOTS

Still believing that the Soft Game increases our chances of defeating teams of equal or better skill levels, we will continue discussing details of the technique itself...we've progressed from the ability to hit the basic dink shot, practiced on the backhand side diagonally, added some topspin and maybe even some outside-in side spin...the plan was(and must continue) to be to just practice this stroke pattern/technique until you feel comfortable with it and it becomes second-nature to you...

Note: this discussion is continuing on the premise that you are engaging your opponent in a diagonal soft game with your backhand going from NVZ corner to NVZ corner...

Now that you've reached this level of comfort, we need to recognize that we can NOT stop there...what we've done is develop a skill that gets us well into the Soft Game but this one shot alone will not make a Champion...

You'll need to add variety...you can't become PREDICTABLE, even if it's your best shot...you need to introduce two additional facets to your soft game, both of which are a change to what you've been doing so far...

Number one, you need to change up the spin...once you've begun a backhand diagonal exchange with your opponent, you may hit as many as two or three such shots...if you haven't won the point by then, you must change your strategy...the easiest change is to reverse the spin that you've been hitting and hit a solid under spin shot...this is an easy shot to control and may be made even easier if your opponent has been returning your shots with topspin(since the ball is already spinning with the same rotation)...

Number two, you need to change the placement...as in case Number one above, hitting to the same location more than 2 or 3 times becomes predictable and your opponent just needs to continue on repeating what's kept him in the point so far...you've

been hitting wide angle shots that pull your opponent further and further from the middle of the court...now, you must change it up and hit more to his body or his forehand side (being careful not to get too close to his partner)...this change may be all it takes to trigger an error or reopen your diagonal shot for a winner...

PRACTICE!!!

TIPBITS #65

FOOTWORK AT THE NET

In the past, we touched upon the importance of a much higher level of focus that must be used when engaged in soft game exchanges...this can't be emphasized enough...but, we also discussed the importance of sound footwork...when these two added elements have become ingrained into your play, your success at the net will only then reach its full potential...

Some principles of sound footwork...

Stay on the balls of your feet...try NOT to become flat-footed...this will provide you with the best possible basis for movement in any direction...**remain slightly crouched, stay low with your knees bent**...this will further your ability to move more quickly AND to focus on the ball more closely(your vision will be more in line with the ball's trajectory)...

When you need to move into the NVZ...step in with one foot only and reach for the ball, then step back immediately with that same foot...

When the ball just dribbles over the net, you must charge the net with whatever resources you can muster, flick the ball up and over the net, then retreat out of the NVZ as quickly as possible, getting BOTH feet re-established outside the NVZ(or simply duck behind the net and hope your opponents don't hit you until you can scramble back into position-Good Luck!)

When the ball comes at your feet, step back with one foot to give yourself more time and room to, perhaps, hit a more aggressive shot...if you do not move back, you will probably need to hit the ball in the air or hit a well controlled half-volley...if you have added the half-volley to your repertoire, great...if not, one step back is your next best choice...

When you're actively engaged in the soft game and required to move from side to side(along the NVZ line) use a side step

“shuffle”...do NOT cross over, one foot over the other...and REMEMBER to return to the center after each exchange, LIMITING the opening between you and your partner... NOTE: this applies to BOTH the engaged player AND his partner!!!

Finally, you must remain ever vigilant in watching for and being ready for the ball you can SUCCESSFULLY attack, the whole purpose in the soft game!!!

TIPBITS #66

PICK UP THE BALL

We're not talking about picking up the ball that just rolled into your court(although good players have good peripheral vision and seem to spot these balls rolling in long before they become an issue)...no, we're talking about picking up(watching and seeing) the trajectory of the ball as soon as possible...being successful in doing this will give you that extra time to decide what YOU need to do...

It's the technique that good, especially great, players use to give them the advantage of knowing what to do and where to go almost before the ball is struck...actually, it might be even called ANTICIPATION, by some....whatever you call it, it's a MUST if you want to get a jump on the ball and be better prepared to react appropriately...

What's the best way to get the jump on the ball?...it starts with being focused on the path of the ball as it approaches your opponents...then, you need to watch what your opponent is doing, in particular, with their paddle(and their back-swing)...then, you need to watch the ball ever so closely at the point of contact...then, as it comes off their paddle...and finally, the follow through...this tells you “everything” you need to know...but you MUST react immediately...

What helps you to react immediately is the “everything” you need to know...this is WHAT you learn by watching...that is, the Spin, because you watched the back swing, the contact and the follow thru...the Direction or Path the ball is going to take, because you watched the paddle and ball at the point of contact...the Pace the ball has, because you watched the back-swing, the contact and the follow through...the Height or Depth, for all the same reasons...pretty much everything you need to know to get that jump...

When can you use this jump?...it starts with the Serve....you'll never be caught off guard...on the Return, when it's critical to decide which player will take the Third Shot...during Play, when

you always need to buy some time or get a head start(the jump)...

In summary, it all adds up, watching each component of your opponent's process in their stroke...but, perhaps the best single facet is watching their PADDLE just prior to and at the point of contact...finally, as an aside, it doesn't hurt to know what your opponents tendencies are for a given shot based on your past observations...it all adds up to help you get the JUMP!!!

TIPBITS #67

WHAT'S YOUR TAKE AWAY?

Many of you may have played in or watched the recent 5th Annual Miracle Ear Tournament...players of all skill levels and all ages and, pretty much, from everywhere...whether you played or not, you saw a lot...whether you medaled or you were two and out, you still saw a lot...

The question is..."What was the Number 1 standout observation that you had?"...

Clearly, it's going to be different for everyone...but, simply because there were so many participants, you saw many, many different techniques, different strategies, different strokes and different shots...certainly, some good, some great and some, maybe not so good (yes, we can also learn "what not to do!")...

Still, the point remains...What was your take away?

We previously discussed examining results of your own matches, especially matches that were lost...we noted the value in a LOSS Q n A that focused on the most obvious reasons for the loss...this opportunity to improve is much larger and more valuable than just one single match...it's a chance to learn from literally hundreds of matches and players, almost all at one time...

What technique did you observe that was obviously effective?

What strategy of play was used that produced winning results?

What stroke was often overwhelming?

What shot or placement created an opening or was an outright winner?

Recalling these observations, why not incorporate them into your game...ask someone to explain the rationale or methods behind them, the why's and how to's...don't be afraid to ask...you'll not

only make someone else's day, you'll benefit as well...then, practice it and add it to your game...

And don't stop there...whenever you see something that could benefit your game, add it to yours...

Get started now!!!

TIPBITS #68

SEE THE BALL?

We talked earlier about picking up the ball as soon as possible, to be better prepared...we can track its direction, its pace and its spin...and now we need to react and execute our response...not out, not in the net, but just exactly where we want it...

But in spite of all we've done to get the “jump” on the ball, our reply can, and on bad days, often does fail...Why?...because we are not looking at the ball, more specifically, we are not looking at the ball ON CONTACT...this is crucial...the ball, clearly, never bounces the same, the wind moves it about, you don't recognize the amount of spin...you name it!!!

And, it's a common issue for all players...you're wondering why you hear that infamous "clunk" when you hit the ball and your shot goes no where near where you expected...do you think you took your eye off the ball???...of course!!!

There is just no substitute for hitting the ball on the center of your paddle...making an effort to watch the ball through CONTACT is good, but doing it consistently is another issue all together...but to win points, you must eliminate or lessen your errors...so, you must do it!!!

Try this...as the ball is approaching you, do not take your eye off it BUT focus on trying to look INTO one of the holes in the ball, so that you can see the CENTER of the ball(the hollow part in the middle)...start by practicing this on Serve Returns or while your about to hit your Third Shot...you'll be amazed at your results...

This is similar to the tennis student who is told by his pro to concentrate on hitting a specific small area in the service box on the serve versus JUST trying to get it in...you not only get it in, it goes magically to that spot...OR the baseball coach that tells the on-deck batter not to worry about getting a hit BUT to place the ball over the second baseman's head...and you do it...just a little “mind over matter”...

Try this and see for yourself...it's all about keeping your focus on the ball long enough to get it to go where YOU want it to go!!!

TIPBITS #69

INSIGHTS FROM A NATIONAL CHAMPION

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

PAT MCKENNY

Where were you born? I was born in St Paul, MN

Did you play other sports? I played baseball, football, basketball, softball, racquetball, golf, and some I can't remember

Do you remember where and when you first played PB? I started almost 10 years ago in Arizona

What is your favorite shot and why? The dink shot because it's an important part of the game; it helps slow up the game!

What paddle(s) do you currently use? Pro-lite

Do you have a shot you practice or a drill you like? Yes, first dinking across from my opponent and then dinking diagonally, in both directions

Do you have a warm up routine? Yes, similar to the drill above(dink directly across, then diagonally) and then, the drop shot from the baseline

What do you think is the most important shot in PB? the "one" that gets over the net!

Do you have something else you would like the readers to know? Pat did not add anything here but my guess is that most of you that read the answer to the previous question might have done so with a smile on your face... this one comment that Pat made here says volumes about the game and we will talk about that at length in a subsequent article!!!

TIPBITS #70

TIME TO RECAP

As we have done after each multiple of 9 TIPBITS, it 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 to be made a part of every day play and warrant repeating...take a moment to review these articles to help keep them fresh in your mind...here's a summary of the last 9...

