

July 2022

PICKLEBALL FIRE

PLAYER SKILL
RATINGS: HOW GOOD
ARE YOU?

MASTERING 4
TYPES OF
VOLLEYS WITH
DEKEL BAR

HOW TO LEVEL UP
YOUR GAME

COURT
RENEWAL
OPTIONS



OFFICIAL PICKLEBALL
MAGAZINE OF THE IFP



PICKLEBALL FIRE PODCAST

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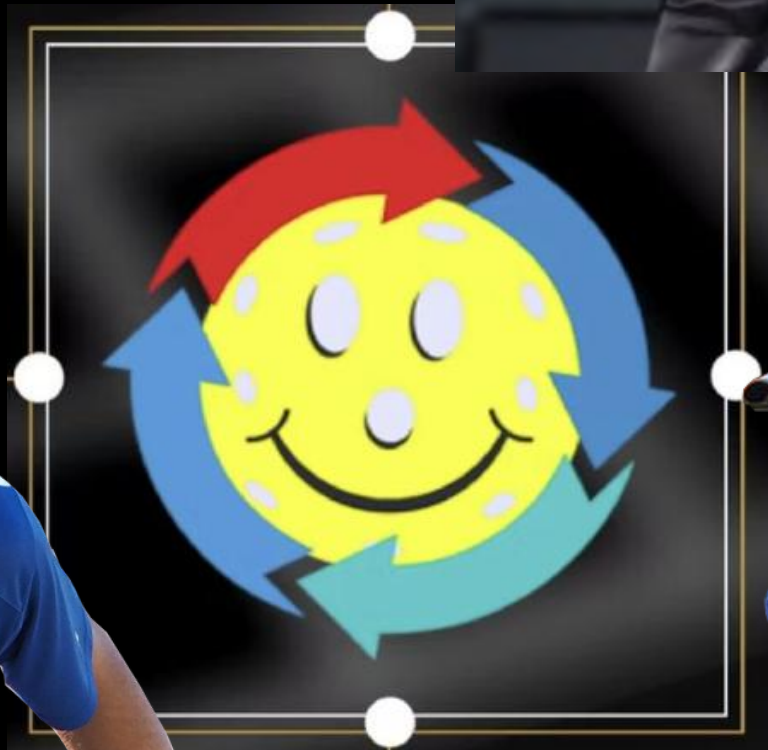
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MESSAGE FROM THE IFP OUTGOING PRESIDENT PAT MURPHY AND THE IFP CONTINUING GOAL OF EMBRACING A NEW CHAPTER

I will take this opportunity to introduce Sunil Valavalkar, who will be assuming my position as the IFP President. I will remain on the Board as Past President. As we move forward with this change, I will be helping and providing Sunil with all the support he needs. Please welcome Sunil to this new position and responsibilities.

Many of you read the Sports Illustrated article last month written by John Waters. Some of the statements were correct, but some were a bit misleading or he failed to tell the rest of the story as the late Paul Harvey would say. To move forward positively and not use the Pickleball Fire Magazine as a forum for negative conversation, I have created a personal email at savepickleball@yahoo.com. Please contact me directly with your comments, concerns, and questions. I will provide an opportunity for everyone to receive factual, truthful, and honest information with supporting documentation about the actual state of pickleball...Our sport is popular and rapidly growing, which can cause many of the issues facing it. The last thing we need is individuals and organizations dividing our sport for their control and individual gains.



In closing, I would like to thank everyone for all the support and help in growing the IFP. Our accomplishments are numerous, dating back to April 2019 when I was elected President and the IFP broke away from the control of USA Pickleball. The below are just a few of the many areas that the IFP has helped grow the sport of pickleball around the world:

- From 13 member countries in April 2019 to over 60 member countries in 2022;
- The creation of the IFP World Ambassador program in July 2019 with over 200 Ambassadors carrying the IFP message;
- Continuing the Bainbridge Cup Tournament Events - Germany in 2019, USA in 2021, and the 2022 Bainbridge Cup in India Nov 30-Dec 4;
- The new website has been updated with new and informative information;
- A new IFP Individual Membership program;
- The official IFP Pickleball Fire magazine;
- IFP Rulebook is used and supported by all IFP member countries;
- Grants and donations that help support and promote pickleball around the world;
- The IFP Academy for training and instructor certification throughout the world;
- The continuing effort to move our sport toward the Olympics;
- The new IFP Liaison Offices in China and development of other IFP Liaison Offices around the world;
- The Program Directors that help grow the IFP;
- The creation of the Advisory Committee from the five continents to help direct the growth of the IFP

I look forward to the future and what it holds for the IFP and the sport of pickleball.

Cheers and thanks to the many pickleball friends supporting me and the IFP.

Pat Murphy

President IFP

CONTINENTAL FEDERATION ADVISORY COMMITTEE

The IFP has been actively restructuring its organization and has made great strides toward building its Continental Federation Advisory Committee. When complete, the committee will be comprised of two representatives from each of the five continental federations, (Africa, Americas, Asia, Europe, and Oceania). We've had several applicants and have selected 7 magnificent candidates, leaving only 3 seats open. We are still accepting applications but only from North America, South America or Oceania. One of the first tasks of this committee is to revise the governing documents beginning this month. They will share their work at the Board's September meeting. Additionally, the committee shall make recommendations and develop additional committees they determine are important for the restructuring process.



If you are compelled to volunteer your passion and talent for the world betterment, submit your curriculum vitae and a brief paragraph of why you want to join the IFP's leadership team. Please send to: contact-us@ifpickleball.org.



INTERNATIONAL FEDERATION OF PICKLEBALL



The World Governing Body for the Sport of Pickleball <http://www.ifpickleball.org>

NEW LEADERSHIP— SUNIL VALAVALKAR (INDIA) ASSUMES THE PRESIDENCY BEGINNING OF JULY 2022

Dear Pickleballers and Supporters:

I am honored to serve in my new role as the President of International Federation of Pickleball (IFP). I accept this responsibility in all humbleness with the assured cooperation from my fellow Board members, players and supporters worldwide. As you may know, my appointment has come into force under a unique situation. Mr. Pat Murphy, past President, has shared his perspective; we will endeavor to learn from experience and look to the future.

The IFP new leadership team consists of many compassionate and talented members strategically designed to benefit you and your association, uplift our global pickleball community as well as bring happiness and peace to every part of the world. We will work to promote greater communications with member countries and alliances, integrating their interests in guiding the decisions and actions of IFP.



In my opinion, pickleball is a modern-day concept and it is more than just another sport. Pickleball is an idea, and its applications are manifold. It is extremely flexible in its appeal no matter the player's age, gender, race, religion, skill level, ability or disability. Pickleball's significant acceptance is due to the tangible benefits it offers. It's fun, very social and affordable. Pickleball is gaining worldwide popularity, especially after the COVID pandemic era. Considering the uniqueness of this sport and the speed at which it is growing, its world governance should also be commensurate with its demand to meet the emerging needs of international pickleball. As the global premier governing body of pickleball, the IFP believes that every citizen of the world should have access to and enjoy the benefits of this beautiful sport. The IFP strongly embraces its moto **"Leave No Country Behind"**. We endeavor to reach out to every country through its national governing body to form a meaningful partnership. Join us in shaping the future of pickleball worldwide!

While undertaking such a significant task, the IFP has trust and confidence in its diversified Board members alongside other key committee members, program directors, ambassadors, member countries and their respective associations. The growth of pickleball worldwide requires a combined effort from players, national governing bodies, equipment manufacturers and distributors, governmental agencies, the media, the International Olympic Committee and many more global stakeholders. Therefore, I appeal to each of these stakeholders to play a meaningful role in promoting pickleball. The IFP welcomes and supports the efforts of those who bring value to the journey of spreading this sport worldwide.

Growing popularity will always bring additional challenges to any activity; pickleball is no exception to this rule. The IFP will be careful in dealing with every aspect of our growth, be it equipment, regulations of the games, or discipline matters, etc. Several key values will drive our efforts: globalize, harmonize and integrate. Indeed, the growth of IFP has been propelled collectively by the individuals, all the past presidents and past members of the Board as well as member countries and generous sponsors. I look forward to continuing this important work towards fulfilling the mission of IFP.

Last but not least, the IFP is working diligently to follow an internationally accepted sports code and will seek similar support from every stakeholder of the pickleball worldwide.

I look forward to giving you an update in the next edition about the IFP Bainbridge Cup World Tournament in India at the end of November 2022.

I wish you all the best of luck as we take on the future together.

