



Pickleball Skill Level Definitions

The following skill level sets are a **guide** for evaluating your own level and determining which lessons you should sign up for. They were developed utilizing both existing guidelines listed by the USAPA (usapa.org) and from other pickleball clubs. This is a work in progress and we expect to continue to modify these descriptions with your input at least once a year.

The club will use this information to develop training clinics and for seeding fun tournament players.

The purpose of rated events is to insure a consistent and competitive level of play for all players within that event as much as possible. Therefore we request that you do NOT sign up for a lesson higher or lower than your rated skill level if you have a rating.

The following lists each skill level from 2.5 to 4.0+. It also adds specific detail about skills required to be at a given level. .

2.0 Beginner Skill Level

2.0 Skill-Level Players possess the following attributes and skills:

- Have taken Mesa Regal beginner's training or the equivalent. Have been assessed by the Beginner Coach and moved to Intermediate level.
- Are familiar with how to serve although they may not be able to execute serve yet.
- Are not comfortable with two-bounce rule and may not appear to know what it is.
- Are learning where to stand on the court during serves, returns and point play but are still uncomfortable with some positions.
- May not have basic ground strokes unless they are bringing in transferable skills from other sports...e.g. racquetball, tennis, badminton, paddle tennis, table tennis, squash, etc.
- Don't yet demonstrate the basics of how to keep score, have no idea what a dink is, unless coming from tennis where a cut-volley or drop-volley may be a demonstrable comparable.
- At best can keep a ball in play for a couple of shots.

2.5 Skill Level

2.5 Skill-Level Players possess the skills and attributes of the 2.0-level players, and in addition:

- Have taken Mesa Regal beginners' training or the equivalent at another club or have played with other pickleball players who have taught them the very basic rules of how to play the game.
- Should be learning to move around the court in a balanced and safe manner, as opposed to, for instance, running at great speed and totally out of control, thus becoming a danger to themselves and others.
- Are learning how to get their serve in regularly.
- Usually let the ball bounce before returning the serve or returning the return of serve (2 bounce rule), but not always.
- Are learning where to stand on the court during serves, returns and point play.
- Should be allowed some freedom in staying back so they can improve their ground strokes. (Not sure of whether or not this is a quality they exhibit vs. a suggestion to the instructors.)
- Know the basics of how to keep score, but may still struggle to do so.
- Have not yet learned how to effectively dink but could be attempting to do so.
- Should place more emphasis on keeping the ball in play as opposed to trying to hit it low and hard or trying to place it better than the player's skill allows.
- Occasionally may lob with a forehand, although probably not well.

3.0 Skills-Level

3.0 skill-level players possess the skills of the 2.5 level plus the following:

- Know some of the rules and how to re-figure the score after losing track.
- Are getting about 3/4 of their serves in.
- Are striving to return more than half of their backhands and overheads.
- Should be working towards serving to both sides of the opponent. Should be striving to place their serves and returns deep in the court (nearer to the baseline).
- Will usually move to the non-volley zone line quickly after the return of serve.
- Do deeper and higher returns of serve to allow time to approach the non-volley zone line.
- Are working to develop consistent forehand and backhand ground strokes.

- Should not be hitting returns (after return-of-serve) up in the air, but are making flatter returns.
 - Are becoming more aware of their partner's position on the court relative to themselves, and how to move in concert with a partner.
 - Are not consistent in the overhead smash.
 - Are beginning to use the forehand lob with some success.
 - Can sustain a short volley session at the net, but have little if any ability to place their volleys
 - Are developing more power in their shots, and the ability to return a ball hit lower and harder.
 - Should be developing a sustained "dink" exchange at the net.
 - Are not yet thinking about putting varying pace on the same shots and do not handle differing paces on balls consistently.
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3.5 Skills-Level

3.5 skill-level players possess the skills of the 3.0-skill-level player, and in addition:

- Should be continuing to improve their knowledge of the rules of pickleball (and know all the main rules at this point).
- Should generally be able to get their serve in play and return most serves.
- Should be regularly serving deep and returning serve deep.
- Should understand **most** basic match strategy and the tactics that apply to skills that they either possess or are trying to learn; however, employment of such strategy and tactics is still inconsistent.
- Should be improving their skill to play with partners effectively, to include proper communication and good team coverage of the court.
- Know to move to the net quickly after returning serve, but may occasionally still lag back too long.
- Are hitting to the weak side of opponents somewhat regularly.
- Should possess shots such as forehand and backhand ground strokes, forehand lob, overhead smash, net volleys, and sustained dinking, and hit them with a fair level of consistency.
- Are developing the ability to place their shots with a fair level of accuracy.
- Should be starting to practice drop shots from $\frac{3}{4}$ court and are using them with some success to get to net in games.
- Should be developing the backhand lob.

- Are improving in knowing when to make specific shots.
 - Should be learning when to use soft shots versus power shots to their advantage.
 - Should be gaining the reflexes and judgment to avoid returned shots which may be going out of bounds.
 - Are comfortable putting pace on balls but are less comfortable returning paced balls softly.
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4.0 Skills-Level

4.0 Skill-Level is a term used to describe players who are capable of consistently executing at above a 3.5 skill-level. The 4.0 player will distinguish themselves from the 3.5 player by possessing increased skills and strategy, or by more speed, power, or consistency.

- Are comfortable with all the rules of pickleball.
- Control and place both the serve and return of serve.
- Are generally consistent in their play, understand match strategy and use a variety of specific shots to affect their strategy.
- Move effectively with a partner and easily switch courts to cover their partner's side when required.
- Are comfortable playing at the non-volley zone line. Work with their doubles partner to control the line by keeping their opponents back, driving them off the line, or controlling the pace or placement of the ball.
- Consistently hit to their opponents' weak side when possible.
- Can block strong volleys directed at them at the non-volley zone line or elsewhere, and can place their volleys with a good degree of accuracy.
- Have excellent footwork and move forward, backward and laterally with ease and quickness.
- Understand the strategy of dinking, employ it on a regular basis, can sustain a dinking session until receipt of a "put away" shot, recognize the "put-away" shot, and usually succeed in ending the rally with it.
- Hit overheads consistently "in", often with pace, and are striving to place them more effectively. Are developing the ability to return overheads hit at them or their feet.
- Have a fair to good ability to change from a soft shot strategy to a hard shot strategy during any given rally, or vice versa.
- Utilize both forehand and backhand lobs, are striving to employ lobs from anywhere on the court, and have good accuracy in placing their lobs.

- Can consistently drop-shot successfully from $\frac{3}{4}$ court and frequently drop-shot with success from the baseline as their preferred method of getting to and gaining control of the net.
 - Are good at avoiding returned shots which may be going out of bounds.
 - Can handle a good deal of pace without over-hitting or hitting out-of-bounds too often.
 - Can usually recognize and exploit weaknesses in their opponent's game.
 - Can generally poach effectively.
 - Are developing their use of spin on a variety of shots.
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4.5+ Skill-Level

4.5+ skill-level players are consistently capable of executing at the 4.5 and/or 5.0 levels. The 4.5+ player is distinguished from the 4.0 player by increased skills, a higher level of strategy, quickness of hands, judicious use of power, superior placement of shots, and consistently makes fewer unforced errors.