#61 Soft Game Mechanics...Limit the Variables...hold the paddle properly and in the same way

#62 Soft Game Strokes...hitting flat and then adding the three spins

#63 More Soft Game Strokes...practice the basics, then combine spins to be more effective

#64 Backhand Diagonal Shots...Don't be Predictable...change location, pace and spins

#65 Footwork at the Net...you'll need some specific techniques to move about the net

#66 Pick Up the Ball...learn how to predict the ball's flight and direction ASAP

#67 What's Your Take Away?...benefit by competing in and/or watching large tournaments

#68 See the Ball?...learn how to watch the ball THROUGH contact

#69 National Champion's Insight-Pat McKenny...the most important shot is over the net

Finally...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 #71

OVER THE NET

In our discussion with Pat McKenny, when asked “What was the most important shot in Pickleball?”, his reply was “the one that gets over the net”...or simply, the one that's “in play”...

Keeping the ball in play is the single best shot you can make, time after time...not trying for a winner or overwhelming your opponent, but simply “in play”, over and over!!!

Another variation on this is theme is “Don't make mistakes”...this mentality starts at the beginning of each point and continues until the end...

The Serve must be put in play...don't try to hit the low percentage winner at the cost of losing the Serve...just keep it deep...

The Return must be kept in play...why give up a point when there is little or no chance for a winner?...just keep it deep...

Coach Mo, of The Villages, says that you are allowed only one Serve and one Return error per month...works for me...

Put the Third Shot in play...get it over the net, even if you hit it a little high...you can recover from this high shot(more on this another time) but you can't recover from the ball that goes into the net...if you don't have time for even a half decent drop shot, hit a drive and then, drop next time...even a lob is better than a ball in the net...

During play...try not to get into a high velocity volley exchange, especially if you only have a 50/50 chance of winning the point...just make an effort to return the point to a neutral condition by hitting a stop volley..or when you get a “fat-sitter”, chose “place over pace” by taking something off the ball and putting it out of reach of your opponent...

Keep the Ball in Play...”OVER THE NET”!!!

TIPBITS #72

AVOIDING INJURIES

No matter the age or gender, we are all prone to injuries...some that range from a mere nuisance to a debilitating long term injury, perhaps even requiring surgery...clearly worth avoiding...

There are at least two kinds or categories of injuries we might expect that could prevent us from continuing our favorite sport(Pickleball, of course)...the most prevalent injuries are those that are caused by overuse AND those that occur suddenly during some sort of strenuous activity...

Overuse injuries occur from performing specific repetitive movements that are not consistent with a(your) regular routine...or simply, too much of the same movement...examples of this might be as simple as carrying a heavy suitcase from one end of the airport to the other...or vacuuming your own 2 story house then doing both of your sisters' places, as well...or taking an overhead drill that goes for half an hour...or starting a running program by jogging 2 miles your first time out...you get the picture...something you could have avoided had you been conscious of the likelihood of the probable consequence...SURPRIZE!!!

Injuries that occur during activity are generally more severe and are almost impossible to predict...they include muscle, ligament and tendon strains and, in some cases, tears...or even broken bones from falls, an indirect result of the injury...during match play, an awkwardly stroked overhead may cause a rotator cuff injury...a quick effort to retrieve a ball could easily cause a hamstring pull...or a rapid movement sideways that results in a turned ankle...any of these injuries can be from mild to serious depending upon the degree of effort being expended...almost all such injuries should be evaluated by a trained specialist...these, too, could have been avoided had you taken the proper steps beforehand...NO SURPRIZE!!!

Avoiding the overuse injury simply requires an awareness of how much is too much of any activity...

Avoiding an activity injury requires a different approach...two simple steps could almost eliminate the likelihood of the occurrence of these injuries...WARM UP and STRETCH!!!

A Warm Up “routine” or “process” will gradually increase your overall body temperature and speed up your heart rate...it serves to better ready you for your Stretching routine...examples of a warm up could be a hot shower, a 5 minute whirlpool or sauna, a bike ride or simply a fast walk or jog around the courts...each will get you ready for your “must do” Stretches...

Stretching serves to increase the flexibility of all the muscle groups and joints utilized in your activities...it also relieves muscle soreness and tension, as well as muscle and joint stiffness...it should become a part of your daily routine, regardless of your planned activities...finally, stretching should be done both BEFORE and AFTER your activity...more particulars to follow...

TIPBITS #73

AVOID INJURY BY STRETCHING

Injuries we incur at anytime keep us from playing, at least to our full potential, our favorite game, Pickleball...last time we talked a little about the two most common types of injuries and to some degree how to avoid them...we encouraged you to always do two things before playing(or any strenuous activity)...1) WARM UP prior to play and 2) add STRETCHING to your warm up routine...

WHY STRETCH? Stretching serves to increase the flexibility of ALL the muscle groups and joints utilized in your activities...it will also relieve muscle soreness and tension, as well as muscle and joint stiffness...

WHAT SHOULD I STRETCH? You should stretch all the muscle groups and joints you expect to use in your activity...in Pickleball, we are talking a bunch!

Working from the bottom up...your feet and ankles start you moving...your calves, knees, hamstrings, quads, hips and gluts add speed and direction to your movement and dictate your level of mobility(virtually ALL your lateral, forward and backward movements)...your abs and back muscles(your core) add strength and control to ALL your upper and lower body movements...and your shoulder, arms, elbow and wrists control your paddle that both directs the ball and controls its pace...it seems to make sense to attend to(stretch) all these muscle and joint groups...they're all so important to your play!!!

But if you can't find or take the time to stretch each and every group, pay particular attention to those groups that have been an issue (prone to injury) for you in the past...

HOW DO I STRETCH? Keep in mind that your goal for all your stretches should be to achieve maximum circulation, relaxation and tissue(muscle, ligament and tendon) elongation WITHOUT exceeding safe limits that might cause injury...begin by selecting the specific stretches you want to perform(see below for sources

for specific stretches)...position yourself as necessary and begin that stretch...start slow until you feel some light irritation, then back off just a little...most stretches should be held for at least 20 seconds...longer if you have the time(even from 1-2 minutes) ...repeat each stretch from 3 to 5 times...try to add a little additional force or extension to each subsequent repetition...

STRETCH SOURCES? The internet can be used to research virtually any stretch for any area...simply search for the name of the group and choose your source...one particularly informative and complete sight for all your needs is...www.hep2go.com

Finally, remember, stretching should be done both **BEFORE** and **AFTER** your activity to stay...**INJURY FREE!!!**

THE DYNAMIC WARM-UP ARGUMENT

Our article, “AVOID INJURY BY STRETCHING “ triggered some feedback and it seems only appropriate to share some other thoughts on how best to “AVOID INJURIES”...

A fellow columnist, and author of “SENIOR TENNIS”, George Wachtel, shared this article written, coincidentally, just days after ours...

Larry Starr, professional athletic trainer for the Cincinnati Reds baseball team and the John Newcombe Fantasy Camp, writes, “Stretching prior to playing has always been a mainstay in tennis and all athletic activities. It was felt that you needed to ‘stretch’ the muscles to prepare them for whatever sport you were to undertake, including tennis. But the current philosophy among professional trainers is different.”

“The research has demonstrated many times that stretching a ‘cold’ muscle or tendon is not only NOT beneficial but can actually cause injury. Stretching is best completed after playing or after any sports activities. “That does not mean that we should not do something prior to engaging in sports. I believe that you have to get ‘the big muscles’ ready for action.”

According to Larry, **the following exercises can be used while you are waiting to get on the court:**

1. Arm circles – 10 times both way.
2. Arms criss-cross – 10 times both way.
3. Arms front/back – 10 times both way.
4. Arms wipe-on/wipe-off – 10 times both way.
5. Trunk twist – 10 times both way.
6. Windmills – alternate toe touch – left hand to right foot and vice-versa – 10 times both way.
7. Knee to the chest – 10 times both legs.
8. Butt kicks (heel to the buttocks) – 10 times both legs.
9. Leg swings (front to back) – 10 times both legs.
10. Leg swings (side to side) – 10 times both legs.

11. Front lunges – 10 times both legs.
12. Side lunges – 10 times both legs.
13. Squats – 10 times.
14. Toe bounces – 10 times toes straight, 10 times toes in, 10 times toes out.
15. Jumping jacks

Either way, our position remains...a good warm up followed by selective stretching will provide the best defense against injuries...stretching clearly adds flexibility and range of motion...and everyone agrees that stretching AFTER strenuous exercise is a must...

Resources:

Baechle, T. R. & Earle, R.W., editors, 2008. Essentials of strength training and conditioning / National Strength and Conditioning Association. 3rd ed. Human Kinetics, 2008, Champaign, IL

Brown, S. (2009) Dynamic warm-up and post-workout recovery methods. Healthy Living.

TIPBITS #75

THE SEVEN DEADLY SINS

Generally, we prefer to talk about what TO do versus what NOT to do...But, it's never the wrong time to review some of, perhaps, the most obvious, but often overlooked or ignored simple mistakes...it can't be emphasized enough, how important it is to avoid these costly miscues that result in lost points or unnecessary turnovers...if your goal is to win by playing Percentage Pickleball, SEE BELOW!!!