Sunil Valavalkar

IFP President

3 SPIN SHOTS TO IMPROVE YOUR GAME

Putting a spin on a Pickleball is clearly part of the game, as doing this affects how the ball bounces so that players can struggle with it. And no one knows this better than professional player Mark Napartovich. He hits every shot with heavy spin, whether topspin, underspin, or sidespin, because of his background in other racquet sports. So, the question for the average player is, how do you add spin to your game and learn to deal with your opponent's spin during competition?

Adding Spin to Your Game

The first question is when you should add spin to your game. Most instructors suggest you have good fundamentals before adding spin to your game. "Most coaches would tell you not to try to spin because it makes your strokes less reliable. For me, it is just the opposite. Spin for me; it's how I control the ball. So if I try not to spin, I become less consistent." However, most players are not going to be like Mark. If adding spin to your shots makes your game erratic, make sure you master the basics of Pickleball and then practice hitting spin shots before using them in a game.

Spin shots come in many forms, including topspin, underspin, and sidespin. Many players coming from a tennis background are comfortable adding topspin which you do by swinging from low to high. Be sure to brush up on the side of the ball to maximize topspin. The most common time to use topspin is when hitting groundstrokes from the baseline. However, you can also add topspin to volleys and dinks as your game progresses.

Some tennis players and those from racquetball are likely to have excellent underspin. You hit this type of shot by swinging from high to low, and the underspin or slice causes the ball to stay down. Mark uses the slice shot frequently on serve returns, as do many professional players. Hitting the ball deep in the court with significant underspin makes it challenging for players of all levels to strike a good third shot drop or drive. Mark explained,

"I found that if I put extra side spin on my slices, usually people who are really good at driving the ball, they start making mistakes. They hit it out or in the net. So it neutralizes bangers pretty effectively."

Sidespin can be imparted on the ball with your paddle by coming across it from left to right. You can also produce sidespin by hitting inside out or right to left if you are a right-handed player. The benefit of this type of spin is that the ball jumps unexpectedly, and you are unsure which way it is going.

How to Deal with Spin

Beginning Pickleball players, especially those without a racquet sports background, often have difficulty adjusting to any type of spin. But Mark has a suggestion on the best way to learn how to effectively return your opponent's spin shot. "My theory is most people, they wouldn't benefit if they try to learn to spin. Like they wouldn't benefit immediately. They wouldn't be able to spin consistently enough. And actually, most of these strokes would become worse with a spin, but they have to learn to spin because, at some point of time, they will meet somebody like me. And if they cannot read, spin, they are in trouble. And the best way to be able to learn to read spin is to know how to produce spin."

You can even learn to produce spin by getting what Mark calls a "special device." It's called a kids bike. Turn it over, and you can take your paddle and brush up on the wheel to develop topspin. If you remove the small wheel from the tricycle and mount it horizontally, you can also work on your slice shot. Another option is to use the TopspinPro, initially designed for tennis. However, it can also be used for Pickleball.

So, take the time to learn how to use spin shots in your Pickleball game, whether topspin, slice, or underspin. Developing this skill will also help you deal with your opponents as you will better understand where the spin is taking the ball.





FROM AUSTRALIA TO THE U.S. OPEN

Australian Sarah Burr won a lottery ticket to play in the U.S. Open. But she almost missed her plane to America because of a stop along the way to compete in the Asia Open. Sarah was scheduled to leave the hotel at 8:10 pm to go to the airport, but tournament delays postponed the semi-final mixed doubles match to 7:35 pm. While Sarah played the game and won, she said she was stressing the entire time. And then came the decision of whether to play in the final or forfeit as it was already 8 pm. The other team graciously agreed to play the one game to 11 rather than 15. So, Sarah was able to grab the bronze, winning 11-1 in a five-minute game, and make her flight.

After the win, Sarah quickly collected her medal and rushed to the airport. She didn't want to miss her flight to the U.S., especially because she would be playing in her first professional event. While she knew it was the time to go pro, she still had a few doubts. "I didn't want to make the fool out of myself. But, that feeling was quickly gone. I played in the doubles with Chris Harris, and we won in the first round. That was my first pro win," she recalls.

It is not surprising that Sarah has had that type of success. She owes her incredible early achievements to the countless hours of practicing. And when we say countless, we mean it. Sarah is one of the most dedicated Pickleball players we have ever heard about. And how couldn't she receive that title? She practices every day at 4:30 AM. Yes, you read that right. "It's not even daylight when we start, so we need to turn on the lights...We usually work during the day, and we have another session in the afternoon. And it's mostly drilling. I like to practice a single shot to perfection, at least a few hundred times," Sarah claims.

Sarah has an extensive sports background, and she is no stranger to racquet sports. Sarah started when she was only six years old and was heavily involved. She even had a chance to work with some top-notch names in the world of tennis. Sarah trained with Nick Watkins, who was also a coach of Sam Stosur at the time. But, as the time passed and she grew up, her passion for tennis was slowly fading. Sarah wanted to stay active to play some sports, and Pickleball came as a great solution. When she started to play, the pandemic of COVID-19 struck the world. Fortunately, Australian people were allowed to exercise outside, so Sarah managed to play on the outside courts in her country.

Sarah's Pickleball skills were rapidly developing, but she still wasn't sure what exactly was her level of playing. Her friend Fred Martin invited her to play mixed doubles with him at the New South Wales Open. "I was not sure at first. But then I decided to just take the plunge. And it was great. We won the silver medal in the advanced mixed doubles. I also played intermediate singles and won the division," she recalls. Sarah was so good that she was told never to play at the intermediate level again.

Sarah is such a competitor. She wants to play in every event possible. Her first time at the US Open happened to be a great success. Meanwhile, Pickleball is exploding in Australia. The number of courts, both inside and outside, is rapidly growing as the number of tournaments "It's growing. I just saw today that there is Tasmanian Open. It's really exciting. We really hope that it will continue to grow. Pickleball is a beautiful sport for both young and old," she concluded.

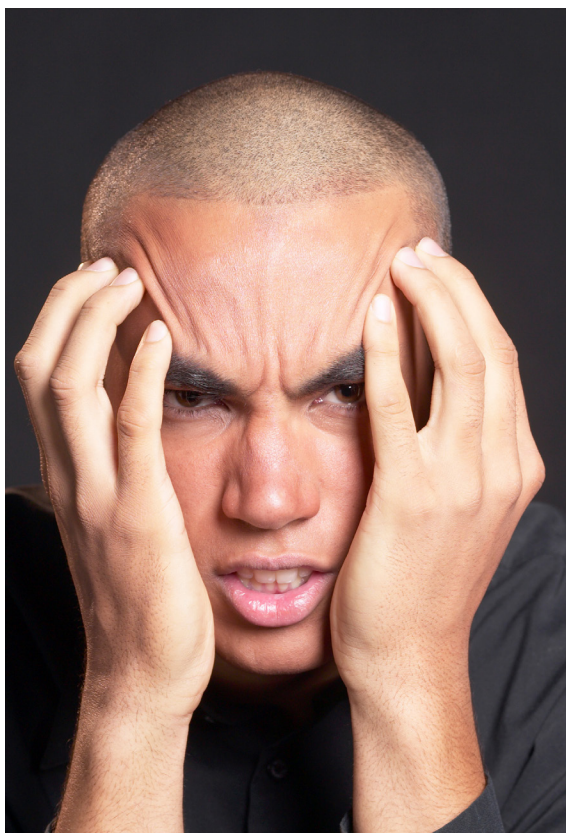
HOW TO OVERCOME 3 FRUSTRATIONS ON THE COURT

Professional Pickleball player Christina Bolton was surprised when Cliff Pickleball asked her to film a video on frustrations. Christina initially thought he was kidding because Christina can have a temper on the court. She added, “I don’t know why, but in, in rec play, it’s more prevalent. But in the tournaments, I seem to be a lot calmer, and I implement everything that I’m talking about today.” While many things can be frustrating on the Pickleball court, Christina shared her top three scenarios.

Your Partner Gives Up on a Point

There are many reasons why players give up on a point. It can be as simple as they did not think the ball was going over the net, or it unexpectedly stays in-bounds when it looked like it was going out. A player can even give up on a point because they hit a high ball, and they know the opponent will attack. Christina’s philosophy is to get just one more ball back, so you play hard until the ball goes in the net or hits the fence.

Whatever the situation, giving up on a point not only impacts you but also your partner. In Christina’s case, she becomes distracted, so she has



learned how to refocus her attention. “It’s good to quickly move on from points and just realize that you can’t change the past. So worry about the next point and focusing on the ball every time. And when you get frustrated, I’m not opposed to letting out a scream or a sign of frustration, but don’t let it just snowball into where you spiral, and it just ends up being bad for you and your partner.”

