

Pickleball-

The Sun City Festival Way

Module 1: Beginning Pickleball Coach's Guide

prepared by Ernie Jerome

Contents

Preamble; Skills and Competencies at the 2.0 Level	p. 2
Lesson 1: Dinking	p. 3
Lesson 2: Forehand Groundstroke; Serve; Return of Serve	p. 5
Lesson 3: Punch Volley; Backhand Groundstroke; Scoring	p. 8
Lesson 4: Skill Assessment	p. 10

Preamble; Skills and Competencies at the 2.0 level

The plan is for there to be 2 coaches working with 8-10 players on 2 courts for each module (consisting of four weekly 1½-hour lessons). For explanations and demonstrations, the two coaches can bring the 8-10 players together on one court. For drills and activities, each coach can take half the players to their own court. “Eight” is the natural number of players for drills or games on two courts, but we will normally register 10 to allow for an absence or two at any particular lesson. Extra players should be rotated into the drills and games so that each player gets equal time and attention.

Coaches should read the Module 1 Player’s Guide to be aware of the content provided to beginning players. The skills and abilities we hope to develop over the four lessons are repeated below.

Overall Objective of “Introduction to Pickleball” Lessons

- To bring the player’s skills to the 2.0 Level

Individual Skills and Knowledge

A player at the 2.0 level:

- Knows the basic rules and scoring system;
- Knows where to stand depending on the score and which team is serving;
- Knows the in/out rules for line calls;
- Demonstrates simple pendulum swing on forehand and backhand dink shots;
- Makes 40% of forehand down-the-line (i.e., within 2 feet of the line) dink shots;
- Makes 40% of forehand cross-court dink shots;
- Makes 40% of backhand down-the-line (i.e., within 2 feet of the line) dink shots;
- Makes 40% of backhand cross-court dink shots;
- Demonstrates proper ready position at the NVZ line;
- Makes 40% of forehand punch volleys (from the NVZ line);
- Makes 40% of backhand punch volleys (from the NVZ line);
- In preparation for a ground stroke (both forehand & backhand), player demonstrates footwork (including a final split-step) that will enable him/her to contact the ball at the start of its descent and at a point a little to the side of the body and forward of the front knee;
- While making a ground stroke, transfers weight from the back foot to the front foot while swinging the paddle through a shallow low-to-high arc;
- Serves (from both “deuce” & “ad” courts) with 50% success;
- Returns serves (from both “deuce” & “ad” courts) with 50% success.

Positioning and Game Strategy

In a doubles dinking game, the player:

- Avoids NVZ violations;
- Returns to the proper ready position after making a dink shot;
- Attempts both forward and cross-court dink shots.

In doubles match play, the player:

- Calls out the proper score before serving;
- Promptly advances to the NVZ line after returning a serve;
- Avoids NVZ violations when volleying;
- Makes proper in/out line calls in own half of the court.

Lesson 1: Dinking

In the Player's Guide we explain the rationale for teaching dinking first.

Lesson Plan:

1. Make sure the players know the **terminology** concerning the court: baseline, sideline, centerline, non-volley zone (NVZ) or "kitchen", backcourt, mid-court, and NVZ line. (The Player's Guide contains a diagram of the court.)
2. Without a ball, one coach should demonstrate the pendulum swing for the **forehand (straight ahead) dink**. (**Note to coaches:** We will frequently perform "demo's" without a ball or without hitting the ball because observers tend to focus more on the movement of the ball than on body mechanics when a ball is part of the demo.)
3. Have the players face the coaches and mirror the stroke as the coaches repeat it a few times.
4. Next one of the coaches should hand-feed the ball over the net for the other coach to demonstrate all the elements (including return to the ready position) of the forehand dink. Repeat 3 or 4 times. (Point out that a player can step into the NVZ to take an opponent's short dink shot after it bounces, and then quickly step out after the shot.)
5. Have the players form two lines opposite the coaches. (In Fig C-1.1, each "P" represents a player and "C" represents a coach.) The coaches each then feed a ball to the front player who returns a dink shot. Critique the player's mechanics and repeat a few times. Then the front player goes to the back of the line. Repeat with the second player, and so on through the entire group a couple times.