ONE: Never miss a Serve...this is one of those “freebees” you never want to give...getting an Ace is almost impossible and a Service winner is just as difficult...so why go for it...simply focus on getting it in and keeping it deep...

TWO: Never miss a Return...another “freebee”...why go for a Return when your chances of a winner are slim to none?...just put it in play and stay in the point...

THREE: Don't sit at the baseline or mid-court after your Return...as the Return team, you have the advantage of being able to advance to and control the net...don't give them a target AND a free pass to the net...get to the net immediately...

FOUR: Never hit a short return...talk about a free pass...you're literally inviting your opponent to the net...as the return team, your goal is to get to the net and control the net(preventing your opponents from advancing to the net)...

FIVE: Don't miss your third shot by hitting it into the net...error on the side of too high, not too low...

SIX: Don't hit a fat sitter...at any time...don't give your opponents an easy ball to put away for a winner...

SEVEN: And don't make an error or miss an easy shot...the most costly and worse sin of all...making dumb mistakes...this may be the most important lesson of all, learning not to make mistakes

versus trying to make a shot that just isn't there (when the odds are against you)...

Play Percentage Pickleball by not committing these Seven Deadly Sins!!!

TIPBITS #76

CALM OR INTENSE?

Simple question...how does it relate to Pickleball??? Consider your mental attitude when you play...do you think you should be calm and controlled??? Or should you be eager and ready to pounce at the blink of an eye??? Certainly a good answer could be a compromise between the two...who knows??? But consider this...

Have you ever wondered why the ball hits the top of the net when you're attempting a simple overhead when you're right at the NVZ...happens a bunch...shouldn't ever happen, though...but why does it?

How about that overhead you need to back pedal for (but it's still well within your reach)...you swing using your best technique...but upon contact with your paddle the ball sails to the back fence, if not over it...it ended up being hit off the very top edge of your paddle, not the face at all...why?

Or maybe you drove that fat sitter a little too hard and it landed just outside of the baseline...bummer, it was an easy shot...what changed?

How about this...when you saw the opportunity, you became over anxious, either outwardly or inwardly...you triggered your flight or fight mechanism and it kicked you into overdrive...all it took was a little shot of adrenalin...and, wallah!...

The easy overhead at the NVZ went right into the net...why?...you reacted just a tad faster than you needed to and your paddle face came through a thousandth of second quicker and the face was just too closed for the ball to go over the net!!!

Your back pedaling overhead that seemed under control flew to the back stop...you got just a little too anxious and that shot of adrenalin pulled your arm through the shot...had you waited just another thousandth of a second...but you were just too quick and the ball had not yet settled into the center of your paddle!!!

Then there are the many fat sitters you just over hit...can you imagine what caused them?...

Think about these comments the next time one of these situations arises in your games...what could you have done to change the outcome??

Being aggressive is good thing as long as it's under control...but its got to be a happy compromise for it to work in your favor!!!

TIPBITS #77

MAKING THE RIGHT DECISION

So, you're ready to purchase a new paddle...WHY?...that's the first question you must ask yourself...

Is it just time, do you need a new look, a new color, is everyone else getting one?...OR is your old one soft, damaged, or just not playing the way it once did?...OR do you want to get something more out of your paddle?...don't settle for that same old paddle...get something different...get what you need!!!

Something different, in terms of performance, probably would include...more power, more control OR both...normally power and control are mutually exclusive...BUT you may have an early model paddle that offers little of either...maybe you want more depth or pace on your ground strokes, better reaction time at the net or a softer touch for delicate shots...these too, could also be mutually exclusive...BUT not always...

What should you do when you're ready to buy?...you should consider these factors...the surface of the paddle, its composition, its weight AND balance, its head size AND shape and finally, the handle's grip size AND the handle length...after you decide on these factors, you get to pick your color! NOTE: no mention has been made as to price since most new paddles are within \$20 of one another!!!

But, how do you know which one to get?...study the specifications, ask others you see play, try some out?...in this case, all of the above is a good answer...the specifications will tell you a great deal...like its composition, its weight, its head size, its grip size and handle length...another good indication is often simply a popularity poll...which paddle do you see most often used?...finally, trying them out...your single most important factor...how does it work for you?

Here's just one reason why you must try them out...sometimes more weight means more power...BUT where the weight is added

is important...was it added in the handle or at the top or proportionately throughout?...all factors...yet some lighter paddles can provide more power, such as the “Legacy” or “Element”...so the specifications alone can't be used...you've got to test them!!!

Once you've assembled an array of paddles to test, have a hitting partner feed you a bunch of balls...start by warming up, as you usually do, with your CURRENT paddle...get a good feel for it...by hitting ground strokes, serves, returns, soft shots and dinks...maybe an overhead or two..now, pick up a new paddle...

Your very FIRST hit will tell you a bunch of information...you will know IMMEDIATELY...if its more powerful or not, if it's heavier(swing weight) when you swing, whether the grip and handle are just right or different some how, or whether it just feels right or not...then hit some more...you shouldn't need too many shots to tell you the difference between your old one and THIS new one...

now try the next new one...notice the difference?...what is it?...repeat until your done...

Remember your goal...do any of these paddles satisfy your goal?...remember the bigger the change you make, the more time you will need to make a successful transition to your new paddle...be patient BUT do make the change...you'll be glad you did!!!

TIPBITS #78

GOOD FOR EVERYONE

Playing Percentage Pickleball still seems elusive for a greater number of players than it should be...

There may be a number of ways of defining Percentage Pickleball but some recurring principals include...keeping the ball in play, not making mistakes, playing defensively, at least until an opportunity presents itself, never over hitting, being patient, and so on and so on...easy to say, hard to do...hard to put into practice...

Another principal...you must set aside practice time on a regular basis...you must use this time to add new strokes, improve existing strokes and work on strategies...it's almost impossible to discipline yourself to actually practice, especially something new, during game play...

It's pretty easy to see the value of practice time versus game play when you consider the value of hitting that new stroke, maybe one time during match play versus hitting that same shot fifty times during a drill...no comparison...

But, you have often heard it said...hitting a shot during practice, whether on the PB court or a golf driving range is totally different than hitting that same shot at game point in the Finals or on the first tee in front of the Club House...big difference...BUT, you still have to put your time in practicing...

Here is a compromise that might help you to become a better Percentage Pickleball player, while giving you real game time playing experience...it's simply "Rally Scoring"...

Many of you know it, some may not...it's often used in organized group sessions when it's desirable to get large groups of players to begin and end their respective matches at virtually the same time...this makes organizing a fun event much easier and limits scheduling and downtime to a minimum...

Rally Scoring is played exactly the same way a normally scored game is played with just one small difference...points are scored EVERY time the point is over...NOT just when the Serving team wins a point...

That scoring change is exactly why its real value comes into play by forcing both, the Serving team and the Receiving team, to play much more cautiously(in other words, not to make mistakes)...

Aha! Percentage Pickleball!!!

TIPBITS #79

STEPS TO THE NET

You're the Serving team and you need to get to the net...you put your Serve in play and the Returning team just hit a deep return with lots of pace...what are you going to do?

If you're current on your strategies, you're probably going to hit a Third Shot drop...if you didn't make it to the net on your first attempt, because your shot was too high, the good news is that you are still in the point...unfortunately, the Receiving team is doing its best to keep you on the base line...so now what?

Nothing's really changed...you've got to continue your plan...attempt another drop and inch forward...keep doing that until you get there...it may require some special footwork and some special shot making...and you'll be bombarded by the Returning team's efforts to keep you back, most likely with shots aimed at your feet or just low and hard...your special footwork will be a step or two forward followed by a "split step" just "prior" to your opponent's shot...your special shot will be a stop or drop volley who's target is to bounce in the NVZ...yes, volley...because your opponents will be hitting at you as you attempt to approach...

First, the split step...this clever bit of footwork has been used by tennis players ever since the days of "Serve and Volley"...tennis players charge toward the net and just prior to their opponent's shot, they totally stop their movement forward and position themselves in the ready position...the moment they determine the flight of the ball, they take the necessary action...in Pickleball, it's exactly the same...whether you've moved just inches forward or a couple of steps, the second your opponent prepares to hit the ball, stop and take the ready position...

Now, the stop volley...this is the shot you'll need to master, as usual, through tons of practice...it's just like any other volley except for its target...your goal is to drop it softly into the NVZ...and then move forward again...repeat this process until you're at the net...

Practice this strategy with a hitting partner feeding balls to you from the NVZ line while you're at midcourt in the ready position...take the pace off, not by stroking it but by merely blocking the ball just over the net, bouncing it in the NVZ...hit several volleys while at midcourt, then move forward a step, making a split step and hit another series of volleys...repeat until you've got it...

Your Steps to the Net...move forward, split step, stop volley, and repeat!

TIPBITS #80

TIME TO RECAP

As we have done after each multiple of 9 TIPBITS, it 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 to be made a part of every day play and warrant repeating...so, here goes...

#71 Over the Net...the most important shot...In Play...don't make mistakes

#72 Avoid Injuries...Warm Up and Stretching guidelines

#73 Avoid Injuries by Stretching...Why, What and How plus Sources for specific stretches

#74 The Dynamic Warm Up...a discussion about a variety of warm up routines versus stretching

#75 The Seven Deadly Sins...from never miss a serve to never miss an easy shot

#76 Calm or Intense...the pros and cons of each mental and physical attribute

#77 Making the Right Decision...consider all the factors before buying a new paddle

#78 Good for Everyone...finding the best way to improve your percentages...Rally Scoring

#79 Steps to the Net...how to get to the net using the split step and the stop volley

Finally...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 #81

INSIGHTS FROM A NATIONAL CHAMPION

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

DEB HARRISON

Where were you born? Walpole, Massachusetts (home of Cedar Junction Prison) and near Patriots Stadium

Did you play other sports?