You Are Losing a Game You Feel Like You Should Win

When playing Pickleball, you often go into a game believing you should come out on top. However, sometimes you beat yourself even before you get on the court. Then you get behind in a game while playing an opponent you regularly beat or a lower-rated player. To prevent this frustration, you may want to alter your mindset and take your opponent seriously regardless of whether they are lower-level players or older than you are.

Christina no longer even looks at the bracket before playing a match in a tournament. She explained, “I really try to focus on the ball and not who’s hitting it, or if they’re a righty or lefty or if they’re tall or short or if they have a knee brace. I try to ignore everything across from me, except for where the ball is landing because that’s the only thing I can control at that point is moving my own feet, getting to the ball, and doing what I know.”

You Are Missing Shots You Expect to Make

Sometimes you miss shots you expect to make because you are just having an off day. At other times, you feel the pressure of the moment, whether competing in a tournament or trying to knock off a formidable opponent in recreational play. Several techniques exist which



can help you if you are feeling tight. Before a game, Christina likes to listen to music to get her mind off of the upcoming competition. During a match, she also focuses on her breathing, as Christina finds that she is not inhaling deeply when she gets anxious.

When players make a mistake like missing a serve, they need to quickly move past the error since the past cannot be changed. “We miss those a lot of times. We get over-confident, or we’re trying to prove here’s how good I am. I noticed that if I just slow down and worry about placement and not so much how hard you hit the ball, it turns out better for you,” Christina said. She even will tell a funny joke to relax as laughing makes her feel a lot better.

Christina knows from her own experience that she often gets frustrated on the court. However, she has developed numerous strategies to help in those times on the court. So if you find yourself in the same situation, try implementing some of her suggestions.

RICH LIVELY: THE PICKLEBALL PREACHER

The Pickleball preacher. That is the nickname of senior professional Rich Lively. How can someone play that good being a preacher? That was the question people often asked when they found out what Rich does. “Why wouldn’t I play well? I’m going out there playing really hard, trying to break that stereotype along the way”, says Rich.

God, obviously, plays a significant role in his life. Rich has been preaching for a long time. He even does it in the more prominent churches. This Pickleball enthusiast has no problem talking in front of a larger group of people. 50, 60, 100 – you name it, Rich will preach to them. How does that transfer to the Pickleball court? “I’m trying to make everyone feel good while playing with or against me. It doesn’t matter: win or lose. But, don’t get me wrong. I love to win, and I’ll go hard. The most important thing for me is to make everyone feel like a winner, whether I beat them or they beat me”, he says.

And how did Rich start playing Pickleball? The answer is both simple and unusual – the strange noise. Rich has an extensive tennis background, as many current players do. But, one day, he heard the noise of the paddle smashing a plastic ball. What was that, he wondered? Rich was just on the way to play some tennis and, suddenly, it started to rain heavily. The sports lover he certainly is went indoors where he was given a paddle. So he just started playing Pickleball. That happened in August of 2019 and hasn’t stopped ever since. His tennis and golf schedule started to fade. It went to once every month from playing it six times a week. Pickleball took the throne of being Rich’s go-to sport.

“My whole life, I was dreaming to become a professional athlete. I played almost every sport you can

imagine. But, really. I was a wrestler in high school, played football, cricket, rugby”, he recalls. He played even some of the “exotic” sports besides those well-known ones. Have you ever heard of sepak? That’s a sport very popular in Asia. It’s basically volleyball but played without touching your hands. Rich tried even that while living overseas. For some time, his home was Russia. There he played badminton and table tennis. All of those sports are now behind him. Pickleball came into his life, and it won!

The start wasn’t easy, he admitted. Playing with a racquet in his hand and switching to a paddle wasn’t easy. Rich used to hit the ball very hard as you do in tennis. Slowly but surely, he figured it out and became very good at Pickleball. Rich started to make videos about different shots and techniques, including his signature shot called the hitchhiker. “Doing the backhand volley, you just need to put your thumb up, just like hitchhiking. It reminded me of the seventies”, Rich explains.

Rich prefers to go deep into the analysis of Pickleball when teaching, but also in a funny way. Shooting videos come naturally to him. And the reason? We need to go back to his preaching. He used to talk and make videos in front of large crowds, so that’s something he’s very comfortable doing. “I’ve got no problem going on the street and talking to strangers. And as my friend says, it looks natural. I just have that gift. Good for him, there is usually no need for a lot of editing”, he claims.

When a man who has tried almost every sport says that Pickleball is the best, you know it’s true. Pickleball has it all, including the social and physical aspects. “It’s such a delight to play and help other people learn about it,” Rich says. Being both a pastor



and a Pickleball player, he combined the two things. Rich took the big fellowship hall at his church and turned it into Pickleball courts. It’s hard to play outside in Florida as the temperature rises, but the Pickleball Preacher found a solution. It seems that he practices what he preaches.



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FINDING YOUR **OPPONENT'S WEAKNESSES**

Professional player Neil Mediratta learned to play Pickleball in college, and he enjoyed it so much that he would skip classes to learn more about the game. His study of Pickleball included watching a video of his gameplay, professional matches, and his opponents. As you can tell, the 26-year-old Neil, who is no longer in college, is a student of the game and very analytical in his approach to the sport.

He says it takes a lot of reflection, "I would record myself and then watch afterward, see where the mistakes were. And I watched a lot of videos from Pickleball and just try to watch one little thing in one of the players and see what they did that made them good. And then try to emulate that the next time I drill or practice. And when it comes to tournaments, I like to watch videos of who I play before I play them. And just look for small little weaknesses that I can exploit, and then I try to bring that onto the court."

Neil gives an example of how he could exploit a weakness in a match where he and his partner, Brandon French, defeated the third seed in a tournament, Tyson McGuffin and Jay Devilliers. Neil was on the right side and cross-court from Tyson, who likes to attack by jamming the person in that position. Since Neil is only 5'5" tall, his reach is not very long, so it is more difficult to jam him. So Neil looked for that shot and was ready to pound his backhand shot behind Tyson.

While Neil knew what to expect from Tyson on the attack, he also used information about his opponent from video or during the warm-up. He notes his competitor's paddle position when they are at the non-volley zone line. Since most people sit with their paddle slightly to the backhand or forehand side, Neil reads that tendency and uses that information in a firefight. Neil emphasized, "They'll generally tend to do the same one over and over. You can go to the other side. That will cause them to lose half a second. And a lot of times will result in a pop-up."

Even the professional players have certain tendencies which can be exploited. Neil said the team of Tyson and Jay had two spots he and his partner Brandon could attack. While Neil did not reveal who had which weakness, he said one of his opponents favors his backhand, so his ready position was tilted slightly to the left since both players are right-handed. So Neil and Brandon would speed the ball up between his dominant hip and shoulder. The other player also had some weakness in their backhand since their punch was not super strong. So these were the two spots Neil tried to hit.

Neil concluded by saying, "So a lot of it is an analytical part we talked about earlier. Zane (Navratil) kind of mentioned one time online that I think that Pickleball is almost like chess on concrete. There's so many little moves." So, the third-grade teacher continues to be a student of the game as he rises to the top of professional Pickleball.

TEACHER NEIL MEDIRATTA IS STILL THE STUDENT

Professional Pickleball player Neil Mediratta loves teaching, but his venue may be changing from a third-grade classroom to the courts in the future. As you might imagine, teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic is challenging. Neil elaborated, “This year has been an exceptionally rough school year on teachers in general and me. Currently, I’m getting bit, kicked, spit on almost every day. I had a pencil thrown, and it hit me in the eye, which was kind of rough. So I have thought about looking into maybe teaching tennis and Pickleball at a club. And then that would allow me to dedicate more time to my Pickleball game. And as of right now, it looks like I might be going that route. So that is a little exciting for me.”

The opportunity to focus on Pickleball full-time is appealing because Neil is only 26 years old. He knows it is impossible to teach in the classroom and play professional Pickleball. But doing that is on his mind as Neil has won against some of the top professionals in doubles. Still, he needs more time because he drives for at least one hour to find some good Pickleball games. He does that a few times a week and then tries to squeeze in as much Pickleball as he can during the weekends. “That is a long day. Driving for one hour, playing for a few, and then driving back home for an hour more. And the next day I’ve got to be ready at 7 AM for 28 kids at school. So, it’s really tough for sure,” he said.

Neil originally picked up the game of Pickleball as a student at Northern Illinois University. He wasn’t good enough to play tennis for them. So, he was working out one day when he saw some older adults playing that weird sport, as many people describe Pickleball, watching it for the first time. “Of course, they beat me, as a classic Pickleball story goes. But that just made me hungry for more. That was two and a half years ago. I was quickly learning, and soon enough, I played my first tournament,” Neil recalled.