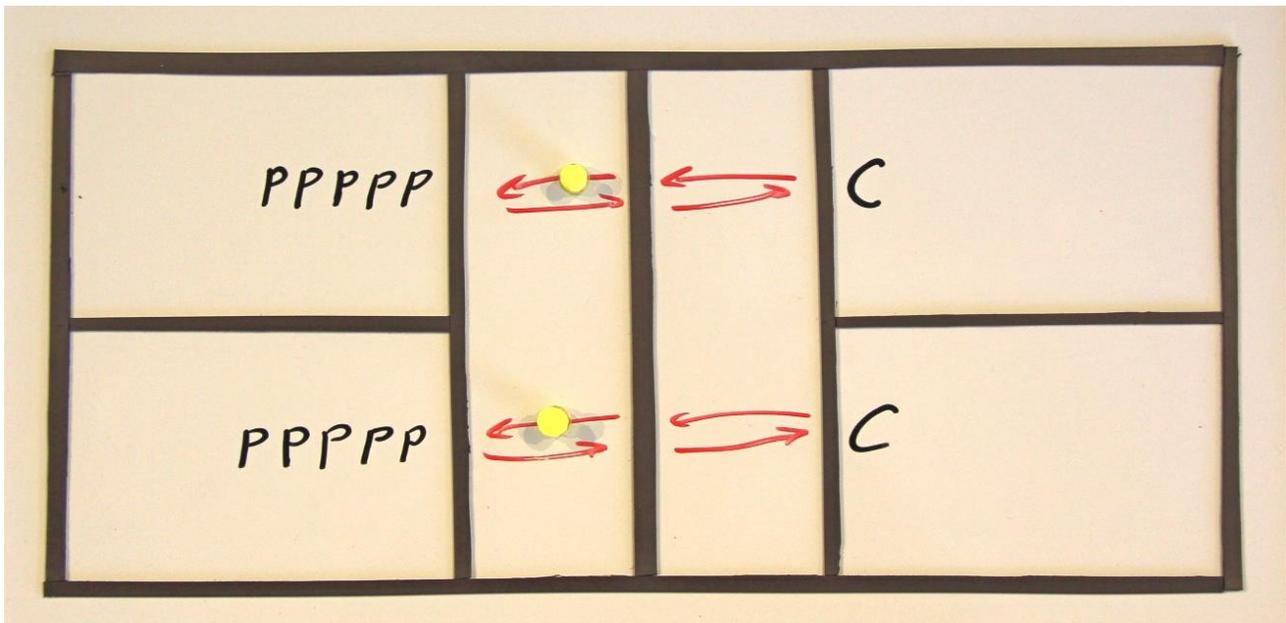


Fig C-1.1: Forehand Dinking Drill

6. Then split between two courts and have the players in pairs practise forehand dinking. If 10 players in total, 3 pairs can simultaneously dink on one court and 2 pairs on the other. (Allow 3 to 5 minutes.)

7. Repeat items 2 through 6 for the **backhand (straight ahead) dink**.
8. One coach should hand-feed the ball for the other coach to demonstrate (i) the **forehand cross-court dink**, and (ii) the **backhand cross-court dink**.
9. Divide the players between the two courts again. Two pair can simultaneously practise cross-court dinking. (Fig C-1.2) Shift players clockwise one position every couple minutes so each works on both forehand and backhand (and the 5th player enters the rotation).