High School; Lettered and Captained Field Hockey, Basketball (the days of dribble 3X and pass with a center rover) scores were like 29-18! And Softball (played shortstop and the hotspot). In College at The University of Massachusetts; Captained Field Hockey and was selected to The United States Squad. Tennis Teaching Professional at MidCape Racquet Sports Complex on Cape Cod, Massachusetts

Do you remember where and when you first played PB?

A place called 'Carefree' in North Ft. Myers in 2003 (the place had 1 court). I visited the Villages in 2004 and saw ALL the pickleball courts and just HAD to relocate. I've played just about every day since then!!!!

What is your favorite shot and why?

I am, I think, best known for my third shot drop from the left to the extreme right as the ball tails away from my opponent. I really enjoy a 'topspin' lob that spins and drops IN.

What paddle(s) do you currently use?

I recently changed to the Paddle Tek Element. I have used the Predator for years, the Legacy for a small time, the Bantam Paddle Tek for a little while, as well. But really, really like the balance, lightness, good pop, and 5 year warranty of the Element.

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

I like the 'hot spot' drill which requires 3 players one of whom is

on the hot spot. They can dink ANYWHERE and the twosome across from them MUST dink in their box, all trying to get each other out of their 'comfort zone'.

Do you have a warm up routine?

I absolutely LOVE to practice but before a match I like to do straight across dinks, diagonal dinks, volley-volley, swing volleys and ground strokes, and then a few serves. Nothing really hard but stuff just to groove the basic components.

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

I think the 'square' volley is perhaps the most important. Trajectory and placement is key to this shot above all else.

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

There are probably more than 80 components of the game. As I try to perfect each component, it opens up more and more possibilities when I am no longer worried about 'how' to execute a component. I begin to really 'see' my opponents' position in the court and react accordingly. Being comfortable with skill execution allows you to expand your awareness to the 'other' things important to the game like 'putting it where they ain't'. Drills and muscle memory by repetition is the only way to get comfortable with the parameters of your game. Also, play 'within' yourself and don't try to be too heroic if that is not within your nature.

TIPBITS #82

THE ROLE OF THE SQUARE VOLLEY

Last time, we heard from one of the nation's best Pickleball players and arguably, the best Pickleball instructor anywhere...not that we're biased, BUT it would take far more room and time than any of us have in order to document all of her achievements OR to detail what she has done for the game...

You can see the depth of Deb's knowledge and interest in each of her comments...not the least of which is her paddle insights/recommendation...but her other comments are worth noting as well...her best shot, of course and why not, is the most difficult shot in the game...and it's her favorite...we once discussed the notion of making your favorite shot your best shot...and Deb has surely done that...we must also comment on her *other choice* for her favorite shot, the Topspin Lob...this has to be only a sentimental favorite because it is, percentage-wise, a very low percentage shot...BUT, done successfully, it provides an incredibly rewarding feeling...

Then, there is her insatiable desire to continue to get better, and to do that, through practice...this is obvious when you look at her comments on her favorite drills, warm up routines and her other comments...it's best summarized by her comment on “how” to execute as opposed to “when to do what”...in her words, “drills and muscle memory by repetition is the only way to get comfortable with the parameters of your game”...any of this sound familiar?

But, what's all this got to do with the Square Volley?

Well, Deb has said that, from her point of view, the Square Volley is the most important shot in Pickleball...

If one were to gather(chart) all the shots resulting in a won or lost point in most Open level Finals or Championship matches, one point would be obvious...

If you tally all point ending strokes, including Services and Returns, Overheads and Lobs, Ground strokes(FH and BH Drives), 3rd Shot drops, NVZ Dink shots and Volleys, the number of Volleys resulting in a point lost or won would exceed all the other strokes ***combined!!***

Sounds like pretty good reasoning to consider the Volley the most important shot!

Finally, if you'd like to get some detailed instruction from Deb, simply go to You-Tube and Search on “Deb Harrison”...or come down to The Villages and see her in person...you'll be amazed!

TIPBITS #83

PRACTICING WITH 2 PLAYERS

Time spent practicing is the single best way to improve your game...and this includes incorporating new elements into your game...to start, find a practice partner...when you do, what should you do?

The following is a partial list of practice routines(drills) that you can do with just 2 players...

Note: starting with the Dink shot is crucial...if you cannot master these strokes, you will find it much harder to master other more difficult strokes...you must start here!!!

DINK ACROSS: Standing at the NVZ line, start across the net from your practice partner and hit both forehands and backhands just over the net landing somewhere between the half way point of the NVZ and the NVZ line; repeat until you're satisfied with your results; next, stand just inside the left sideline, with your partner directly across from you(if you are both right handed, you will be hitting only backhands and your partner, only forehands); hit your shots so that they will land (aim for) the sideline; once your satisfied, move to the center of the court and repeat the drill BUT, this time you are hitting only forehands and your partner, only backhands; hit your shots so that they will land (aim for) on the imaginary line that divides the court in half; repeat as before; next, return to the center of the left side of the court; you will now hit dink shots to your partner, alternating the direction of the ball from one side to the other(first to your partner's forehand, then to his backhand) while your partner always returns the ball to the same spot; reverse roles and repeat...

DINK DIAGONAL: Standing on the right side of the court at the NVZ line AND with your partner across the net in the same position on the right side of his court, start hitting dink shots diagonally across to your partner...ALWAYS keep the ball inside the NVZ...if you are both right handed, you will be hitting forehands; your objective is to keep the ball in play for as long as

possible; when you are satisfied with your progress, restart the drill by hitting balls as close as possible along the line of the net; always return to your original position on the court; when done, repeat again this time adding spins to the ball; first, use underspin, then topspin, then sidespin; when you have tried and are comfortable with each spin type, alternate the use of the spins, moving your partner around; NOW, reverse your positions on the court(you and your partner will be on the left side of your respective courts); repeat all of the above sequences but this time hit only backhands; your objective with the diagonal drills is to move your partner around, pulling him off the court with a wide angle; BUT you also need to factor in some amount of caution that will keep your potential for success as high as possible(your percentages); this can be done by keeping the ball within a foot of the side line and never too deep or too high...

DINK MOVING: This drill may not be something that lends itself to actual playing conditions; it will, however, require that you hit many different dink shots from almost any position along the NVZ line; further, it forces you to maintain a very high level of FOCUS just to keep the ball in play...begin by standing at the far left side of your court at the NVZ line(your partner will be directly across from you at his far right side at the NVZ line); hit a couple of dink shots directly across to your practice partner, then hit one towards the middle moving your partner in that direction; your partner will return it towards your middle moving you to the middle; this movement continues until you reach the opposite edge of the court; keep the ball in play as long as possible, reversing the process by moving each other back and forth, from one side to the other; repeat as long as you can...

More next time!!!

TIPBITS #84

MORE PRACTICE WITH 2 PLAYERS

Previously, we described 3 different drills that focused on NVZ dinking...these drills were done with just one other person, a hitting partner...this article is a continuation of drills for just 2 players...

Remember, its important, when starting any drill session, to begin with those drills discussed previously; the Dink Across, the Dink Diagonal and, to a lesser degree, the Dink Moving...after those, consider these...

THIRD SHOT DROP, ACROSS: Position one player at the NVZ line(feeding) and the other at mid-court(practicing)...while feeding balls gently, hit 3 consecutive shots from mid-court that bounce in the NVZ...once you have hit 3 in a row successfully, repeat drill but this time the practicing player backs up 2 steps; after success from there(3 in a row), repeat from behind the baseline...try to hit 5 in a row successfully before reversing roles with your hitting partner...

THIRD SHOT DROP, DIAGONAL: This drill is basically the same as the first drill but is performed diagonally across the court...repeat all aspects as above but diagonally...when both players have completed the first diagonal, repeat again by doing the other diagonal...

VOLLEY-VOLLEY: With each player standing opposite each other at the NVZ line, begin by volleying the ball at about half pace...increase the pace gradually, making every effort to keep the ball in play...repeat until you have reached near your maximum pace, then continue until you're happy with your performance...

VOLLEY-DRIVE: With 1 player at the NVZ line and the other at the baseline, hit deep volleys from the net and hit hard drives at the baseline...repeat until satisfied with your results...then reverse positions and repeat...

THREE BALL DRILL: With both players at the baseline, diagonally across from one another, player with the ball serves,

player across returns and charges the net, and the server attempts a third shot drop...player returning, now at the net, catches the ball and returns to his baseline...the drill is now repeated with the other player serving...this continues until you're content with your progress(or too tired to continue)...

HALF COURT SINGLES: Standing across(not diagonally) from one another, play one game to 7 using rally scoring...this drill requires a good serve, return, third shot drop and lots of control...

LOB-OVERHEAD: If you've got anything left(energy or time), position one player at the baseline and the other at midcourt...the baseline player begins by hitting a lob, the midcourt player hits a controlled overhead in the direction of his hitting partner and this sequence continues for as long as possible...your goal, keep the ball in play...repeat by reversing positions...