Neil got so hooked on Pickleball that he even started to skip some classes to play and learn more about the sport. As time passed, Neil became more and more interested

in Pickleball. He developed a very analytical approach to the game. You name it: videos, recording, analyzing, and Neil is doing it all to improve his game. He claims every little detail counts, and everything can make a difference between wins and losses. Before every match, he watches videos of his opponent playing. The goal is, of course, to find a weakness (or more of them), to exploit anything that can help him win.

Sometimes that even involves trash talking. Can these two things go together? Knowing how friendly the Pickleball communities are, we would definitely say no. But Neil convinced us that it happens during the matches. At least, he likes to practice that sometimes. He says it depends on who you are playing and how familiar you are with your opponent. The situation in Pickleball is very much different than in tennis. Pickleball has, as we mentioned, a friendly community. Everybody is supportive, rooting for each other.

On the other hand, tennis isn’t like that. It’s a lot more cutthroat drama, as Neil described. He tasted both sports, which makes his opinion relevant. But, there is still some room for trash-talking, he claims. “I am really good at using those little things to motivate me. A lot of people who don’t know me don’t realize how fiery and loud I can be on the court. Doing that, I get pumped up, and it almost always makes me play better,” he said.

On his Pickleball journey, Neil is not alone. He made a lot of friends. Among them is Jennifer Lassandro, a great Pickleball player. They used to play tennis together. Now, they are “all-in” for Pickleball. Neil is mostly playing doubles, while Jen focuses on singles. “I’m not going to lie. She beats me in singles sometimes. I’ve got a decent serve and a strong forehand, but after that, it gets a little sketchy,” Neil admitted.

Given Neils’s crazy situation in the classroom, it will not be surprising if he makes the jump to focusing on Pickleball full time. And because he is a student of the game, it is clear Neil will go far in the game.



PLAYER SKILL RATINGS: HOW GOOD ARE YOU?

Even if you are a recreational Pickleball player, you often hear people talking about a player's rating. But what is the difference between 3.5, 4.0, or 4.5 players? While USA Pickleball has a detailed sheet describing the attributes of players at each level, certified instructor Joey Gmuer recently weighed in on the subject as ratings are not as clear-cut as you might think.

Joey and the Pickleball Pirates team created a video containing five points from players of different levels playing in a U.S. Open tournament. Viewers were then asked to guess the rating of the players in the match. "Yes. I think that's a huge subject because people watch our channel and they'll say 3.5 at best. But I don't think people realize when we're playing like a Rich Lively, when he drives, they don't see the velocity of his drive and how far it's sinking. So short points don't necessarily determine your ratings. I mean, you can have a 121 dink rally, but that doesn't mean you're still not a 3.5. And I think when people watch, they don't see the wind, they don't see a lot of other things," Joey commented. Some of those other things include disguising a speed up, hard slice returns, and being able to hit a third shop drop consistently in the kitchen.

When asked how you know if you are a 3.5 player, Joey

had a short reply. "The simplest answer is a 3.5 player won a gold in 3.5 and is moving up to 4.0." But USA Pickleball's definition would be more specific. A 4.0 player is going to miss fewer third shot drops, be more consistent, and hit the serve deeper with more power. Joey also said the backhand is critical in assessing the difference between a 3.5 and 4.0.

As players move up to the 4.5 level, Joey believes patience is a crucial factor. He said, "4.0 players will speed up the wrong ball. So a 4.5 player is going to attack the right balls most of the time. A 4.0 player is going to miss some easy attacks, and they're going to try to make up for it and attack the wrong ball."

Besides offensive attacks or neutral times in a point when dinking, defense plays a role in a player's rating. Being able to cover the court by moving side to side or up and back is a key to high-level play. Players rated 4.5 or above also have mastered the reset shot and can hit it from anywhere on the court. The ball should land in the kitchen without giving their opponent an attackable ball.

It is evident in talking with Joey that attributes like patience and defense are intangible characteristics that impact ratings. So, regardless of whether or not you know your rating, there is always room for improvement.



DUPR: THE ULTIMATE RATING SYSTEM

In a recent interview by Pickleball Forum for Women (PFFW) founder Dotti Berry, Jill Braverman tossed around terms like “exponential decay” and “half-life.” The great news is that you do not need to understand the concepts discussed by DUPR CEO to understand the Dynamic Universal Pickleball Rating system. It rates players’ skill level on a 2.0-8.0 scale regardless of age, gender, or location.

In other words, the ratings are genderless. So if you are a woman, you can directly compare to men younger and older than you. For example, DUPR used its simulator to rank the professionals just before the Association of Pickleball Professional’s event at the New York Open. The top female player in the doubles draw was Andrea Koop, with a ranking of 5.850, and her partner Simone Jardim at 5.834. In the doubles draw, the top men’s player was JW Johnson, rated as a 6.921, while his partner Zane Navratil’s DUPR was 6.770. According to Jill, the team of JW and Zane would crust Andrea and Simone if they played against each other. The reason is that competitive games occur when two DUPRs are within 0.25. So a competitive game should occur between a DUPR of 4.0 and 4.25. Jill explained, “If you put a 4.0 DUPR against a 4.5 DUPR, that’s a blowout.”

Jill became the CEO of DUPR after playing tennis at Pepperdine University and working as the Head of Commercial for Universal Tennis Rating (UTR). While she thought she left the rating world behind after exiting UTR, Jill could not pass up the DUPR opportunity as she had an interest in democratizing technology in sports.

DUPR is already the official rating system for the Professional Pickleball Association and Major League Pickleball. But it is also being used by other groups like PFFW and local clubs. Jill elaborated further, “We are a data and analytics company. We track all of your results in your metrics, even if you don’t know we’re doing it because we receive results from over 20 different sources, other tournament management, software providers, and all of your USAP sanctioned results. And then we build data and analytics and a rating history for you.”

APP NY OPEN - WOMEN'S DOUBLES									
Seed	Player	DUPR	Player	DUPR	Team DUPR	Gold	Silver	Bronze	Medal
1	Simone Jardim	5.834	Andrea Koop	5.850	11.684	45%	18%	9%	72%
2	Bobbi Oshiro	5.603	Anna Bright	5.760	11.363	15%	16%	14%	45%
3	Irina Tereschenko	5.673	Jorja Johnson	5.658	11.331	13%	17%	17%	47%
4	Corrine Carr	5.459	Vivienne David	5.719	11.178	9%	11%	10%	30%
5	Michelle Esquivel	5.576	Lee Whitwell	5.552	11.128	6%	10%	10%	26%
6	Lauren Stratman	5.697	Parris Todd	5.401	11.098	4%	8%	11%	23%
7	Regina Franco Goldberg	5.493	Susannah Barr	5.589	11.082	4%	9%	9%	22%
8	Sarah Ansboury	5.450	Maggie Remynse	5.538	10.988	2%	3%	6%	12%
9	Megan Charity	5.375	Rosie Johanson	5.358*	10.733	0%	2%	3%	5%
10	Megan Fudge	5.325	Rebecca Ryan	5.357	10.682	1%	3%	4%	8%
11	Annica Cooper	5.272	Milan Rane	5.358	10.630	1%	1%	2%	4%
12	Olivia McMillan	5.241	Martina Kochli	5.324	10.565	0%	1%	2%	3%
13	Kamryn Blackwood	4.965	Michelle Lui	5.476*	10.441	0%	0%	1%	1%
14	Rachel Rettger	5.017	Lina Padegimaite	5.390	10.407	0%	0%	1%	1%
15	Monica Paolicelli	5.197	Alexandra Truong	5.146	10.343	0%	1%	1%	2%
16	Amanda Hendry	5.010	Rachel Summers	5.215	10.225	0%	0%	1%	1%

MEN'S DOUBLES									
Seed	Player	DUPR	Player	DUPR	Team DUPR	Gold	Silver	Bronze	Medal
1	Zane Navratil	6.770	JW Johnson	6.921	13.691	42%	19%	11%	72%
2	Adam Stone	6.583	Dekel Bar	6.858	13.441	17%	20%	17%	54%
3	Dylan Frazier	6.783	Darrian Young	6.642	13.425	15%	19%	17%	51%
4	Thomas Wilson	6.709	AJ Koller	6.708	13.417	12%	15%	15%	42%
5	Eden Lica	6.589	Andrei Daescu	6.689	13.278	7%	11%	13%	31%
6	Kyle Yates	6.646	Robert Cassidy	6.421	13.067	3%	7%	10%	20%
7	Rafa Hewett	6.466	Chuck Taylor	6.444	12.910	2%	4%	7%	13%
8	Brandon French	6.103	Rob Nunnery	6.714	12.817	1%	2%	3%	6%
9	Brendon Long	6.374	Pablo Tellez	6.320	12.694	1%	1%	2%	4%
10	Johnny Goldberg	6.220	John Cincola	6.391	12.611	0%	1%	3%	4%
11	Brandon Nsekpong	6.257	Stefan Auvergne	6.287	12.544	0%	1%	1%	2%
12	Edward Scarpa	6.202	Greg Dow	6.146	12.348	0%	0%	1%	1%
13	Hayden Patriquin	6.172	Gabriel Tardio	6.174	12.346	0%	0%	1%	1%
14	Federico Staksrud	5.726	James Ignatowich	6.131	11.857	0%	0%	0%	0%
15	Frank Anthony Davis	5.919	Matthew Kawamoto	5.857	11.776	0%	0%	0%	0%
16	Ryan Sherry	5.811	Matt Manasse	5.846	11.657	0%	0%	0%	0%

Another great thing about DUPR is you do not even need to be a tournament competitor to get a rating. You can play a match against your friends and record the score on the DUPR website. Once either player competes against someone with a DUPR rating, a retroactive DUPR value will be assigned to them. So, all of the data matters even when you are starting. In other words, it takes one match against a DUPR player to get a DUPR. Then play five to 10 matches with the scores going into the system, and you will have an accurate and reliable rating.