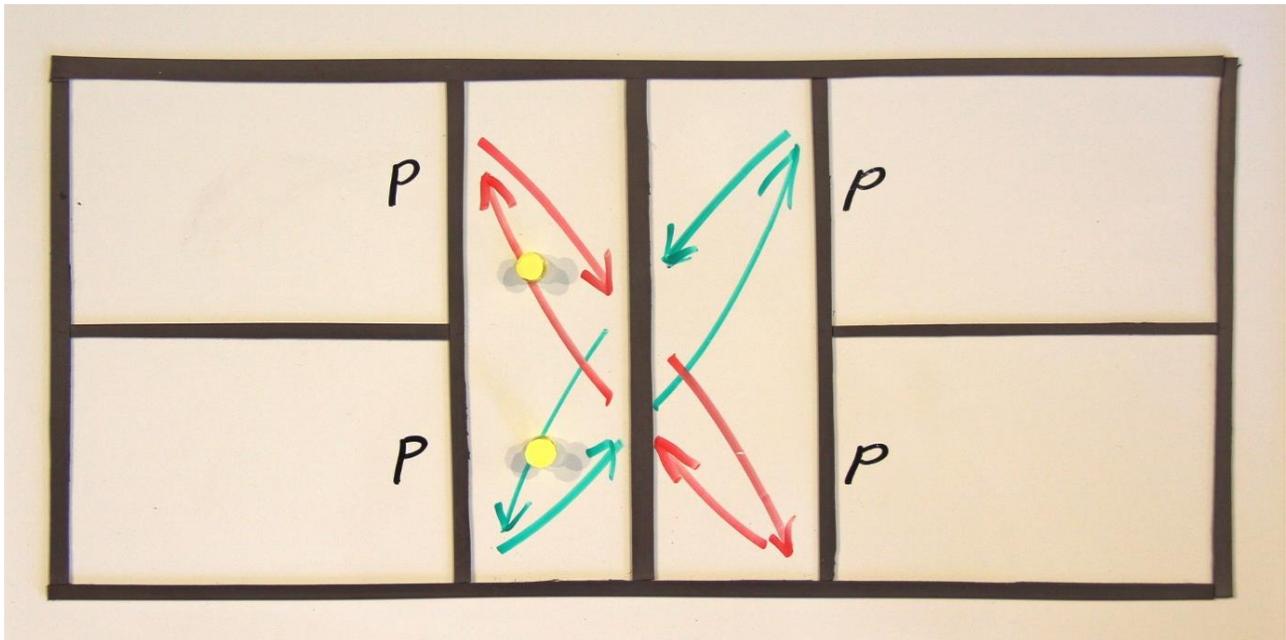


Fig C-1.2: Cross-Court Dinking Drill

Game Play. The Dinking Game (No score-keeping this lesson—will cover it in Lesson 3). Doubles format on each court. The coach starts the rally by tossing a ball into the NVZ on one side. Players must hit only dinks that land in the opponents' NVZ until a ball is hit out of bounds or into the net. Rotate players every couple minutes. Encourage players to:

- Return to the ready position after making a dink shot;
- Return to the NVZ line if they step back for a ball that bounces deep in their NVZ;
- Develop their judgement of when ball will land out of bounds.

Homework and Videos:

Encourage players to practise between lessons. The following URLs are included in the Player's Guide. They provide excellent reinforcement and ideas for drills.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c8XpasxBrrl>

Good for dinking basics.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mEI5l8aY3Ho>

Improving your dink shot.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vsyjY2qM4OM>

Dinking drills.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TK6fnPh90IU>

Additional dinking tips.

Lesson 2: Forehand Groundstroke; Serve; Return of Serve

The mechanics for each of these shots are presented in the Player's Guide.

Lesson Plan:

1. Briefly review the mechanics of dinking. As a warmup drill, have pairs of players do the "**travelling dinking**" drill. (Use both courts.) When one pair gets halfway across, another pair can start. Once both (or all three pairs) have crossed the court, then they dink back to the starting side. Do three out-and-back cycles of forehand dinking and then four cycles of backhand dinking.