SPECIALTY SHOTS: Add drills as you need to develop various specialty shots, such as block volley, stop or touch volley, angle volley, lob volley, swing volley or any other shot you'd like to learn...

Finally, set aside practice time every week(at least one hour, if not two)...not one accomplished player, in any sport, has ever reached the top of his or her sport with out this minimum commitment!!!

TIPBITS #85

PRACTICE WITH 3 PLAYERS

Previously, we described a variety of different drills that just 2 players can use to hone their skills...sometimes you'll have a chance to practice but you've got 3 players...what then?

You can certainly adapt most of the drills described for 2 players, especially the 3 dinking drills...but a couple of drills or practice scenarios are uniquely suitable for 3 players...they are the “Hot Spot” drill mentioned by Deb Harrison in her article and the “Cut Throat” game, a format used in many sports, as well as pickleball...

HOT SPOT: this is a two against one drill/game and the single player controls/dictates the point...the onus is on the single player; to move the other two players around the court looking for an opening or waiting for a high ball to attack and win the point...

the drill starts with all 3 players at the NVZ line, 2 on one side of the court and 1 on the other...the single player stands/covers just the right or left HALF of the court(vary the HALF played)...once play begins, the 2 players on their side can only hit their shots to the HALF of the court that the single player is covering...

play starts by dinking softly several times over the net(say 3 to 6 times)...after successfully reaching the number of dinks chosen, play begins in earnest...for the single player, this format simulates exact game playing situations...and for the two players, it requires extra effort and teaches ball placement control(hitting only to the single player's side)... play is to 5 or 7(rally scoring)....repeat, rotating the position of the players...

CUT THROAT: once again, another two against one game...as in the Hot Spot game, the single player only covers his HALF of the court and the two players must return their shots to that HALF of the court only...

only one end of the court is used for Serving AND points are only scored by the Server... players determine who will be the first

Server AND which end will be used for Serving...

throughout the game, players rotate(clockwise) to and from the Serving end... a new player rotates onto the Serving end when the point is lost by the current Server...the Server's position(half) on the court is dependent upon his score, just as in singles(Even number, right half; Odd, left)...after the loss of a point by the Server, the player on the left side of the two players rotates onto the Serving end...each player keeps track of his own score...games may be played to 7, 9 or 11...

Again, set aside practice time every week(at least one hour, if not two)...not one accomplished player, in any sport, has ever reached the top of his or her sport with out this minimum commitment!!!

TIPBITS #86

PRACTICE WITH 4 PLAYERS

Clearly, the optimum situation for a good practice is 4 players and an hour(preferably more) of time...and, it would be best, if all players were of a similar skill level...

If you've been reading these articles all along, you've been privy to a series of discussions on practicing with 2 and 3 players...use ALL of the 2 player drills when you have 4 players...

These include...the Warm-Up, the Dink Across(ahead), the Dink Diagonal, the Third Shot Across(ahead), the Third Shot Diagonal, the Volley-Volley, the Volley-Drive, the 3 Ball drill, the Half-Court Singles, Lob-Overhead, and a variety of Specialty Shots you choose...

To these 2 player drills, insert a couple of games that can be played when there ARE 4 players...

DINK GAME: after your dink practices, insert the Dink Game...with all 4 players at the NVZ line, start by hitting a series of soft, easy to return dink shots INSIDE the NVZ...after 4 have been hit successfully, begin the game...ONLY soft dink shots may be hit...any balls hit into the net or outside of the NVZ are errors and score a point for the opposing team...play to 5 and then rotate partners and repeat until you've played with each player...

SNAP GAME: after you've completed your volley drills, insert the Snap Game...Important: this drill simulates actual game play and should be played whenever you have 4 players in a practice session...all aspects of the Snap Game are identical to the Dink Game with the following exceptions...once play starts, players hit defensive dink shots(not necessarily within the NVZ but still in play), move their opponents around, look for an opening or high ball and attempt to SNAP(hit a forceful shot) through the opening...no lobbing is allowed...play to 5 and then rotate partners and repeat until you've played with each player...

FIVE SERVES: for your last drill(before playing the Plus-Minus Game or actual game play), insert the Five Serves drill...always use the same side of the court for the Server...start serving in the normal position(the right half of the court)...all four players will stand in this position when it is their turn in the rotation to Serve...begin by hitting an aggressive Serve...follow that with an aggressive Return...hit a soft Third Shot drop only...then play the point out...NOTE that each of the first three shots must be successful(in play) or that Serve is repeated...in other words, if unsuccessful, that Serve does not count as one of the five allotted to that Server...after five successfully completed points, rotate one player to the right so that the next Server is in position...repeat until all four players have Served...then repeat the entire drill one more time but this time begin the Serve on the left half of the court...this drill allows both the Server and the Returner to experiment with different, perhaps more aggressive shots...as an additional practice tool, consider marking(chalk-line or ?) the last 3 feet in front of the baseline as a target...if either the Serve or the Return does NOT fall within that area, repeat the Serve...

Try these drills...there is just no better way to improve your skills!!!

Lastly, remember when you **give back** you always **get back** more than you **give back**...

TIPBITS #87

WHAT IS THE SQUARE VOLLEY?

Some time ago, we discussed the “Role of the Square Volley”...it all started after Deb Harrison said, from her point of view, it was the most important shot in the game...this could very well be because a variety of statistics gathered in many Open level Finals or Championship matches seem to support her claim...statistics point out that not just the majority of winners or losers(point ending shots) ARE volleys...BUT that point ending volleys equal or exceed the combined totals of all other point ending shots(serves, returns, overheads, ground strokes, etc., etc.)...

But that's where that article left off..no further discussion, no explanation of what's a square volley...so, for those interested or concerned that they might be missing out, here is an explanation...

The Square Volley, as Deb named it, is the most basic volley shot in the game...a volley, by definition, is nothing more than hitting the ball(no matter what the racket sport) in the air, before it hits the ground...the Square Volley got it's name because of the way it reflects the position of the player when it's being executed...being “Square to” or directly facing the ball as it is about to be hit by your opponent...to be more specific, your entire body is facing the oncoming ball, your shoulders, upper and lower body, your legs and feet, all directly facing the ball...as Deb would call it, forming a “wall”, straight up and down, that prevents anything from passing by...you are set to either attack or defend...the ready position!!!

From this position you can hit ANY height ball coming at ANY speed...being in this position offers you the best possible position to control the direction and pace of your response...to make your shot a point ending shot in your favor!!!

Lastly, remember when you *give back* you always *get back* more than you *give back*...

TIPBITS #88

MIXED DOUBLES ETIQUETTE

Long before any TIPBITS articles were written, long before Pickleball was even invented, a lady by the name of Emily Post, wrote a very popular self-help book entitled "Etiquette" ...their website defines Etiquette as treating people with consideration, respect, and honesty...it means being aware of how our actions affect those around us...to help us build successful relationships... Wikipedia defines it as a code of behavior that delineates expectations for social behavior according to contemporary conventional norms within a society, social class or group...MANNERS!!

Playing doubles with a player of a different gender(mixed doubles) or playing with a player of a different skill level(men's or women's doubles), can trigger some uncomfortable situations...and this is where some special emphasis should be placed on proper Pickleball Etiquette...

If you watch high level Championship Doubles(mixed, men's or women's) matches, you will see some relatively aggressive style of play...i.e., the more dominate player imposes him or her self into the middle of most of the points...with a Championship on the line, this approach generally allows the better player to dictate play and gives that team a better chance of winning...if winning is the only thing that matters, perhaps this might be considered acceptable behavior...BUT probably not from Emily Post's or Miss Manners' perspective...certainly not in every day play!!

In day to day games, in an open play environment, you are frequently paired with OR matched against a player with somewhat different skills than your own...as a doubles partner, your role is to cover your half of the court and hit the balls on your side...if a ball comes to the middle, it's customary to let the Forehand player take it(or the First one there or the player in the Flow)...ideally, each player ends up hitting just about the same number of balls...that's why you're there!

On the other hand, taking every ball you possibly can OR hitting every ball to the weaker player is just NOT right, it's poor sportsmanship, it's bordering on poor behavior, and at the least, it's bad manners...

It's NOT always about winning...it's about doing the right thing!

In Tennis, there is a term often used by teaching pros called “Customer Tennis”...when a teaching pro is hitting with 3 other students, his goal is to keep the ball in play, not overwhelm anyone on the opposite side of the net or take all the balls from his partner...next time you're playing with OR against a weaker player, consider the tennis pro's mentality and try a little “Customer Pickleball”!!

What are your Pickleball Etiquette Pet Peeves?

Lastly, remember when you *give back* you always *get back* more than you *give back*...

TIPBITS #89

PRACTICE WITH 1 PLAYER

We've talked a bunch about different ways to practice and drill, with 2, 3 or 4 players...we haven't discussed what to do on your own...

Until recently, practicing with one(by yourself) was pretty much limited to hitting on a bang board or a convenient wall...or getting a bucket of balls and hitting a ton of serves...or maybe practicing a topspin lob...the problem with these last options meant that, after you had exhausted your supply of balls, you had to go pick them up from who knows where!

Nothing wrong with this kind of practice BUT now there is a another option...it's called Simon, a Pickleball-specific ball machine...