Your DUPR goes up or down each time you play based on the results. So, you can see the odds of you beating another team with a DUPR. Jill commented, “You can see the spread. So all of a sudden, you bring in a little bit of that golf handicap, gambling element to games, and you can also then bring in even larger gambling opportunities to the sport as a whole, which the sport really needs. It needs the Ford Motor cars sponsorship. It needs the Pepsi and the Cokes to be interested. And we need some form of gambling to enter the sport. It’s going to be really hard for that to happen without DUPR.”

While DUPR looks suitable for gambling on Pickleball, it can help in tournaments to keep players from sandbagging or entering a lower division than what they are capable of playing in. “Do you hate on the person that plays down, or do you hate on the fact that the software and the rating systems that exist allow them to do that? Is that their fault for using the current rules of the game to enter events where they don’t belong? So whose fault is it when in reality you kind of have to be sandbagging if you want a medal,” Jill said.

So despite the intricacies of DUPR, exponential decay and half-life are not terms you need in your vocabulary as Jill does. Just play a match, record the result on MyDUPR.com or play in a tournament where the results go into the system. Then you will have your rating between 2.0 and 8.0.

HOW TO LEVEL UP YOUR GAME WITH JORDAN BRIONES



Professional Pickleball player Jordan Briones said he was adventurous when he played his first tournament many years ago. He and his father jumped into the fray, competing at the 5.0 level. Jordan recalls that event was a humbling experience as he does not believe they even won a game. “When you watch players on YouTube or even the pros today, it is very impressive, and it looks great, but in real life, it’s a lot more difficult.” Of course, Jordan has come a long way since then, as he now creates instructional videos via Briones Pickleball and teaches full time to help others with their game. Jordan, now in Arizona, primarily teaches players in the 3.0 to 4.0 range, and he believes players of that skill level need to master the volley and dinking.

The Dink

The dink is an essential shot that, when starting to play, can help you with paddle control. The initial goal is to make the dink land in the non-volley zone. However, dinking becomes much more sophisticated as your game develops. While it is natural to hit a dink with backspin on

the ball, especially on your backhand, advanced players go a step beyond this technique. “They’re hitting more flat dinks, kind of like just lift dinks. And a lot of players now, I think at the highest levels, it’s very good to develop a topspin dink,” Jordan elaborated.

The key with dinking is to apply pressure on your opponents, especially at the higher levels. One way to do this is to move the other team from side to side. You can do this by hitting to both partners and also by dinking to the forehand and backhand of an individual player. Where you place the ball in the non-volley zone is also critical. As your game improves, aim for the back one-third of the kitchen or even deeper, depending on where your opponent is standing. Keeping that ball near your opponent’s feet forces them to decide whether to step back and let the ball bounce or take it out of the air. The choice can impact your competition’s effectiveness because they have to decide. Just make sure you do not dink the ball too close to the sideline, as higher-level players will smack an around the post shot.

The Volley

The volley is especially important because, at the lower levels, you do not see a lot of dinking. Jordan explained, “Obviously, dinking is huge in Pickleball, but at those levels, they go out and play rec, and they’re dealing with bangers, and obviously, players don’t have that control. There’s not a lot of dinking, unfortunately.”

The key to the volley is to make your stroke as compact as possible. Learn to push outward with some force but not take a big backswing. However, this can be challenging to do when you have bangers hitting the ball hard to you. Sometimes you get in the habit of banging back and taking a big swing at the ball. One way to develop the proper volley technique is to practice against a wall. You do not even need to be seven feet away from it. Just make sure you are using that compact swing.

When volleying, contact the ball in front of yourself, but make sure it is not too far in front of your body. If you get your arm extended too much, you lose both power and control. “We don’t want to hit our volleys one inch away from our chest because that’s jammed up. So there’s a certain range. I would call it a certain zone where we should be volleying. And I would say generally it’s about a foot to two feet give or take out in front of our chest,” Jordan said. And do not worry about hitting a hard volley if your opponent is attacking you. Control the shot, placing it low over the net toward their backhand.

So while Jordan has come a long way since his playing in his first tournament, players in the 3.0 to 4.0 range can do the same. Concentrate on mastering the volley and dink shot so when you play it will not be an adventure like it was for Jordan in his first competition.



MASTERING THE 4 TYPES OF VOLLEYS

WITH PRO DEKEL BAR

Dekel Bar, one of the top professionals in the game, says his number one tip for players is to get as close to the kitchen line as possible. Standing near the non-volley-zone line allows you to take more balls out of the air, putting pressure on your opponents. Then you can hit one of the four types of volleys, including the punch, roll, dink, and swinging.

Punch Volley

The punch volley involves contacting the ball above the net and hitting it down near your opponent's feet. The key is to meet the ball in front of your body and go forward using a compact swing. If you take a big swing, you may mishit the ball. The punch volley has a significant advantage over hitting a softer volley that pops up. Because the softer volley stays in the air longer, your opponent can move in and hit the next shot above the net.

So, the punch volley is a highly effective shot when the serving team drives the third shot at you.



Dekel explained, "It helps a lot to get the ball to their feet, and then maybe they'll drive again, but they'll have a harder drive with a lower and faster ball. It's a good way to protect yourself against bangers. They just keep hitting the ball as hard as they can, and they're overpowering. But if you're staying on the line there and punching the ball back to their feet, you're in the better position there. So trying to drive off your punches is not usually going to go so well."

Roll Volley

The roll volley is an advanced shot that players at the 4.0 level and above should work on. It differs from the punch volley because you contact the ball at the top of the net or lower. Because of the contact point, you will need to put some top spin on the ball to keep it in the court. The roll volley is used in two common situations. One is after your opponent makes their third shot. The goal is to hit the roll volley deep in the court to keep your opponent's back after hitting a third shot drop. Aim for where you expect your opponent's feet to be when hitting the ball.

Dekel described the second situation, "Everybody's at the kitchen, you're having a dink rally, and you're trying to have a more sneaky attack or just attack that is below the level of the net and surprise your opponent. It's not a very powerful shot because you are using it from below the level of the net. But it's a lot about placement. It might be if it's an attack, it might be a setup shot for your next shot." While it can be effective to target your opponent's right shoulder if they are right-handed and create the "chicken wing" effect, it is a good idea to mix up your placements.

Volley Dink



According to Dekel, not all volleys need to be aggressively hit shots. When you are in a dinking rally, you may take the ball out of the air and hit a dink back to your opponent. The dink volley is similar to the bounce volley and can be used when contacting the ball below the net, or you do not have the opportunity to attack.

Swinging Volley

The swinging volley is an aggressive shot that you can use when your opponent pops the ball up in the air. Because the ball stays in the air longer, you can take a more full swing than with the other types of volleys. But Dekel cautions against using a massive swing and only use this type of volley when you have enough time and are on balance.

As you can see, the volley in Pickleball is alive and well as there are four types of volleys: punch, roll, dink, and swinging. You can use the different types depending on your skill level, your opponent's tendencies, and the height of the ball as it comes over the net.



COURT RENEWAL OPTIONS: ASPHALT OR POST-TENSION CONSTRUCTION

BY M. L. JOHNSON, E.D., PH.D.

The word “court” has an interesting history. Dating from the Middle Ages, the central area surrounded by a castle’s fortifications was variously used by monarchs to resolve disputes, as in “holding court” and by castle staff for quoit, archery, horseshoe, and Tug O War contests.

