

Pickleball-

The Sun City Festival Way

Module 2: Advancing from 2.0 to 2.5 Player's Guide

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**Warning: Pickleball can be addictive.
Indulge at your own risk.**

Preamble

It is expected that some who have been playing pickleball for a while will choose to enter our Club's player development series at this Module 2 level. For that reason, the following Q&A section regarding our Player Development Program is repeated from Module 1.

Those who have taken Module 1 will see a number of similarities in the instructions, drills, and activities to those encountered in Module 1. This is partly because some participants have not taken Module 1—we want to be sure they are employing proper shot mechanics. In addition, progress through the skill ratings is much about becoming more proficient and strategic at the “same old” shots. Nonetheless, two new shots will be introduced in Module 2.

Sun City Festival's Player Development Program

Q: What is the structure of the program?

A: For 2018-2019, the Pickleball Club has developed 4 training modules designed to help players progress from a beginning level to an intermediate level. In pickleball, players' skill levels are rated from 1.0 (raw beginner) to 5.0 (advanced/elite) in steps of 0.5.

This first module is intended to develop the skills that take a beginner to the 2.0 level. Subsequent modules are designed to develop the skills and strategies needed to advance from 2.0 to 2.5, 2.5 to 3.0, and 3.0 to 3.5.

Each module consists of four 1½-hour on-court sessions spread over four weeks (at the same time and location each week). Normally you will be in a group of 10 players on 2 courts with 2 coaches. When in actual doubles play, two of the ten players will stand aside at any one time, but will be rotated into the action so that all will have the same participation.

Q: This numerical ratings stuff seems pretty serious. Do I need to get involved in it if I just want to play for fun?

A: The vast majority of players agree that they have the most fun in a doubles game when the other three players have similar skills. It is one thing to challenge yourself by playing against others possessing somewhat greater skills, but a game involving, for example, 3.0 and 4.0 players, is usually unsatisfactory for **both** the 3.0 and the 4.0 players. Consequently, pickleball clubs in retirement communities usually structure open play, programs, competitions, and skills development sessions with the intent of having “even” competition. Therefore, it is advantageous for club members to have accurate skill-level ratings.

Most new players become quite enthusiastic about the sport and seek to improve their level of play. In recent years, quite explicit measurable criteria have been established for each official rating level. These criteria represent goals for players wishing to raise their play to the next level. Players experience a sense of personal accomplishment when they are recognized for achieving a new rating level.

Q: Can a 2.0 player become a 3.5 player in just 12 weeks (3 modules of 4 weeks each)?

A: That is unlikely (even if scheduling permits that possibility). In any module, you should not expect that just four 1½-hour sessions will, by themselves, raise your level of play by the full 0.5 increment. But the four lessons will make you aware of the skills and strategies you need to develop to gain the rating you seek. In club and private play, you should be intentional about incorporating those skills and strategies into your play. Ideally, the shot mechanics, positioning, and game strategies you learned become “second nature” or instinctive for you.

You may wish to repeat a module at a later offering. The SCF Pickleball Club would like to make that possible. But it will depend on the availability of volunteer coaches and the number of players wanting to take the module for the first time. The club feels that priority should be given to “first-timers” at each level. The signup process will likely give priority to such first-time registrants.

Q: How can I know for sure if I have really attained my desired skill rating?

A: Until 2016, the only way to obtain an “official” rating was to play in tournaments sanctioned by the USA Pickleball Association (USAPA). But less than 10% of players enter such tournaments. For the other 90+%, their home club may have had some sort of ratings committee to assess members’ skills. But even if there was consistency within a club, ratings standards varied from club-to-club. Often, players simply rated themselves by comparing their own play to that of others (whose nominal skill ratings were also likely to have been self-assessed). Consequently, when four self- or club-rated 3.5 players from around the country come together on the same court at Festival, there can be a wide range in their actual skill levels.

Recognizing this lack of rigor and consistency in players’ ratings, a group of prominent pickleball instructors and players founded the International Pickleball Teaching Professional Association (IPTPA) in 2015. Its main goals are to establish uniform consistent standards for teaching pickleball skills and for rating the skills of players. The IPTPA sets standards for and trains both Certified Pickleball Teaching Professionals (CPTP) and Certified Rating Specialists (CRS). (See <https://iptpa.com/>).