Simon IS battery operated(6 hr charge)...it's portable(32 lbs)...it holds a ton of balls(160)...you can adjust the ball speed(10-30mph)...it's pretty accurate(+ or - 3 feet)...you can adjust the frequency of the ball feed...it will hit lobs...and ball machines of this design are historically very reliable for many years of trouble free operation...

Simon NEEDS wheels, so you don't have to carry it...its top speed could be enhanced(30mph max)...it lacks any height adjustment...it lacks any directional adjustment...it has no random capability...it has no remote control...it can't be programmed...it can't apply different spins...and by comparison to Tennis ball machines, it's pricey(\$1100-\$1400)

BUT, in Simon's defense, adding wheels and height adjustments are easy DIY fixes and “should” be available from the manufacturer before long...and the other features may or may NOT be an issue for many...

Simon's real claim to fame is that it will feed 160 balls to you in virtually the same spot...there is no better way to add or master a

stroke than by continually repeated the same stroke, developing muscle memory!!

Can't afford one?...consider the cooperative approach...get 4 to 8 players to go in with you(with 8, that's just \$150 each)...store it at the last user's place...next user picks it up and stores it at his place, etc., etc...

Check it out at the Website below...

<http://www.pickleballmachine.com/Simon-Pickleball-Machine-p/simon.htm>

Lastly, remember when you *give back* you always *get back* more than you *give back*...

TIPBITS #90

TIME TO RECAP

As we have done after each multiple of 9 TIPBITS, it 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 to be made a part of every day play or simply warrant repeating...so, here goes...

#81 Insights from a National Champion-Deb Harrison...Most Important shot is the Square Volley

#82 The Role of the Square Volley...Why it is the most important shot

#83 Practicing with 2 Players...the three most common drills for two players

#84 More Practice for 2 Players...a bunch more drills for 2 players

#85 Practice with 3 Players...adapting 2 player drills plus the “Hot Spot” and “Cut Throat” drills

#86 Practice with 4 Players...doing 2 player drills plus Dink and Snap games and “5 Serves” drill

#87 What is the Square Volley?...hitting the volley with your body “square” to the oncoming ball

#88 Mixed Doubles Etiquette...using good sportsmanship when playing with or against a weaker player

#89 Practice with 1 Player...using a bang board or the new Pickleball-specific ball machine, “Simon”

Finally...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 #91

COMPETITIVE VERSUS OPEN PLAY

In a recent article, we discussed Etiquette or Sportsmanship as it related to either mixed doubles play OR playing with OR against a weaker player(a lot of feedback was received on this subject, so it seems appropriate to address it a little further)...it remains true now, as it did then, that competitive tournament play seems to favor the approach that whatever is needed or what works best to secure a win is acceptable..and further, based on an above average response to this article, this is NOT acceptable for open play...

At a recent forum of some 15 Pickleball National Gold Medal winners, both men and women, a question was asked about Mixed Doubles tournament play..."Why does one player usually take over or control the majority of the points?"...the simple answer was that they want to win and many times the stronger player can impose him or her self in such a way as to affect the final outcome, one way or another...the singular intent, to win...OK, so much for that topic...

But then, the discussion continued, when another person asked about every day(open) Pickleball...here the responses were ALL in sync...from each and every player, the response was the same...maybe it can be summarized by another question...

What possible purpose could it serve to play to the weaker player?...

Yes, it's good to keep both players engaged in the point...but when an opportunity to hit a winner OR even try for a winner presents itself, THAT is the time to hit to the better player...NOT to the weaker player...as the question suggests, what possible benefit might you get from hitting a winner against a weaker player?

You learn by playing against better players...how many times have you heard that? It is one of the best ways to improve your game...if you win a point or more importantly, win a match, by playing the better player, then, and only then, have you really accomplished

something...

Hitting against a weaker player or winning by playing most of your shots to the weaker player just doesn't help you improve or serve any other purpose...so, don't just take it from the writer but from a number of the best players in the nation...they all agree...

Win by challenging the best player on the court, not the weakest!

Lastly, remember when you *give back* you always *get back* more than you *give back*...

TIPBITS #92

IS 50/50 GOOD ENOUGH?

At a recent local club event, one of the Mens Open Doubles National Championship Gold Medal winners provided an analysis of the match...his name was Matt Staub, and NOT coincidentally, he is the son of last year's Gold Medal winner...while times change, and the young are infiltrating the sport at its highest levels, some things DON'T change...and that's the strategy that it takes to win a National Championship...

This match is quite interesting for several reasons...while Matt is the youngest on the court, he plays with the maturity of a much more seasoned veteran(perhaps he has his dad to thank for that)...just the same, when it comes to patience and keeping the game plan in place, it's Matt that leads the way, not his more senior partner or their opponents...

It's necessary to recognize that anyone of the players could have ripped the cover(if it had one) off the ball at most any time but they choose not to...and Matt, again as the youngest, has arguably the quickest hands, feet and reaction times of any of the other players...and he would probably be the most successful at doing that...BUT, does he try to overwhelm his opponents?...not unless it's on his terms!

Nor does he attempt to initiate any sort of volley bang fest...he realizes that, AT BEST, there is only a 50/50 chance of winning that kind of point...instead he utilizes his younger talents to take the pace OFF the ball and neutralize the point...he does this every chance that he gets...it's so that he can get aggressive on his terms, not his opponents...

See this for yourself by watching the video of this match on the site shown below...

And while your watching the match, you may note a couple of other points...

Both teams use the power formation OR stacking to make the best use of their skills...on Matt's team, you see Matt(black shirt) on the right side, meaning that his backhand is in the middle...not that his forehand is weak but his control on the backhand side is second to none...also, his partner, Chris Miller known for his massive forehand, positions himself far to the left of his side(protecting his backhand) so that he is always ready to go for a big forehand winner...

Finally, notice that nobody is lobbing...this is of little or no value at this level of play...

But regardless of your level of play, you can learn one lesson here...if you are virtually equal to your opponents, you will not be able to out-power them...you will need to out-strategize them!

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VKVL-doWTLM>

Lastly, remember when you *give back* you always *get back* more than you *give back*...

TIPBITS #93

INSIGHTS FROM A NATIONAL CHAMPION

(This TIPBITS format presents some Background and Insights from the Best Players in the Country...the next TWO articles will share information from a married couple that have won numerous National Championships in Singles, Doubles and (yes) Mixed Doubles...it will be Ladies First)

DIANE BOCK

Where were you born? Fort Dodge, IA

Did you play other sports?

Tennis in High School

Do you remember where and when you first played PB?

I was first introduced to Pickleball in The Villages while visiting some friends, Pat and Dan Brown, in 2002...

What is your favorite shot and why?

It has always been my cross-court backhand dink because its been second nature to me BUT now it has become another shot...when I am standing at the NVZ on the left side, I have had a lot of success with hitting down the side line...

What paddle(s) do you currently use?

I use the PaddleTek Bantam because it is a good all around paddle for both Doubles and Singles...

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

My favorite drill is the “one, two, three” drill or as its often called the “four” or “five serve” drill...it's played with four players, the Server must hit a deep serve(within 3 feet of the baseline), the Returner must hit a deep return(within 3 feet of the baseline) and then the serving team MUST hit a successful Third Shot drop...repeat the serve if any of those 3 shots are not successful...the first player hits 4 or 5 serves and then the drill is repeated for each player...

Do you have a warm up routine?

I like to start by hitting dinks, then ground strokes from the baseline, then Third Shot drops...these shots give me a good warm up before beginning a game...

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

My opinion is that it is the Third Shot drop because, if you can't get to the net you can't expect to win the point...

What has been the key to your Mixed Doubles Championship successes?

For us, it has been being able to hit good drop shots from the baseline AND sticking to the dink game until my partner can put them away...

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

Pickleball should be fun! Play the best you can with the best attitude! Give the benefit of the doubt to the other team with line calls! Be thankful that we can play and enjoy the game!

TIPBITS #94

INSIGHTS FROM A NATIONAL CHAMPION

(This TIPBITS format presents some Background and Insights from the Best Players in the Country...this article is the second in a series from a married couple that have won numerous National Championships in Singles, Doubles and (yes) Mixed Doubles...now the guy)

MARC BOCK

Where were you born? Indianapolis, Indiana (not sure of the zip)

Did you play other sports?

Played baseball, tennis, basketball, racquetball, and ran track (forced to by my coaches)

Do you remember where and when you first played PB?

First played Pickleball in The Villages...as a guest of some Iowa friends...Loved it right off.

What is your favorite shot and why?

Got to name two...maybe not always effective, but I like the topspin lob and the "dead drop".

What paddle(s) do you currently use?

Currently using the Paddletek "Stratus"...It is light, quick (sometimes I can't even catch up with it) and it has adequate power when needed...Also, has a 5 year warranty...important, as I was going through other paddles every 3-4 months...mostly going "dead".

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

I enjoy what I feel is a very important drill we call the "One/Two/Three. "...Serve deep, return the serve deep, and drop the Third Shot just over the net.

Do you have a warm up routine?

Warm up routines vary....mostly start with dinks to get eye-hand

focus and move back to dropping just over the net and then, power shots.

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

The most important shot in Pickleball is...all of them. The best players have a quiver full of shots to use in different situations...For example, against bangers (hard hitters), the dead drop is very effective as well as dinking...Against not so mobile players, soft angles, lobs, and deep base line shots are most valuable.