That central castle area has diverged into a) places for justice decisions and b) places for athletic contests. Bored monks striking a back-and-forth ball over a rope with their hands has progressed into net contests allowing the ball to bounce before hitting and games where the object is not-allowed-to-bounce before hitting. Contestants allowing a ball to bounce before striking have become interested in court surfaces – as uniform rebounds help contact predictability.

Requirements for a uniform rebound surface have led tennis contestants through several surface iterations – specifications for which considered uniform performance, longevity, and cost. Consider transition from castle dirt, to grass, to pulverized bricks (clay), to asphalt, and to concrete courts – each having performance, longevity, and cost considerations. The past several decades witnessed a surge in asphalt court construction, as it provides a good performance-vs-cost balance. However, nothing lasts forever. Despite its tendency to crack, asphalt was the hardcourt construction choice for decades. While asphalt is a flexible pavement, those flexible material properties can lead to structural failure in tennis and pickleball court applications. Thermal expansion, UV exposure, and freeze-thaw cycles all contribute to asphalt surfaces degrading in quality over time.

Asphalt is a good choice if you’re looking for a relatively soft and smooth all-weather playing surface. Asphalt courts are basically upgraded parking lot and highway pavement, providing a predictable bounce. Though cracks appear over time, asphalt is cheap and easy to repair. Affordability is now of the major advantages of choosing asphalt. Compared to other material options on the market, asphalt comes at a much cheaper price. Depending on which type of mixture used, how much compaction is applied, and the type of surface coating, it typically ranges from \$5.00 to \$7.00 per square foot. Thus, the average tennis court would cost a minimum of \$45,000 – or \$25,000 for a single pickleball court. This price may appear to be a steal compared to other construction options. But the binding power of the tar-like bitumen diminishes over decades. Thus, with the binding agent disappearing, the asphalt’s sand and gravel composite deteriorates – with little structural strength, cracks develop and widen annually.

A version of asphalt, perhaps the antonym of “hot rolled”



asphalt installation, is the typical professional tennis court surface. Laykold is a brand of hardcourt surface acrylic coating that can be applied to an asphalt or a concrete base, with or without a cushioning elastic over-layer. A thin overlay reduces running impact without affecting the ball rebound. Most professional tennis tournaments (ATP and WTA) are played on tennis courts with Laykold-type surfaces. The U.S. Open brand name is Decoturf, and its softer version in the Australian Open is branded Plexipave.

The next step up is concrete. But without an internal reinforcer, either rebar or cable installation, concrete develops cracks and is difficult to repair. Reinforced concrete tennis court installation costs more but has a much longer lifespan and lower maintenance costs. It produces a uniform ball rebound. An optional thin subsurface cushion can be installed under a Laykold-type of acrylic top coat. The preferred strengthening agent is now cable tensioning rather than steel rebar – named “post-tension concrete.” Though post-tensioned concrete courts have an initial cost that is around 20 percent to 30 percent higher than that of asphalt courts, over the course of 25+ years, asphalt maintenance costs would be higher. Thus, **after 25+ years, the total cost of installing and maintaining post-tensioned concrete courts would be 20 percent to 30 percent less than for asphalt courts.**

Post-tensioned concrete provides durability, excellent playability, low maintenance, and long-term value. Benefits of post-tension concrete over asphalt include: a) Increased resistance to crack development; b) Increased resistance to settling or heaving; c) A more controlled slope for better drainage; d) A more uniform playing surface; e) Elimination of control joints; f) Lower maintenance costs; and g) Longer service life – 50-years or longer. The structural strength remains, but the surface will need to be repainted every five years.

The initial cost of a regulation-sized post-tensioned concrete tennis court could be one-third higher than an equivalent asphalt court. “The basic asphalt court typically starts at \$40,000, and the basic post-tension court starts at \$75,000 – one-half for one pickleball court. The actual cost depends on soil stability, prevailing materials and labor costs, upgrades, and amenities. Re-using the perimeter fencing could reduce the cost. The choice to install a post-tension concrete court is just the beginning. To minimize “buyer’s remorse” for selecting the most expensive court type, do a site visit to an established court. You also need to evaluate the proposed court site for soil stability and drainage – old asphalt courts being good base materials. Since not everyone appreciates pickleball’s noise, minimize future litigating by considering noise mitigation. Consider options that drive up construction costs, such as fence color, the addition of cabanas between courts, and the color scheme. The next step is to find a qualified, experienced contractor who can install the court you want at a fair price. There are certifications for post-tension court contractors.

To clarify, bridge construction prestressed concrete has cable tension applied before the concrete is poured, and post-tension concrete has cable tension applied after the concrete is cured. “Yes!” concrete can be compressed. After the perimeter forms are set, a seven-strand (1/2 inch) high strength cable is laid between every 3 to 4 feet in – to form a grid over the vapor barrier. The cable ends protrude through holes drilled through the forms. After curing, one end of each cable is secured, and 33,000 pounds of tension is applied before capping – typically stretching the steel cable one foot across the court length. The monolith slab is thus impervious to sub-surface heave or erosion. See Figure 1.

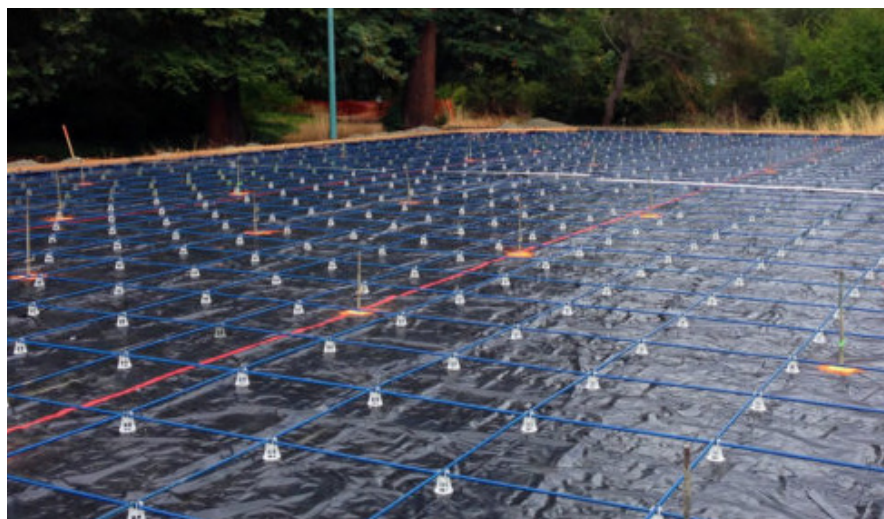


Figure 1. The typical post-tension cable grid layout. A minimum of five inches of concrete is required where there are more than three annual freeze-thaw cycles. Courtesy of Vintage Courts

Given the cost of materials and labor and the relative permanence of concrete, everything must be planned with the contractor – no surprises.

Experienced court construction professionals can best explain the process based on your exact conditions and needs. These court builders should set up a no-charge site visit and check out your property so that they can ask you some important questions and look at your available space and potential limitations. After a complete review of your wants, needs, and timeline, you should be ready to talk contract specifications. For a list of typical specifications, contact the Post-Tensioning Institute and the American Sports Builders Association for standard specifications. Specifications are the basis for your “request for bid” sent to qualified contractors.

This brings us to the case in point. Our subdivision was developed in the late 1960s – now containing some 356 single-family and multi-family units. A continuing HOA was chartered as the Parkwood Home Owners Association – in Fort Collins, CO. The three asphalt tennis courts, covered with a fiberglass carpet to soften the foot traffic and lessen the ball rebound, hosted singles, doubles, and mixed doubles play and tournaments. However, after a few decades, cracks began to appear ... and reappear wider from the annual Colorado freeze-thaw cycles. Seeing the “ease” of court repair demonstrated from internet searches, volunteers spent at least 100 hours “fixing” smaller cracks and a three-court “San Andreas Fault.” But, those three 56-year-old courts had become unusable – sending tennis players to public courts and requiring pickleball re-plays when balls hit dead spots.

Though some homeowners requested that the courts be demolished completely, the PPOA Covenants specified the maintenance of specified amenities – the lake, the green belt areas, the swimming pool and clubhouse, and the courts. Thus, the dilemma was “Whether to abandon the eyesore courts to nature or to devote funds from the PPOA cash reserves for upgrading to post-tension concrete?” The motion and second to fund the renovation passed unanimously in a regular PPOA Board of Directors meeting. A site visit to private post-tension courts affirmed the Board’s choice. Bid specifications were developed and sent to three area contractors, with the low equal-quality bid was accepted.