Our four teaching modules have been intentionally designed to align with the IPTPA’s skills criteria for each skill level. A player able to demonstrate most of the skills and strategies listed for any of our modules should be able to pass the formal ratings assessment for that level conducted by a CRS from the IPTPA. In the spring of 2018, the SCF Pickleball Club offered less structured “prep” sessions for players interested in obtaining an official IPTPA rating. Over 50 of our Club members were assessed by a CRS. 85% of the candidates were successful in achieving their desired rating.

Skills and Competencies at the 2.5 Level

Overall Objective

- To raise the player's skills from the 2.0 level to the 2.5 level.

Individual Skills and Shot Execution

In addition to the skills specified in Module 1 for a 2.0 rating, a 2.5 level player:

- Demonstrates a simple pendulum swing on forehand and backhand dink shots;
- Demonstrates proper side-step movement while dinking at the NVZ line;
- Makes 50% of forehand and backhand forward or cross-court dink shots
- Makes 40% of forehand and backhand third-shot drop shots from the mid-court (transition) area;
- Makes 50% of forehand and backhand punch volleys (from the NVZ line to at least mid-court depth);
- Executes 40% of overhead shots (to mid-court) while demonstrating the proper sideways turn (and short retreat if needed);
- At least 40% of serves (from both "deuce" & "ad" courts) land in the deep half of the court;
- At least 40% of returns of serves (from both "deuce" & "ad" courts) land in the deep half of the court.

Positioning and Game Strategy

In a doubles dinking game, the player:

- Steps in and out of the NVZ at the appropriate times;
- Demonstrates proper side-step movement to reach the ball;
- Returns to the proper ready position after making a dink shot;
- Attempts both forward and cross-court backhand dink shots;

In doubles match play, the player:

- Attempts serves and returns of serve to the deep half of the court;
- Promptly advances to the NVZ line after returning a serve, but stops the advance if the third shot of the rally comes back before s/he reaches NVZ line;
- Other than on the return of serve, advances and retreats side-by-side with partner;
- Attempts to anticipate and move to the best position to make a groundstroke or volley;
- Attempts third-shot drop from the deep half of the court;
- Communicates with partner on balls near the center line; defers to partner's forehand;
- Demonstrates court and position awareness by not hitting balls that would otherwise land out of bounds.

Lesson 1: Dinking; Introduction to the Drop Shot

At intermediate and higher levels of play, most rallies evolve to the “dinking game” with both teams at their NVZ lines making short soft shots intended to land in the opponents’ NVZ. (A separate online document titled “Pickleball Essentials” presents a brief overview of key aspects of the sport of pickleball. If you have not already done so, you should soon read that document just to get a sense of the “big picture”.)

We teach dinking first because:

1. Pickleball requires far more dink shots than any other shot, and
2. Most points are won (and lost) in the dinking component of the game.

Dinking Technique: Your coaches will demonstrate the forehand dink shot. Perform:

- A smooth easy pendulum swing without flexing the wrist (delivering more of a “push” than a “punch” to the ball);
- A dip of the knees while making the pendulum swing;
- Head down to see the paddle contact the ball;
- A return to the ready position—paddle at chest/shoulder level with paddle’s face perpendicular to the net or slightly angled to the backhand; a slightly crouched position on the balls of the feet spaced at slightly more than shoulder width.

Drills: per coaches’ instructions.

Your dinking drills will finish with “The Dinking Game” wherein players must hit only dinks that land in the opponents’ NVZ until the ball is hit out of bounds or into the net. Players set up at their NVZ line for doubles play. Games are to 5, win by 1. Servers call out the score and switch sides after rallies won as in a normal game. A player can serve by bouncing the ball off the ground and hitting the first dink shot. Each player should:

- Return to the ready position after making a dink shot;
- Return quickly to the NVZ line if s/he moves off the line to hit the ball;
- Force opponents to move from side to-side by hitting cross-court dinks and by dinking to both their forehand and backhand sides;
- Communicate with her/his partner on shots landing near the (extension of the) center line. The player whose forehand is closer to the center line should take balls that will bounce near the center line. That player should say “mine” or “got it” as early as possible.