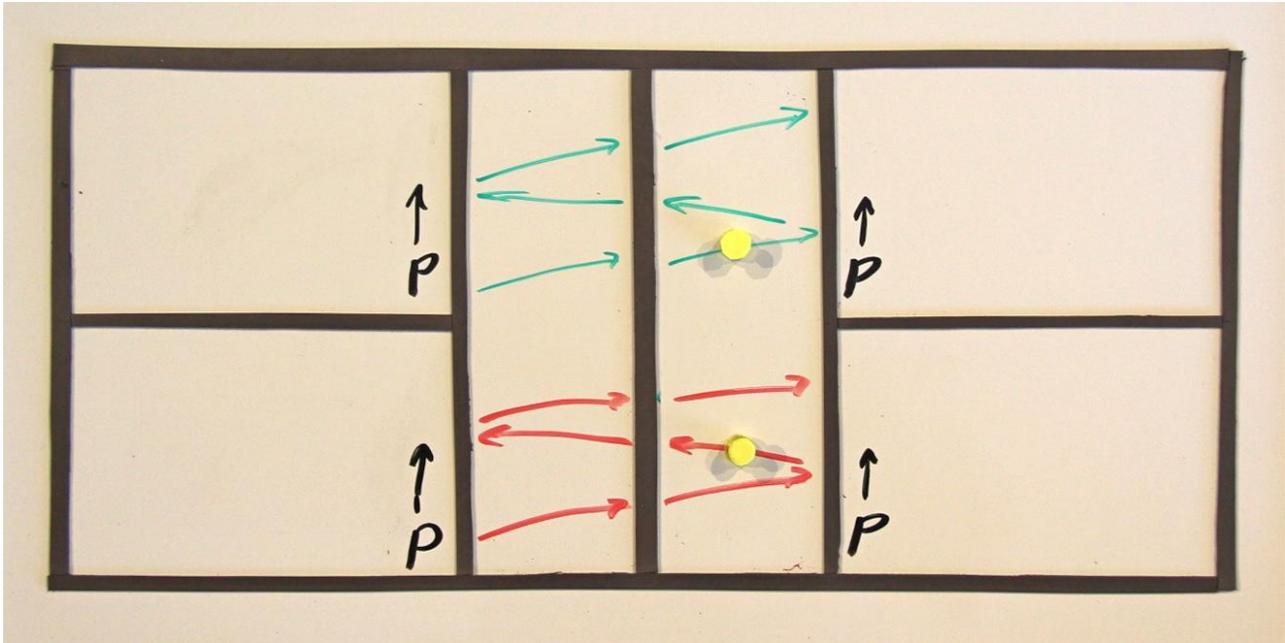


Fig C-1.3: Travelling Dinking Drill

2. Without a ball, one coach should demonstrate the **forehand groundstroke**. The mechanics of the shot are listed in the Player's Guide.
3. Have the players face the coaches and mirror the stroke as the coaches repeat it a few times.
4. Next one of the coaches should feed the ball for the other coach to demonstrate all the elements of the forehand groundstroke. Emphasize the importance of projecting the ball's early trajectory and quickly moving to the optimal spot for hitting the groundstroke. Repeat 2 or 3 times.
5. Divide players between the two courts. Each coach feeds the ball for a player at the backcourt to hit back using a forehand groundstroke. Three shots for each player. Critique the players' mechanics. Cycle through the players at least twice.
6. Next have the players hit forehand (straight ahead) groundstrokes to each other from opposite backcourts. Two pairs can be on the court simultaneously. Interrupt the drill to make suggestions on improving shot mechanics. After 3 minutes, have the players change to hit forehand cross-court groundstrokes for 3 minutes.

7. **The serve**. Review the rules for the pickleball serve. (They are presented in the Player's Guide for Lesson 2.) Demonstrate the mechanics of the serve, first without hitting the ball, and then hitting the ball. Emphasize that the forehand groundstroke mechanics can be used for the serve--just toss the ball out from the body in such a way that, as you shift weight from the back to the forward foot, you make contact with the ball on the forehand side a little in front of the forward knee. At this beginning level, don't make a big deal of hitting serves deep—that will come in the next module. Leave it at “deeper is better”. We mainly want them to get their serves inbounds.
8. Have 4 players go to the 4 serving locations on a court. Give a ball to each diagonally opposite pair to practise serving back and forth. (Both balls can be going simultaneously.) After one minute, have players shift positions clockwise and continue serving. Repeat until every player has served from each of the 4 serving locations.
9. **The Return of Serve** One coach should serve to the other coach. The latter should first demonstrate (without hitting the ball) the concept of reacting quickly to the serve and moving to an optimal spot to hit a forehand groundstroke. Repeat a couple of times. Point out that we should not try to hit a “winner” with the return of serve—just a soft arching inbounds trajectory.
10. Divide the players between the two courts. A coach will be the server on each court. Now have the players in turn replicate what the second coach was doing (without hitting the ball) in Item 9. Cycle through the players a couple times.
11. Everybody return to one court. Next we want to add the element of **advancing to the NVZ line** immediately after hitting the return of serve. Position one of the student-players at the NVZ to simulate the receiving coach's partner. Again one coach serves to the other coach who simulates hitting the return of serve and then rushing to his NVZ line. (If the coach hits the ball, observers' eyes will follow the ball rather than the coach's movement to the NVZ.)

Explain why this is a crucial element of pickleball. Have the two people at the NVZ line spread their arms (with paddles in hand). Point out the large portion of the court's width that is easily covered by that pair and the advantage they have over the serving team positioned in their backcourt.