What has been the key to your Mixed Doubles Championship successes?

Success (winning medals) in mixed doubles, especially playing with a spouse, can be challenging...A couple important things to remember...it is only a game...not life! And, never say, "why did you do that?"...Always be supportive, as you'll probably have a car ride home together.

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

Enjoy Pickleball for what it is...a fun game for friendship and exercise. Preferably play at your age level and within that, your skill level for all to have fun. As mentioned earlier, it's only a game!

TIPBITS #95

RECAPPING INSIGHTS

Our last couple of articles highlighted some insights from a husband and wife National Champion Mixed Doubles team, Marc and Diane Bock...it seems appropriate to re-iterate some of their comments, putting more emphasis on some of them...

Marc and Diane are truly students of the game...they organize and run(on their own and on a totally volunteer basis), several of the most in-demand series of Advanced Pickleball drills in The Villages...they're run several times each week, mens and ladies(no mixed)...they do this to help others get better...and the drills are not for the faint at heart...if you are fortunate enough to get in, you are expected to put in the time and work...2 OR MORE hours each session...and once you get in, you stay in...but this kind of commitment has paid dividends for them, both from a personal reward and a Tournament results perspective...

More specifically, Diane has learned this game well...her Serve is always hit with good pace and depth...her Return is a mirror image of her Serve...one of her best shots is the Third Shot drop and her soft game is impeccable...and, as she mentions in the article, she keeps the point going(often winning it on her own, too) until Marc can intercept a ball for the put away winner...that's Diane's take on many of their mixed doubles points...

Marc, of course is strong player, whether you're talking about playing the soft game or the power game...as he states, for him, it's important to have a complete game, as he says, “a full quiver”...you don't get that by trying some odd shots during a game...you master them by working specifically on them in practice(drilling)...Marc's thoughts on the Mixed Doubles successes is viewed more from the perspective of communication.....remembering to always be supportive of your partner and that it is only a game...not life!

And, did you notice they both like the same drill(The 1,2,3)...it simulates real game play in a practice setting...

Finally, it was particularly good to see (both) their emphasis on the value of the game to each of them...Diane...Pickleball should be fun! Play the best you can with the best attitude! Give the benefit of the doubt to the other team with line calls! Be thankful that you can play and enjoy the game!...and Marc...Enjoy Pickleball for what it is...a fun game for friendship and exercise. Preferably play at your age AND skill level for all to have fun. It's only a game!

And as they have done,

remember when you *give back* you always *get back* more than you *give back*...

TIPBITS #96

CHANGE OF PACE

There has been a number of articles written on the Serve, never much as a weapon but mostly as to its placement...there have been a lot more articles written about the Return, its multiple purpose, its placement and the various options available from a strategic point of view...But, for the most part, there has been very little discussion about deviating from pretty basic Serves and Returns...this article is intended to open the door a little on addressing more particulars about both the Serve and the Return...

It's entitled a Change of Pace...many players focus exclusively on putting the Serve into play, probably keeping it deep but near the middle of the service box...this eliminates the need to “waste” energy on trying to force an error when there is very little likelihood of that happening...hence, the Serve becomes relatively routine in nature...this is just fine...

But, for starters, lets consider one other option...it's called the Lob Serve...it can be just as safe as your regular Serve but it does introduce a new twist(figuratively, for now)...the Lob Serve is just as the name implies... you've probably seen it used from time to time and thought very little about it...it's hit in a very similar fashion to your regular serve but its trajectory is considerably different...instead of being relatively flat with enough pace to land deep into the court, the Lob Serve is hit with a little less pace but with a much higher trajectory(the ball reaching a height of between 12 and say 20 feet)...Finally, if you practice it a bit, you can hit it with topspin which will further accentuate the higher bounce plus add additional depth(for free)...

So, why do this...how about for starters, the name of the article...it's a change of pace, it's something totally different...it will be a surprise...at the very least, it will get the attention of your opponent, may even force an error or a weak return...many players will have difficulty returning this Serve with any degree of effectiveness...and some players don't like it at all...as a worst case scenario, it can't hurt you...so there!

TIPBITS #97

CHIP AND CHARGE...WHAT IS IT

The Chip and Charge is Tennis lingo for a strategy that is rapidly disappearing from the Tennis scene as a result of both new technologies in racket development and consequently, the current style of play...the Chip and Charge was used to help a player hitting the Return to get to the net...its counterpart, for the Server, was the Serve and Volley...both had the same expected result...getting the player to the net where points could be more easily won...in Tennis, that philosophy is no longer valid...the rackets are so powerful and the players so adept at utilizing this power, that being at the net is no longer the advantage it once was...

Not true in Pickleball...getting to the net remains imperative in Pickleball...we've discussed the Return in numerous articles(#s 2-5 for starters)...the Chip and Charge is yet another variation..and its technique and benefits apply equally well to Pickleball as they once did to Tennis...

As the name implies, the Chip and Charge is comprised of two components...the Chip, which is the stroke used..and the Charge, the movement associated with the stroke...

This combination alone is one reason why this strategy can be more effective than other alternatives...that is, the stroke is combined with the movement versus the two efforts being separate and distinct...

Because the Chip shot is hit with underspin, it provides a greater margin for error(drive and topspin returns require more difficult timing)...in the same breathe, this means that it is easier to control, easier to place it where you want it...you'll be able to use this strategy on all but the most difficult of serves...

Further, the spin adds another benefit in that the ball will not rise as much(not to mention its propensity to skid) when it bounces requiring the opponent to hit up on the ball...

Finally, combining the stroke with the forward movement gets you to the net sooner, ready to continue the attack...

We'll talk about HOW next time!

TIPBITS #98

CHIP AND CHARGE...HOW TO DO IT

The Chip and Charge, as we discussed previously, is a Tennis term describing a technique once used to make approaching the net from the baseline an easier transition...something not really needed in Tennis any longer but a “must” for Pickleball...and, in Pickleball, it's used on the Return, providing a safe and effective(easier) way to get to the net...

Briefly, as the name implies, the Chip and Charge is comprised of two components...the Chip, which is the stroke itself..and the Charge, the movement associated with the stroke...and, as a Return, it can be used on all but the most difficult of serves...

First, the stance or ready position...without going into the particulars of the ready position(see previous articles), take your normal stance facing the Server but consider a slightly more crouched or lower stance than usual(and keep that crouched or lower position throughout the complete shot)...this will allow you to more easily get your paddle under the ball as it is approaching...

Now, the footwork...once you've decided whether your return will require either a forehand or a backhand, make your turn(don't compromise here...you want the shoulder turn to be obvious and evident) as appropriate, plant your back foot and step forward with your other foot...this will begin your forward motion(the beginning of the Charge), begin your stroke as you are moving forward, keep your feet going through the shot and advance quickly all the way to the net...that's the footwork(the Charge) part...

Now the stroke...the Chip is essentially a basic slice or undercut shot(that applies backspin) but in a much more abbreviated form...the back swing, as with all slice or under spun shots, begins with the paddle face open and above the ball as it approaches...keep that back swing shorter than normal, holding the paddle out in front(important...you should be able to see your paddle in front of you as you approach the ball)...the paddle or stroke then begins a downward trajectory so that contact with the ball is on the lower

half of the ball(as in the case of a clock face, this would be somewhere between 4 and 6 o'clock)...this imparts the desired (back)spin and because it is hit with an open paddle face, you will get the added control needed when you are hitting on the move...and the follow through should just be a natural extension of the shot as you progress toward the net...

And use the continental grip(as with all other shots) and keep a firm wrist!!!

Finally, don't be tentative on this shot...it's an aggressive style or technique and you should treat it in that manner...don't let the ball play you...you play the ball and go after it and then get to the net!!!

TIPBITS #99

CHIP AND CHARGE...FOLLOW UP

The most recent articles on the Chip and Charge generated some feedback and questions(thank you) and that has triggered this supplement to those articles...

What was avoided in the previous articles was any description(s) about Pace or Placement...

Pace...because this shot tends to be somewhat of an aggressive approach, you might expect that the pace would be also(hit hard, with lots of pace)...supporting that, the article eluded to the fact that hitting with underspin often lends itself to OR produces more shots that are under control...so, going for your shot, adding quite a bit of pace, works well when combined with the Chip and Charge...

BUT, on another note, if you're less likely to hit with pace OR your more urgent need is to get to the net in a timely manner(i.e., you're tired or slowing down), then the Chip hit more softly, high and deep, is probably a more viable alternative...this option has the added benefit of requiring your opponent to manufacture their own pace for the third shot, nullifying some of the hard hitters advantage...

OR, mix them up!!!

Placement...like all other potentially successful Returns, including the Chip and Charge, the target is crucial...and that target CAN be the same, without regard for the amount of pace used...the most common target should be deep into the court, some 1 to 3 feet from the baseline and near the middle of the court, 1 to 2 feet from the center line...

But, if your style is more aggressive, then your placement might also be more aggressive...such as targeting the weaker player or the weaker player's weakest side...but, keep in mind, hitting harder also introduces more risk...finding the right balance of pace and placement could come down to finding the right balance of

aggression and control...

Either way, the Chip and Charge must be executed with total commitment...it's STILL, all about Percentage Pickleball...no point in hitting a great return if you can't do it 9 out of 10 times!!!