Drop Shot: A drop shot is a softly-hit arching shot that lands in the opponents’ NVZ. It is the preferred shot for the third shot in a rally. **Rationale:** A player hitting a deep arching return of serve as the second shot of a rally should be able to rush forward and join his/her partner at their NVZ line before their opponents hit the third shot of the rally. They present a formidable barrier to their opponents’ third shot of the rally. For the third shot, it is difficult either (1) to drive a low hard shot past two players set up at their NVZ line, or (2) to lob a high arching shot over them. A well-executed third-shot drop gives the team that originally served an opportunity to advance to their NVZ line, thereby neutralizing their opponents’ positional advantage.

Drop Shot Technique: Your coaches will demonstrate the drop shot.

The drop shot is essentially a long dink shot. The straight-arm stiff-wrist pendulum swing will require a longer backswing and follow-through as needed for the greater distance the ball must travel.

- From the trajectory and speed of the incoming ball, anticipate and move to the location from which you ...
- step forward to the ball ...
- while making a pendulum swing such that ...
- you can contact the ball as it begins its descent (after it bounces) ...
- at a point that is 6" to 12" outside your trailing knee and a few inches in front of your leading knee.

In contrast to the faster pace and flatter trajectory of a groundstroke, the pendulum swing enables you to hit a soft arching shot that: (i) has a higher probability of landing in the opponents' NVZ, and (ii) gives you and your partner more time to advance to your NVZ line after hitting the drop shot. The longer the drop shot you need to make, the greater the backswing before your pendulum swing, and the slightly higher speed and longer follow-through on your swing.

You should be able to move so that you take most drop shots on your forehand side. If you need to make a backhand drop shot, make a small rotation of the torso away from the ball on the backswing, and then rotate toward the ball as you step forward to contact the ball.

Cautionary note: Often a player is so eager to see if her/his drop shot is on a good trajectory for landing in the opponents' kitchen that s/he raises her/his head before contacting the ball. As you move to the spot to hit a drop shot, be aware from your peripheral vision of your distance from the net, and then keep your head down through the pendulum swing (actually seeing the paddle make contact with the ball).

Drills: per coaches' instructions.

Homework and Videos:

Watch the following videos to reinforce what you learned in this lesson. Arrange to get together with a partner to work on the skills and drills introduced in this lesson and in the following videos.

<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.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LudiKnT6WwY>

Backhand Dink

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EapzBLduLz0>

Dinking Game Drill

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EAUYwOu9iJ0>

Basic Third Shot Drop

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QuekFbM_sjM

Drop Shot Drill (all distances)

Lesson 2: Groundstrokes; Serve; Return of Serve; Drop Shots

“**Groundstroke**” refers to hitting the ball firmly on a low-trajectory path from the mid-court or backcourt after it bounces.

The key to an effective ground stroke is to anticipate the incoming ball’s trajectory and be settled at the optimal position for striking the ball after it bounces. From the instant the ball leaves your opponent’s paddle, you should project the ball’s path and start moving toward the optimal location. (In fact, you can get an early clue about the ball’s direction and velocity from the direction and speed of the opponent’s swing.) As you move, watch the ball’s early flight and adjust the location to where you should go. Ideally you should be settled “on location” when the ball arrives. Then your only motion should be the groundstroke mechanics.

The **mechanics of the forehand and backhand groundstrokes** are very similar.

- Project the early trajectory of the opponent’s shot. Quickly move to and be set at the optimal location for you to execute the remaining elements of the shot.
- Prepare for the stroke by rotating your torso to the **forehand/backhand** side as you dip your knees in a split step and make the backswing. In the split step, your forward leg will be on the side opposite from your **forehand/backhand** side.
- Step forward transferring weight from the back foot to the front foot as you swing forward on a slightly low-to-high arc.
- Ball contact should be on your **forehand/backhand** side at a point that is: (1) a few inches ahead of your front knee, (2) a few inches outside your trailing knee, and (3) near the start of the ball’s descent after it bounces.
- Follow through with the face of the paddle pointing toward the target.

The minor differences are that, for the backhand groundstroke:

- (1) There is a somewhat deeper dip/bending at the knees as you make the split step and backswing.
- (2) The point of contact with the ball is somewhat further forward of the front knee.

Drills: per coaches’ instructions.

Serve and Return-of-Serve:

There are **two “cardinal sins” in pickleball**. They are (1) hitting your serve into the net or out of bounds, and (2) hitting your return of serve into the net or out of bounds. In pickleball a legitimate service “ace” is very rare. Similarly, it is very difficult to hit a rally-winning return-of-serve if the serve was reasonably good. If you seek pickleball glory by attempting to hit either a service ace or a return-of-serve winner, you are much more likely to commit a pickleball sin.