The actual concrete pouring became the summer neighborhood event. A City “Noise Variance” approval allowed an early start to finish before the heat of the late summer day. Thus, in the dark of a 5:00 morning, 27 fully loaded Ready Mix concrete trucks came and went – alternating dumps into the concrete pump’s hopper. That giant tube filled three courts at least five inches deep, while a finisher drove something like a hockey Zamboni over the setting concrete. All critical elevation references were driven by a laser beam. A dozen highly skilled workers executed the “pour,” and the job was completed by 1:00 PM. See Figure 2.



Figure 2. The concrete finishing “Zamboni” slides over setting concrete.

Courtesy of Hinding Tennis.

The basic post-tensioned concrete slab, with surrounding 10-foot chain link fencing, nets, net posts, and court painting, are the standard fare. But a few extras could transform a standard amenity into a very special place. Change the fencing from galvanized to black and add cabanas between courts for “between games” respite shade and seating. Painting the Non-Volley Zone the same color as the perimeter makes that area distinctive. Apparently, a dark blue court interior provides the best contrast with “highviz” tennis and pickleballs. The dark green perimeter was simply the committee’s preference. And surrounding the pickleball area with sound abatement panels is an option that had become necessary – as 16 advanced doubles players can generate a great deal of noise.

A note about converting a tennis court to pickleball courts: from the existing width and length measurements, it was determined that two pickleball courts would fit easily on each end of a tennis court. The tennis net was left in its normal position to serve as a backstop for errant pickleball balls.

The rapid growth of pickleball and the resulting noise can disturb residents from what was once a quiet neighborhood park or HOA tennis competition. Requiring the quietist paddles and balls (Onyx) may not sufficiently abate the noise, and limiting usage does little to control pickleball noise. To the offended, the only practical solution to eliminate the nuisance that is reducing their property values is to cease pickleball activities – stopping the incompatible activity. In some places, litigation has been the tool of sound control. However, one or more sound abatement products are now available – its considerable expense is less expensive than legal fees and judgements.

The Acoustiblok Company developed and patented a 1/8-inch-thick all-weather sound abatement curtains. The product is made of our barium-free, UV-resistant, 100%-recyclable material. The product, Acoustifence, typically reduces sound by fifty percent. It can handle full sun 24/7/365, up to 200 degrees Fahrenheit, and cold temperatures down to -40 degrees. It is mold and mildew resistant and waterproof. The material, tested at a Hurricane Engineering/Test Lab, withstood a 200-mph wind load. Acoustifence comes in green or black, and is custom made for height and length. Installation, while the contractor is on-site, saves money. See Figure 3.

A three-month cure time requirement and late summer pouring delayed the application of the seal coat and color coats. A combination gate locking system was created to prevent court abuse by wheeled vehicles – roller blades, skateboards, and bicycles. Two pickleball clinics and an intermediate-level doubles tournament have introduced pickleball to the PPOA. Group and drop-in play are steadily increasing. Here are images of the new post-tension courts.

Photos courtesy of Caleb Cripe.

Yes! Post-tension courts are initially more expensive, but compared to asphalt-based courts, they last at least three times longer, do not crack or have soft spots, and the only maintenance is repainting every five years. When considering the initial cost amortized over 50 years, the post-tension court option becomes cost-effective.



Figure 3. Acoustifence installed inside pickleball court fencing. A bit of reverb has been noted inside the Acoustifence enclosure.

Courtesy of Caleb Cripe.

SWEDISH PLAYER AXEL IRESTEDT FINDS HIS SPORT

Playing outside of your country for the first time, it was the US Open, and you won the bronze medal? Going from a cold climate to the sweltering one and still finding a way to make a great result? That's the experience of a Swedish Pickleball player Axel Irestedt.

We always like to find out how he became involved with Pickleball. Axel's story is a classic one. He has an extensive tennis background. So, one day his friend came and asked him to play Pickleball. "He told me that there is some new sport. And that we are definitely going to be competitive in it. We were really good from the beginning", he recalls.

Axel is from Sweden and, as we mentioned, he used to play a lot of tennis. But, that was not his number one sport. Axel was also involved in athletics, mainly running. Tennis was his second favorite sport. After he quit playing it, he tried a lot of racquet sports such as badminton and table tennis.

Living in Sweden, it is hard for Axel to find a lot of Pickleball tournaments. "Pickleball is growing in Sweden, but it's still a small sport. I guess there are around 3000 to 4000 people playing. And most of them play it just once or twice a week. But, our Nationals is growing. On the last one in 2021 there

were around 100 players", he says.

Axel won the gold medal in singles. So, yes, we guess his friend was right when he said they would be very competitive if they started to play it. He also won the doubles tournament in 2019, making him the two-time champion of Sweden.

Being one of the top players in his country, Axel decided to go to the States and play in the US Open. That was his first time playing outside Sweden. And he went straight to one of the most fantastic tournaments in the world of Pickleball. An unexpected problem occurred, though—the high temperature. Swedish people are not used to the climate in Florida. "I filled my hat with the ice cubes. I also put it on the neck. It was not about playing anymore. I was just trying to survive. After about two weeks, I got a little bit used to it. A little breeze probably helped as well", Axel claims.

Axel won his first singles competition quite quickly, as he says. But, in the second one, he met his match. Axel finally faced a formidable American opponent and lost. But it wasn't the end for him. Axel continued in the consolation bracket and came out on top, giving him third place in the event. "I played with the people I usually watch on YouTube. I'm a little bit impressed about what I



did considering that I never played outside of Sweden, as well as that humidity", he says.

To conclude, Axel explained some parts of his strategy when he plays singles. For him, it's all about rushing to the kitchen line after the serve. He claims it's hard to win a match playing primarily from behind the baseline.

It is clear that Axel has found his sport after playing many others. It will be interesting to see how much his game will develop and what more he can achieve. It's hard to imagine a better Pickleball ambassador in Sweden.



SKIN CANCER SURVIVOR TAKES ON PICKLEBALL

Doug Dvorak's life started to spiral out of control after a tragic death in the family. Later he suffered from drug and alcohol addiction, and then he had to face cancer. But through all this, Pickleball helped him become the best version of himself. He's happy and fulfilled and made some difficult choices that were, in the end, worth every struggle.

Doug was a salesman most of his life. Being in sales means that you will experience a lot of rejection, even on a daily basis. Doug read a lot of books on how to stay motivated. He was devouring all the material he could find, as he explains. But then life happened. A few life circumstances changed that determined his future. Unfortunately, it was a tragic incident that happened to his father. He died very violently. "My dad suffered a massive stroke as he was in a long-term care facility on the third floor. He went to a vacant room with a window that should have a lock on it. It did not. And he fell out of the third floor to his death," recalling his family tragedy.

Unfortunately for Doug, the problems just started from that point. After that, he had an alcohol and drug problem. If that wasn't already enough, he also got cancer. And that was a turning point for him. Doug decided that it was enough. He was well aware that it was time for a significant change. And Doug decided to do it in his professional career. He quit his job at IBM to pursue a motivational speaking and sales leadership career. "It was a huge challenge. Quitting IBM with salary, commissions, pension, and benefits was not easy. Fast forward to 15 years later, and I assure you it was the best decision I have ever made," he claims.

After four complicated surgeries, Doug finally managed to get rid of the cancer. And it was a tough one. He had skin cancer, the very dangerous type. The therapies lasted for a couple of years. Doug admits he had a fantastic healthcare team, a very supportive family, and a supportive Pickleball community. Little by little, he also managed to free himself from his alcohol and drug addiction. Pickleball also played a massive role in that journey.

Support is so important when recovering from cancer. Loneliness is a killer, Doug claims. And that's the beauty of Pickleball. It's not only a physical activity but there is a huge social element to it. "It means a lot to me that I can be competitive even at 60 years of age. I've just played in The National Senior Games tournament with my doubles partner. We won the Idaho state senior game title, and that gave us the ticket for The Nationals," he says.

Doug has a funny answer if you are wondering how his skin cancer affects his Pickleball game today. When he plays outside, he's dressed like a mummy. Doug's skin must be covered almost fully, sunscreen and lotions applied,

and, of course, don't forget a hat! But he is glad he found Pickleball. "I started to play seven years ago, and I adapted very quickly. I have a big racquetball background, so it was easy for me. I was playing it at a very high level during my 20s and 30s," Doug remembers. As the years passed, he realized that his body wouldn't be able to do it for much longer, especially at such a high level. Luckily, Doug was introduced to Pickleball and hasn't stopped since.

Doug lives with his wife in a four-season resort. What does the four-season resort mean, you may wonder? It means that there are activities for every season. In the winter, they go skiing, the fall is reserved for mountain biking and hiking, and in the spring, they also do some skiing. What do they do in the summer? It's all reserved for Pickleball! We have a small three-court indoor facility. I play probably once or twice a week during the winter. Skiing is my go-to sport during that period. But, in the spring and summer, we play a lot of Pickleball at the resort," he says.