A coach should ask: “What are the serving team's options for the 3rd shot of the rally?” Try to elicit discussion until they “hit upon” the best of the options. Point out that the drop-shot option transitions the rally to the “dinking game” that we emphasized in Lesson 1. Also point out that the drop-shot is a rather difficult shot that will be introduced in Module 2.
12. Now the coaches should integrate the three elements—the serve, hitting the return of serve, and immediately advancing to the NVZ line. Repeat the demo twice. Point out that deep arching trajectory return-of-serve gives that player more time to get to the NVZ line.
13. Next return to the two courts and have the players replicate the demos in Items 11 and 12. (A coach should still do the serving on each court to get each trial off to a good start.) Cycle through the players 2 or 3 times for each of the following:

- ... first, just moving to the served ball and hitting it with a phantom paddle;
- ... second, moving to the ball, phantom groundstroke; and rushing to the NVZ;
- ... third, all 3 elements including actually hitting the return-of-serve.

14. Finally, we want the student-players to bring together all elements of the first two shots of a rally. Have 4 players occupy the usual starting positions on each court. A player gets 2 serves before serve passes on to the next player. After the serving role has cycled around the court, have the players shift one position clockwise and do it all over again. (Don't forget to rotate in the 5th player if present.) Continue the rotations until every player has served from each of the four corners.

As preparation for Lesson 3, ask the players to watch the following excellent videos explaining the scoring in doubles pickleball. (The URL's are also listed in the Player's Guide.)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zm1x05-kU-M> PB Scoring Made Easy

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YHMIvyyGqOI> PB Doubles Scoring Explained.

Homework and Videos:

Encourage the players to practise between lessons. The following URLs are included in the Player's Guide. They provide excellent reinforcement and ideas for drills.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fK4bFs6Rkdl>

The Underhand Serve

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wUaUegE-b6Q>

Pickleball Serving Rules

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YOASInnqjq0>

Pickleball Serve-Legal and Effective

Lesson 3: Punch Volley; Backhand Groundstroke; Scoring

Lesson Plan:

1. As a warmup drill, have pairs of players do the “**travelling dinking**” drill introduced in Lesson 2. (Use both courts.) Once both (or all three pairs) have crossed the court, then they dink back to the starting side. Do two out-and-back cycles of forehand dinking and then two cycles of backhand dinking.
2. The mechanics of the **punch volley** and the circumstances in which to employ it are described in the Student’s Guide. With one coach feeding the ball to the second coach, demonstrate the **backhand punch volley** (first on balls hit firmly at the body, then on balls hit to the backhand side).
3. Organize players (P), coaches (C), and “shaggers” (sh) as in Fig C-1.4. Each coach should hit 5 balls at or to the backhand side of the first player in his line. Shaggers retrieve the balls. The first player then replaces a shagger who goes to the back of the line waiting to punch volley. Cycle twice through the players.