The primary rules for the serve are:

- The ball must be hit from behind the baseline to the diagonally opposite service area.
- At the point of contact with the paddle, the ball must be below the server's waist level.
- At the instant of contacting the ball, the head of the paddle must be below a horizontal line through the server's wrist joint.

Strategy and Technique for the Serve

If you watch a match between elite players, you will notice that most of them hit rather "soft" serves which land deep in the opponent's backcourt. The reason for hitting serves deep is that it makes it difficult for the receiver to hit a hard-to-handle or rally-winning return of serve. With good serve mechanics and a moderate amount of practice, you should be able to consistently hit the same sort of soft deep serve.

Rather than treating the serve as a new type of shot, just make a minor change to the mechanics for the forehand groundstroke. With a short toss of the ball out from your body, you can send the ball to the ideal contact spot for the forehand groundstroke. The forward swing can be somewhat slower/easier than the usual forehand groundstroke, and on more of a low-to-high paddle path to give the ball a lower speed but higher trajectory.

Strategy and Technique for the Return-of-Serve

You must let the ball bounce before hitting the return-of-serve. Therefore, you should stand at the baseline for soft servers, or a couple feet behind the baseline for hard servers. You should avoid having to take a step back or lean back to hit a return-of-serve.

You should prefer to take the return-of-serve with your forehand. (For virtually all players, forehand shots are stronger, more consistent, and more accurate than backhand shots.) By observing the server's paddle speed & direction and the early trajectory of the ball, judge where to move to be at the optimal location for a forehand groundstroke. A backhand return-of-serve should be necessary only on serves hit sharply to your backhand side.

If you hit a flat hard groundstroke from your backcourt as a return-of-serve, there is little room for error between hitting the ball into the net and hitting it beyond the opponents' baseline. And unless one of your opponents has some sort of physical limitation, one of them can readily reach any firmly hit inbounds groundstroke. Therefore, even elite players rarely attempt to hit "a winner" with their service return.

The preferred approach is simply to hit a soft arching shot that bounces deep in the serving team's backcourt. (Recall that your opponents must let the ball bounce before hitting the third shot of the rally.) By hitting a soft, arching, deep return-of-serve, you can quickly advance and join your partner at the NVZ line by the time an opponent hits the third shot of the rally. This gives you and your partner a positional advantage over your opponents who must hit the third shot from deep in their backcourt. Again, with a moderate amount of practice, you should be able to consistently hit a soft return-of-serve to your opponents' backcourt.

Drills: per coaches' instructions. At the 2.5 level, at least 40% of your serves and returns of serve should bounce in the deep half of your opponents' court.

Drop Shot

The **drop shot** was introduced in Lesson 1. We return to it in this lesson because of its difficulty and importance. Recall that it is the most commonly used third shot in a rally, enabling the team that originally served to advance to their NVZ line, thereby neutralizing the positional advantage their opponents previously held.

Drill and Modified Match Play: per coaches' instructions.

Homework and Videos:

Encourage the players to practise between lessons. The following URLs provide follow-up reinforcement and ideas for drills.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oDD2GY3ywlq>

How to Hit Great Groundstrokes

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

Pickleball Serving Rules

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

The Underhand Serve

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

Pickleball Serve-Legal & Effective

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

Be at the NVZ--Mistakes & Benefits

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NAwIXA4cWgY>

The Soft Return of Serve

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QuekFbM_sjM

Drop Shot Drill (all distances)

Lesson 3: Punch Volley; Overhead

Punch Volley Strategy

A **punch volley** is most commonly employed when you are at the NVZ line and an opponent hits a ball that reaches you at a height between belly-button and eye level. The opponent's shot may be (1) a firm groundstroke from the mid- or backcourt, or (2) an attempted drop shot that is too long and high. With a punch volley, you hit a firm deep shot to the feet of an opponent (preferably on her/his backhand side) or through the gap between opponents. This prevents your opponents from advancing to their NVZ line and forces them to hit their next shot from a difficult position.