TIPBITS #100

TIME TO RECAP

As we have done after each multiple of 9 TIPBITS, it 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 to be made a part of every day play or simply warrant repeating...so, here goes...

#91 Competitive Play Versus Open Play...Who to hit to and When and Why

#92 Is 50/50 Good Enough?...Don't initiate a Rapid Volley Exchange

#93 Insights from a National Champion-Diane Bock...Tips for Playing Mixed Doubles

#94 Insights from a National Champion-Marc Bock...More Tips for Playing Mixed Doubles

#95 Recapping Insights...How this Married Couple has Success at Mixed Doubles

#96 Change of Pace...What is the Point of Using a Lob Serve or a Lob Return

#97 Chip and Charge-What is it?...Discussion about and the Description a of it

#98 Chip and Charge-How to do it...Description of the Mechanics of the Footwork and the Shot

#99 Chip and Charge-Follow Up...Further Discussion on the Use of Placement and/or Pace

Finally...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 #101

A 30 MINUTE LESSON

This lesson will benefit ALL levels of players...it takes only 30 minutes and you'll need 3 other players...you'll also have to keep track of the time...your goal, as always, is to learn something that will make you a better player...and THIS should...

Start a game but don't keep score...play the game exactly the same as IF you were keeping score...you'll still win points, have second serves and side outs, but you just won't keep track of those points...that's because the ONLY score you will keep is your OWN...and it will NOT be points WON...it will be errors made!!!

To recap, you ONLY keep track of the errors you make, NOT the points you win or shots that you hit for winners...

How do you count errors???

For the purpose of this lesson(game), an error is scored when...you hit the ball out or in the net...

Further, there is no difference between an unforced error and a forced error...if you touch the ball(or it touches you) and you are unable, for any reason, to return the ball into play, you score an error point...balls that are hit for clean winners(are not touched by a player) do not count toward the players' error point total...

YES, the idea is simple...all four players play points but only keep track of their individual errors...the player with the least number of errors at the end of the time period is the winner...play 3 games in total, each game lasts for 8 minutes...after completing the time period for the first game, take 2 minutes to discuss your results...then switch partners, and play a second game...discuss your results again..play a third game with your third partner...again,discuss your results and draw some appropriate conclusions...

Your take-away from this lesson is that avoiding mistakes at all costs will help you to become a better player...your goal!!!

TIPBITS #102

SERVICE ACE OR WINNER

We've addressed the Serve numerous times along the way...but we always took a relatively conservative approach, in keeping with the overall philosophy of playing Percentage Pickleball...probably the most aggressive suggestions made have been simply keep it deep...further, to quote Coach Mo, you should make no more than 1 Service(or Return) error a month...now, that's conservative !!!

Serving deep, regardless of the pace works well for the vast majority of players...it gets the ball in play, it keeps the returning player deep on the baseline and it may even trigger a short Return...all good things, all in keeping with the Percentage Pickleball theme...

But not everyone thinks this way...many players prefer a more aggressive approach...their approach to play might be more likened to Singles players...they tend to be more aggressive, prefer hitting their ground strokes and going for winners...unfortunately much of this style of play does not translate well to Doubles...maybe, with one exception...an aggressive style of Serve...Singles players don't necessarily get many aces or service winners but they are constantly going for them...that's because it's their first chance to set the tone for the point, the first chance to pull their opponent to one side or the other...

This strategy is not important in doubles...But, getting an ace or a service winner is like getting a free point...Hitting aces or service winners isn't going to happen over night...but, why not give it a try?

Where to Start...your first concern should be your position on the baseline as you begin to Serve...you have several options; stand to the far right, the far left or in the middle of the service area...where you stand does impact your potential for success...standing to one side or the other may very well open up one side of the court or the other for a potential service winner...standing in the middle offers little benefit...so, where you stand to serve is important!

Where to Serve..the two most effective Service targets are out wide or down the middle...hitting to the middle is safe but not likely to produce an ace or service winner...

Option 1...if you decide to go out wide, you must hit the Serve with spin, it must be hit sharply cross court, and it must land as far forward in the service box as possible...the amount of pace you should use depends on the amount of angle and amount of spin you put on the ball...Stand toward the sideline to get the best results for this Serve...

Option 2...if you decide to go down the middle(along the center line of the court), your emphasis must be on pace...depth is not as important as placement, keeping it low and close to the line...Stand near the center line for this Serve...

Practice...the beauty of learning a new serve is that you can do it all by yourself...simply take a bucket of balls and hit, hit, hit...stand in different locations, with different pace and with different spins...

When it's time to play, don't be hesitant...you've done it in practice, now do it for real...On the downside, you waste an opportunity to score...On the upside, you'll get a free point, or maybe just force a weak return...both are good! Why not?

TIPBITS #103

BACK TO BASICS or The BIG THREE

A number of years ago, the American car industry was known to many as the BIG THREE...Chrysler, Ford and General Motors...they were the dominant force...there were other manufacturers including American Motors, Packard, Studebaker, Kaiser Fraser, Henry-J and so on...too many to remember...but no one ever forgot the BIG THREE...they were more successful because they made better cars...

This distant analogy may parallel our own means for getting better...each day, we have the opportunity to get better...but do we make the best of the opportunity or just hope for the best...

If you want to play your best each day, you need a plan..the plan does NOT need to be elaborate or all encompassing...how much can you remember, anyway?...game play and practice are all together different...practice means focusing on one thing, one stroke, one technique, one strategy, not your entire game...but game play, whether casual games, organized matches, league play or tournament play, all require your best game...and you need to “bring it”, time and time again...so, how do you do that?

Before you play, decide what are the most important factors to remember...give yourself THREE...then focus exclusively and constantly on them, before AND during each and every point...if you are not doing well, getting behind, re-double your efforts on just these areas...AND remember to remain just as focused when you're (even way) ahead...amazing how things can change when you forget to focus...

What THREE things are you going to remember? The title above, Back to Basics, is a good start...if you can adhere to these simple basics, you can and will do your best...

1) Watch the Ball...always, as it comes to you, as it hits your paddle, as it reaches your opponent, and as it comes off your opponent's paddle...then repeat...

2)Bend your Knees...get down low and stay down low as long as it takes...you'll be closer to the ball, you'll see it better and you'll always be ready to move...

3)Move your Feet...don't ever get caught just standing there or reaching for a shot...always get in the best possible position to stroke the ball..if you've been pulled out of position, move back ASAP...stay active at the net...remember, happy feet!

It's easy to remember THREE...any more might just be too much...if basics aren't your problem, choose THREE that help your stroke mechanics(like paddle back, firm wrist, or open face) or THREE that help your strategies(like positioning, communication, or positive support)...pick the BIG THREE!!!

Remember for Basics, “Watch the ball, Bend your knees, Move your feet, \$20 please!!”

TIPBITS #104

WHY PROTECTIVE EYEWEAR

It seems that, the more you play, the more often you see players of different skill levels (and of different ages)...many of the players are getting stronger and hitting the ball more firmly...hence, the reason for this article...Why Protective Eyewear...**it takes just the smallest fraction of a second to be off on your timing to send a ball away from its intended target and into a player's path...**it happens every day!

You certainly know of at least one person who has had either a close call or in some cases, a serious injury, perhaps even lost their sight in an eye...it's like motorcycle riders...they don't ask each other IF they've had an accident, they ask WHEN...this is true for playing Pickleball too...it's not IF but WHEN...Will you be ready?

While no policies have as yet been put into place requiring protective eyewear by the USAPA, other rackets sports, Squash and Racquetball, have long ago adopted such policies (i.e., requiring approved protective eyewear)...while the risk of eye injury in Pickleball is lower than Squash or Racquetball, you can easily prevent almost any injury by wearing appropriate protective eyewear...

Now, this is not to say you need to rush out and buy some World War II bomber pilot goggles...there are clearly some very elegant (or cool) varieties available...one need merely "Google" safety glasses or a Squash or Racquetball supply house for a multitude of options...

Or check out your Outdoors' store for Safety Shooting glasses and get lenses in various shades, like amber, yellow or clear...the same is true at Home Repair super stores...lots of safety glasses offered there as well...many well known brands with professional endorsements...

And if saving a few dollars is of interest, many players buy cheaper sunglasses and remove the lenses altogether...in this case, the

frames are small enough AND strong enough to prevent a Pickleball from reaching the eye...this approach actually addresses two issues, cost and foggy lenses...

Foggy or lenses that fog up during play are a constant issue for many players...many safety glasses are now sold featuring anti-fog lenses...or they offer an add-on spray that will prevent foggy lenses...or, on some models, you can pop out or cut out the lenses on many safety frames and still retain their protective integrity...

Now, if you're not so concerned about injury but might consider some sort of compromise, consider this option...at least one reputable manufacturer(BOLLE), offers a lens for their glasses that actually mutes all colors in the spectrum, except optic yellow(the color of a Tennis or Pickleball), which makes the Pickleball stand out...see for yourself...

<http://www.bolle.com/technology/sunglass/lens/simulator/competition>

Finally, while you're at it, why not consider another aspect of safety for your eyes...UV protection...many long time outdoor athletes have wished they had adopted the habit of wearing UV protective eyewear many years ago...it's not too late, for either!

Why Not Wear Protective Eyewear!