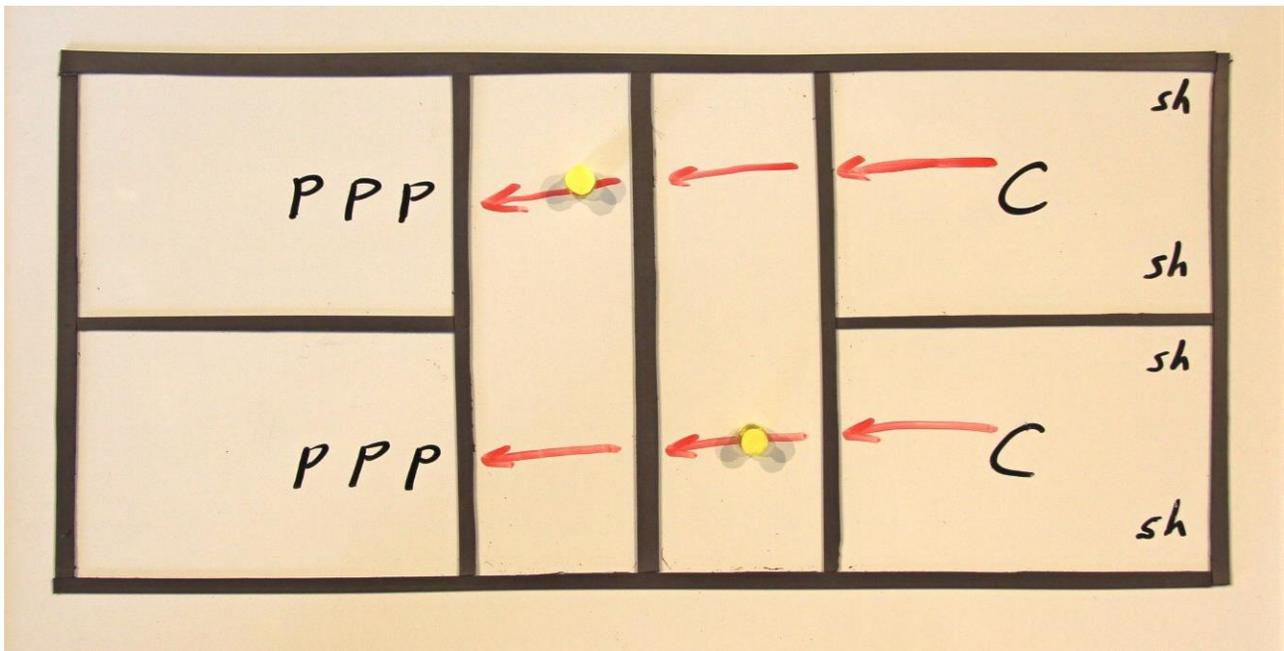


Fig C-1.4: Punch Volley Drill

4. Next the two coaches demo the forehand volley (at the NVZ line).
5. Repeat Item 3 with the coaches hitting to the forehand side of the players.
6. Without a ball, one coach should demonstrate the **forehand groundstroke**. The elements of the shot are presented in the Student’s Guide.
7. Have the players face the coaches and mirror the stroke as the coaches repeat it a few times.
8. Next one of the coaches should feed the ball for the other coach to demonstrate all elements of the forehand groundstroke (including hitting the ball). Emphasize the importance of anticipating the ball’s trajectory and quickly moving to the optimal spot for hitting the groundstroke. Repeat twice.

9. Divide the players between the two courts. Each coach feeds the ball for a player at the backcourt to hit back using a backhand groundstroke. Allow each player three shots. Critique the players' mechanics. Cycle through the players at least twice.
10. Next have the players in pairs hit backhand (straight ahead) groundstrokes to each other from opposite backcourts. (Remind them to aim at their partner's backhand.) Two pairs can be on the court simultaneously. Interrupt the drill to make suggestions on improving shot mechanics. After 3 minutes, have the players change to hit backhand cross-court groundstrokes for 3 minutes.
11. **Scoring** Hopefully, the players have already watched the videos on pickleball scoring. (The URLs were given in the "Homework and Videos" section in Lesson 2 of the Student's Guide.)

Divide the players between the two courts. Send 2 pairs to the serving positions on each court. Without actually serving the ball, run through a serve-by-serve game scenario. The server should call out the score and then the coach will declare which pair won each rally. Players should then move (or not) accordingly and the server call out the new score. (The service returner's partner should take up his/her starting position at the NVZ line.)
12. Finally, play a regular game. Remind the players that we want them to bring together all the elements they have learned—serving, returning serve, following the return-of-serve to the NVZ line, groundstrokes, volleying, dinking, and scorekeeping.

Homework and Videos:

Encourage players to practise between lessons. The following URLs are also listed in the Player's Guide.

- | | |
|---|-----------------------------|
| https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wi_E8XNRI1I | The Volley |
| http://applecountrypickleball.blogspot.com/2015/12/the-basic-volley.html | The Volley |
| https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pIFnIVZyxI4 | Paddle Control in Volleying |
| https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oDD2GY3ywlq | Groundstroke Footwork |
| https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BWwewEo76Dc | Pickleball Groundstrokes |

Lesson 4: Skill Assessment

On page 4 of the Player's Guide for Module 1, it states that Festival's modules for teaching pickleball ...

“have been intentionally designed to align with the International Pickleball Teaching Professional Association's (IPTPA) skills criteria for each skill level. A player able to demonstrate most of the skills and strategies listed for any of our modules will be able, we are confident, to pass the formal ratings assessment for that level conducted by a Certified Rating Specialist (CRS) from the IPTPA.”