Punch Volley Technique

From the ready position,

- For a ball coming straight at you or somewhat to your backhand side, you first draw your arm (bent about 90 degrees at the elbow) back close to your body.
- Then you time a quick extension of the arm from the shoulder and elbow so that you contact the ball 12-18 inches in front of your body. You direct the paddle face through the ball toward the target area. Your arm continues to a full extension on the follow-through.
- For a ball coming to your forehand side, maintain your elbow at a 90-degree bend and fairly tight to your body as you rotate your arm (mostly from the shoulder) to the forehand side. With little or no further backswing, hit the ball with a sharp short forward swing generated largely by rotating the upper arm at the shoulder.

Here are some scenarios and appropriate choice of volley shot from your NVZ line:

1. For a ball hit from deep in your opponents' backcourt, you can (i) punch the ball with moderate firmness to the backcourt to keep your opponents deep, (ii) angle a short punch volley to a sideline, or (iii) execute a **blocking volley** (also known as a **drop volley**). A blocking volley is a soft blocking shot that drops the ball in the opponents' NVZ such that neither opponent can get to the ball before its second (almost non-existent) bounce. To execute a blocking volley, the player needs to relax his/her grip on the paddle and even slightly draw back the paddle as contact with the ball is about to be made.
2. If the opponent's shot comes from mid-court or the opponent is rushing forward after his/her too-high drop-shot attempt, the ball should be punched firmly at an opponent's feet or low in the gap between your opponents.

Drills: per coaches' instructions.

Overhead—What and When?

The "overhead" or "overhead smash" is the appropriate shot when you can hit the ball with your arm partially or fully extended above head level. The occasion typically arises when an opponent's attempted lob is not quite high enough to get beyond you and land in the backcourt, or an opponent makes an off-balance desperation return of a difficult-to-reach shot by you or your partner.

Warning: Except for just one or two small steps, never “peddle backwards” (that is, never attempt to take several direct backward steps without turning away from facing the net) in an attempt to “get under” an opponent’s lob—there is too high a risk of losing your balance, falling backward, and sustaining a nasty head injury.

Overhead (Smash) Technique

If an opponent is so kind as to pop up the ball 1 to 2 feet above your head such that you scarcely need to move to smash the ball down at an opponent’s feet, then “enjoy the good times while they last”. But such “gifts” can also give rise to pickleball’s most embarrassing moment. You can be so excited and anxious to make pickleball’s equivalent of the slam dunk that your paddle gets too far “out in front”. In seeming defiance of Laws of Physics, you manage to hit the ball into the net!

This “technique” section is primarily concerned with the more common situation when an opponent attempts to lob the ball over your head and you need to retreat 2 to 5 feet from the NVZ line to be in a position to smash the ball. (In later modules, you will learn how a doubles pair works as a team to defend against deep lobs.)

- From the ball’s early trajectory, anticipate where it will descend. (Remember that at this Module 2 level, we are not going to attempt to get to balls that will land more than 5 feet behind our starting position. **Always play within your physical limits—if you have any balance or mobility issues, set a reduced personal limit for your comfortable distance of retreat**)
- If you need to take more than one step back, turn to your forehand side and move quickly (but within your limits) to the location where the ball will pass through extended arm height on your forehand side.
- With your body turned 45 to 60-degrees away from the net toward your forehand side, extend your arm as you swing it forward (from a few inches behind your head) with shoulder and torso rotation...
- ... contacting the ball at full arm extension and at a point about one foot ahead of your forehand shoulder.
- Transfer weight from the back to the forward foot through your swing, but do not bend at the waist.
- Snap your wrist at the moment of contact giving the paddle face a downward angle and the ball a downward (rather than flat) trajectory.

Drills: per coaches’ instructions.

Homework and Videos:

Watch the following video to reinforce what you learned in this lesson. Arrange to get together with a partner to work on the skills and drills introduced in this lesson and in the following video.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=44LOdN0KG00>

Pickleball Blocking Basics

Lesson 4: Game Preparation and Game Strategy

Game Preparation: Before leaving home for the courts, you should do some stretching exercises to reduce the risk of “pulling” a muscle. You will also find that stretching improves your flexibility for reaching tough shots from your opponents. The key muscle groups to stretch are hamstrings, calves, quads, and hip flexors.

Too often, **on-court warmup** consists only of easy forward dinking while your mind is “way off” on a conversation with others in your foursome. Make your dinking warmup purposeful by working on some aspect of your dinking game—improving your backhand dink, reducing the net clearance of your dink shots, lengthening cross-court dink shots, maintaining position at the NVZ line while dinking, developing quick reaction as to hitting dink volleys vs. letting the ball bounce, targeting an opponent’s feet or backhand side, targeting the opponents’ NVZ line with low net-clearance dinks, etc.