As we mentioned, Doug is now a full-time motivational speaker. He started that career as a part-time job, but as all the problems occurred, he promised to commit to it after everything was sorted out. Those things made him take a serious look at his personal and professional life. So, of course, we want to know whether he brings any Pickleball into his motivational speeches. "I speak primarily about those three events: dad's death, substance abuse, and cancer. I usually don't bring Pickleball on to that level," he admits.

Doug overcame his addiction, but now he has another! Don't worry. It's a healthy one. "I've been guilty of one thing, and that is a Pickleball addiction. But, my wife recognizes that it's healthy. It's an addiction to a sport by which I have met some great people," he says.



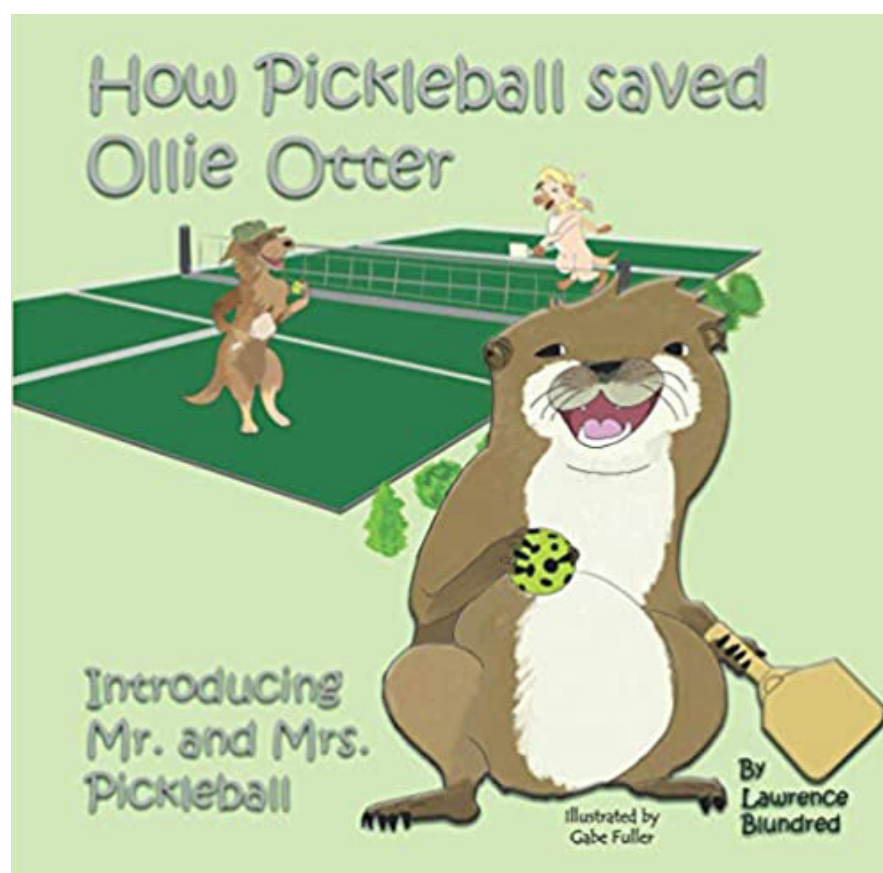
A SALUTE TO THE PICKLEBALL COMMUNITY

Everyone has their reasons why they play Pickleball. Most of them are either for recreational or medical purposes or to have fun. But, Larry Blundred has a unique one. His goal is to salute and honor his late wife by playing Pickleball and writing kids' stories about the game.

Like many people, Larry first heard about Pickleball when he heard the strange noise of the ball bouncing off the paddle. "I looked down on that court, and I remember I had no idea what were they doing. Later, I got home and started researching, and it seemed fun. So, one day I just wandered into the Cincinnati Pickleball club. I just walked in. I didn't even have a paddle," Blundred recalls. Larry quickly found out what kind of people are Pickleball players. The community was more than welcoming as they lent him a paddle. He got hooked on Pickleball in a blink of an eye. Unfortunately, at that time, his wife was getting sick. Sadly, she passed away because of a brain tumor.

However, the Pickleball community showed Larry tremendous emotional support. They were doing everything they could to help him, and his family heal. He was left confused as the group asked him for some of his wife's sweaters and blouses. It turned out that they made pillows out of her clothes, one for Larry and one for each of his three children. "I continued playing. I even did some competitions. I love the recreational part of it. It keeps me healthy and alert," Larry says.

Larry's writing career kicked off with two serious-minded books, as he says. One is called: *Staying resilient when life throws you more than a curveball*. Later, he decided to write a story for the kids. As Pickleball rapidly grew on him, our sport just had to be a part of it. That's why it's called:



How Pickleball Saved Ollie Otter. Writing a book for the kids is not as easy as it may seem. Larry had to overcome various difficulties, such as finding a good illustrator. The inspiration for the third book came in St. Petersburg when I was in a tournament. I saw a man playing Pickleball with a prosthetic leg. So, the driving force of the book is that Pickleball is for everyone, including those with some form of defect or disability," he claims.

Larry's story is another example of Pickleball being more than a sport. It's outgrowing its boundaries, proving how supportive and caring the Pickleball community is.



THE WORLD CUP OF PICKLEBALL: THE BAINBRIDGE CUP

As India, beautiful land of Diversified Wonders, prepares itself to host the Prestigious Bainbridge CUP, let us reminisce the history & Journey of THE BAINBRIDGE CUP.

The Bainbridge Cup :

Since its inception in 1965, Pickleball has grown phenomenally and is now being played in nearly 70 countries across 5 continents. In 2010 after the formation of International Pickleball Federation the game became more popular worldwide, and numerous nations across several continents are currently hosting official events in both national & international arena.

The world's growing interest in Pickleball warranted for an Global Competition Tournament. A tournament that would broaden horizons for a State, National, Pickleball player in any country, an opportunity to compete with the best players across the globe, a platform to observe & learn different technical abilities, tactics, systems and mind-sets.

This led to the foundation and in 2017 IFP initiated the first intercontinental tournament - THE BAINBRIDGE CUP, named after the "BAINBRIDGE ISLAND" - birthplace of Pickleball. This was also a way to pay tribute to the founding fathers - Joel Pritchard, Barney McCallum and Bill Bell of the game who hailed from the Bainbridge Island.

Let's Gear up for the upcoming World Cup - The BAINBRIDGE CUP 2022

Let's Conquer the cup !!!

Block the Dates



BAINBRIDGE CUP

30th Nov - 4th Dec 2022

Venue: City of Dreams



MUMBAI



INTERNATIONAL FEDERATION OF PICKLEBALL



MEET THE SOCIAL MEDIA & MARKETING DIRECTOR FOR THE IFP

Hey there,

I am Avantika Mathure, I am the social media & Marketing Director for International Federation of Pickleball. I have over 16 yrs of experience in Marketing & am a certified Digital marketer. I am currently deputed as a Deputy General Manager Marketing in a reputed pharmaceutical Company based in Mumbai, India. Marketing is just not a profession but it's my passion and with this I have been able to support a few brands make a mark in their respective segments

A total of 5 billion people around the world use the internet today – equivalent to 63 percent of the world's total population & there are 4.22 billion active social media users every day. In current times its very important to build and manage our presence online. As Marketing & social Media director of IFP my core responsibility would be to strengthen IFP's endeavour to perpetuate the game of pickleball at grassroots levels by leveraging social media & innovative marketing strategies. This objective can be achieved by consolidating the position of IFP as the "World governing Body of Pickleball", create a Single Platform for all Players so that their queries are addressed asap, increase the reach of IFP through social media platforms, provide support to all the countries for development of Pickleball at grassroot level.

On the personal front , I am happily married and a mother of a 10-month-old baby girl whose innocent love has made our lives even more beautiful. In my free time I love to cook, read and dancing is my hobby. I am a trained Bharatnatyam dancer and have been conferred the title of "Nritya-Shivali" for exemplary dance performance. I have danced in several dance festivals and have also been a part of Guinness world record for the largest gathering and dance performance "kaikotikali" a south indian folk dance in India.

Diversity and Simplicity makes the world beautiful. Today IFP stands as the World Governing Body is due to the inclusivity of all the diverse member countries which are striving to achieve a simple goal that is development of Pickleball at all levels and make it a part of the Olympic games. As I sign off this letter I urge each and every member to contribute more to achieve this goal soon.

Love

Avantika Mathure

MEMBER COUNTRIES SINCE JANUARY 2022

The International Federation of Pickleball welcomes our newest Member Countries and thanks them and all of our Member Countries for their ongoing support and efforts to grow Pickleball around the world.



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