Accordingly, in this 4th and final lesson of Module 1 we will approximate the assessment procedure that would be carried out by a CRS from the IPTPA. We conduct this assessment for the following reasons:

- With the intention of raising the overall standard of pickleball play at SCF, our Pickleball Club concurs with the IPTPA's philosophy of establishing rigorous consistent uniform arms-length assessment of player skill-level ratings outside of (but consistent with) the USAPA's tournament-based ratings system.
- It is the Club's hope that many members will choose, at some point in the future, to undergo a formal rating assessment by the IPTPA.
- Even though our Club's Executive recommends that players wait at least until the 2.5 level to have their first formal IPTPA skill-level assessment, it is appropriate that we plant the idea of undertaking a future assessment, and that we develop in our members a growing comfort with the assessment process.
- The Club's Executive and volunteer coaches want to know if the design and content of each module substantially achieve that module's objectives.
- Presumably most players wish to know, at least informally, (i) whether their play has attained the level intended for the module, and (ii) whether they are ready to advance to the next module in the progression.

The IPTPA skill assessment has three main components:

- ✓ Individual shot execution;
- ✓ Modified dinking game;
- ✓ Regular match play.

Lesson Plan on next page

Lesson Plan:

1. Each coach takes half the group to separate courts. Record the players' names on the Scoresheet for Module 1. The column titled "Standard" is the score a player should attain or exceed. In actual IPTPA assessments, exceeding the standard on some shots will help offset instances of falling short of the standard on other shots—it is the aggregate score that really matters.
2. As a warmup have players do the "**travelling dinking**" drill as in Lessons 2 and 3.
3. Score each player on his/her "forehand dink down the line" (meaning the dink should land in the kitchen within 3 feet of the sideline). The coach will need to track both the running total of feeds and the number of successful returns. Don't count any instances in which your feed is not "nice". You do not have to stop after each dink—you can maintain continuous dinking if returned dinks are good. Record the number of successful returns from 10 good feeds. (Have waiting players help with confirming your count and recording the scores.)
4. Score each player on the forehand cross-court dink, and so on for both types of backhand dinks shots.
5. Score the players on backhand punch volleys and then forehand punch volleys. Hit your feeds from quite deep in the court. Aim at the player's body or backhand side for the backhand punch volley, and then at his/her forehand side for the forehand punch volley. Again, count only results from good feeds. At the 2.0 level we don't expect any particular depth or direction of the punch volleys.
6. Score the players on 6 serves from each of the "deuce" and "ad" sides. Give each player a couple warmup serves before starting the official count. We don't expect deep serves at the 2.0 level—the ball need only land in the service area.
7. Score the players on 6 returns of serve from each of the "deuce" and "ad" sides. The coach should serve to the players. We don't expect deep returns of serves at the 2.0 level—the ball need only land inbounds in the server's end.

Continued

8. **Modified Dinking Game** Two teams start at their NVZ lines. The coach puts the ball into play for each rally by tossing it into the NVZ from the sideline. To be good, a shot must land in the opponents' NVZ. Rotate the coach's "serve" clockwise to a different player at the start of each rally. The game is to 4 points with rally scoring (that is, a point is awarded to the winner of each rally).

If there are 4 players in the group, play two more games to 4 points. Change partners so that each player has a different partner every game.

If there are 5 players in the group, play three more games to 4 points. Work the extra player into the rotation—no player should sit out more than one game. Change partners so that each player has a different partner every game. (It will end up that four players play 3 games and one player plays all 4 games.)

The coach should point out and correct:

- NVZ violations;
- Failure to return to the proper ready position after making a dink shot;
- Failure to vary dink shots: forward & cross-court, forehand & backhand.

In an actual IPTPA Assessment, a group consists of 4 players, all seeking the same rating. The CRS scores each player on both the proficiency of his/her dinking game and the total points his/her teams wins in 3 dinking games.

9. **Regular Match Play** Four players play three regular games to 7, each game with a different partner. If there are five players in a group, play five games to 5 (win by one point). Each player sits out one game. Play with a different partner each game.

The coach should point out and correct:

- Failure of the server to call out the correct score;
- Failure to advance to the NVZ line after returning a serve;
- NVZ violations when volleying;
- Poor positioning;
- Incorrect in/out line calls.

In an actual IPTPA Assessment, the CRS scores each player on both the quality of his/her play and the total points each his/her teams wins in the three games.