After 3 or 4 minutes of dinking warmup, the foursome should (in pairs with two balls) practice drop-shots. One person backs away from the NVZ line while his/her partner continuously feeds the ball deeper and deeper until the former is hitting drop shots from the baseline. Then they reverse roles.

Finally, the two players in each pair continuously exchange hard groundstrokes from their backcourts.

Game Strategy

The tendency of inexperienced pickleball layers is to play a bit frantic and rush their shots. The following mistakes often result from players rushing their play and swinging too hard: hitting balls beyond the baseline, hitting easily taken balls into the net, volleying balls that would otherwise land out-of-bounds, and hitting balls that would be better taken by your partner. You actually have a surprising amount of time to make many of the shots in pickleball, especially if you haven’t delivered an attackable ball to your opponents. The more you calm done and play “under control”, the better the shots you make, affording your opponents less opportunity to attack your shot. It’s a virtuous cycle—the more you play calmly under control, the fewer mistakes you make.

Inexperienced pickleball players also tend to think that, to improve their game, they need to hit harder, more precise shots. But (arguably) the easiest and quickest way to improve your play and move upward in skill rating to the intermediate 3.5 level is through **proper movement and positioning**. That doesn’t require natural athleticism as much as it involves situational awareness and developing instinctive responses. Few of us possess the former; many more of us are capable of the latter.

Listed next are aspects of pickleball play that involve **movement and positioning** more than shot-making:

- Based on the server’s paddle speed and early trajectory of the ball, move quickly to the optimal position to hit a return-of-serve groundstroke.
- Immediately after hitting your return-of-serve groundstroke, rush forward to join your partner at your NVZ line.
- When receiving a return-of-serve, based on the opponent’s paddle speed and early trajectory of the ball, move quickly to the optimal position for hitting a third-shot drop.

- Based on the “feel” and early trajectory your third-shot drop, decide as early as possible whether your shot will be attackable by an opponent. If not attackable, rush forward (along with your partner) to your NVZ line. If your judgement is that the drop shot will be too long and high (making it attackable), move forward (along with your partner) no more than a couple steps.
- When dinking, do not back off the NVZ line except to step back when an opponent hits a dink shot that is too low to volley and will bounce right at your feet.
- When dinking, shift side to side (following and facing the ball) with your partner as though connected by an 8-foot tether.
- Advance and retreat on the court in sync with your partner.
- On any shot from the mid- or backcourt that you or your partner drop into the opponents’ NVZ, rush to your NVZ line.
- Whenever your opponents are in their backcourt, hold them there as long as possible with moderately firm punch volleys as you patiently play for an attackable ball.

Other basic elements of strategy relate to **shot selection and shot-execution**:

- Serve to the deep third of the court;
- Hit arching returns-of-serve to the deep third of the court;
- Hit third-shot drop shots;
- Dink to an opponent’s backhand or feet;
- Hit to the feet of the opponent further from the NVZ line.
- Move opponents side-to-side when dinking;
- Communicate with partner on shots both can reach (for example, “Yours”; “Mine”);
- On shots both partners can reach, defer to the forehand shot;
- Communicate with partner on shots that will land near the sideline or baseline (for example, “Out!”, “Bounce it!”).

Game Play: In today’s lesson your coaches will be encouraging you to incorporate more strategy in your play.

Concluding Comments: Our lessons have covered a lot in a rather short time. You should now have the knowledge of what you should be able to do at the 2.5 skill level. But implementing all of it at game-speed can be another matter. Our final suggestion is to pick a single weak shot or other aspect of your game and focus just on it for a few days in your social and club play. Work on it until proper execution becomes second nature. Then focus on another element of your game until it too becomes habitual, and so on.

It can be frustrating for you if social play is so casual that other players in your foursome (particularly your partner) are not inclined to follow basic “norms” for pickleball play (such as quickly moving to the NVZ line after hitting a return-of-serve). Your doing the right thing may not “pay off” if your partner is not “in sync” with you. Ideally you should find (or organize) a foursome having similar skills and goals.

Happy pickleballing! See you in Module 3 (Advancing from 2.5 to 3.0) ...