

Pickleball Fire



Pro Sarah Ansboury

Photo by Chris Stratton

PROFILES

- Pickleball & Family by Leigh & Anna Leigh Waters
- Drew Evans the Pickleball Librarian
- Rif's Ride for the Pickleball Hall of Fame
- Mike Branon: Pickleball & the Art of Living

Industry

- World Games 2022: Road to the Olympics

INSTRUCTION

- Tips on How to Move with Sarah Ansboury
- Tournaments Preparation with Lauren Stratman
- Stacking with Meg Charity
- Drilling with Pickleball Coach Dominic Catalano
- Be a Great Doubles Partner With Vicki Foster
- Journaling to Improve Your Game

CONTENTS

04: PRO SARAH ANSBOURY: PICKLEBALL EDUCATOR

06: BETWEEN THE COVERS WITH THE PICKLEBALL LIBRARIAN

08: TOURNAMENT PREPARATION WITH LAUREN STRATMAN

10: PICKLEBALL AND FAMILY: MOTHER'S DAY EDITION

12: STACKING WITH PRO MEG CHARITY

14: PICKLEBALL AND THE ART OF LIVING

16: WORLD PICKLEBALL GAMES: MAKING PICKLEBALL HISTORY

18: U.S. OPEN: SCOTT GOLDEN INTERVIEWS THE WATERS

20: THE RIDE FOR THE PICKLEBALL HALL OF FAME

22: PICKLEBALL AND THE ORGAN TRANSPLANT GAMES

23: COMMUNITY OUTREACH THROUGH PICKLEBALL

24: DRILLING WITH COACH DOMINIC CATALANO

25: ARE YOU KEEPING A PERFORMANCE JOURNAL?

28: PICKLEBALL PADDLE TRAINING

29: HOW TO BE A GREAT DOUBLES PARTNER

FROM THE PUBLISHER

2020 was a tough year for everyone with the COVID-19 pandemic. However, Pickleball flourished as it is a pandemic friendly sport. In 2020 alone, the number of participants increased by 21% over 2019. The start of 2021 shows no signs of the Pickleball wave diminishing.

In fact, the U.S. Open Pickleball tournament is going on in East Naples, Florida as I write this. And, CBS Sports will be showing the finals of the professional events live for women's, men's, and mixed doubles. Yes, the coverage will be live! I plan to watch the finals live plus I have my DVR set just so I can have a replay available for the future. The championship court is sold out so there will be 500 people in attendance. Of course, the stadium court holds 2,000 people but with the COVID-19 pandemic, they have scaled back attendance.

On a personal note, I finally started playing Pickleball again after nine months. The lay off was due to the COVID-19 pandemic so I'm glad I'm vaccinated now. It's been great to get back out and play with my friends although I feel behind the curve as I definitely am rusty and others have an additional year of experience. The great thing is we are playing outdoors in some beautiful weather here in Connecticut. The competition level is high and there are many more really good players out on the courts.

I hope everyone else is enjoying Pickleball today too. I know I did plus tonight the finals are live!

Pickleball Fire

Published by
Pickleball Fire
www.pickleballfire.com

Owner/Writer
Lynn Cherry
lynn@pickleballfire.com

Guest Writers
Leigh & Anna Leigh Waters
Karen Mitchell
Fran Myer
Randy Kadish

Owner/Editor
Colleen Holden
colleen@pickleballfire.com

Pickleball Fire is distributed 6 times per year by Pickleball Fire. Material may not be reproduced without permission. Pickleball Fire accepts no liability for dissatisfaction arising from content in this publication. The opinions expressed, or advice given, are views of the individual writers or advertisers and do not necessarily represent the views or policies of Pickleball Fire.

Pro Sarah Ansboury: Pickleball Educator

Professional Pickleball Player, Sarah Ansboury, has won multiple national titles, but she says her greatest accomplishment in Pickleball is as an educator. Sarah started playing Pickleball in 2016 and soon after that she contacted the USA Pickleball Association (USAPA) to see if there was an education program. At the time, they did not have one, so Sarah started developing her own curriculum. This led to her involvement with the Professional Pickleball Registry (PPR) where she developed courses and instructional materials for instructors. She stated, "It was really important to me that there was like an education system where people can learn Pickleball, but also learn how to teach Pickleball the right way. So, I mean I love playing and that's always a really fun part, but I always tell people I'm a teacher first. So, for me it was really getting the education platform of PPR out there and working with USAPA with that."

Like many people in Pickleball, Sarah has a goal of bringing Pickleball to the Olympic Games. She says in order to do that, children need to start playing the game. The best way to get juniors involved is to get Pickleball in the schools. This will help it to grow both in the United States and internationally. Sports facilities are also helping the development of Pickleball as they add the

game to their list of offerings. Sarah has been instrumental in helping sports facilities to add Pickleball the right way. This means she helps them offer the correct programming, equipment, and facilities. After team on the professional Pickleball tour.

Sarah also now runs the Pickleball program at Palmetto Dunes in Hilton Head, South Carolina. Prior to her tenure at Palmetto Dunes, the facility had eight Pickleball courts. But six months after her arrival, the facility converted two clay tennis courts to eight more Pickleball courts for a total of 16. In 2019, they added an additional eight courts. Sarah said, "We have 24 lighted courts and we've changed the signage. It says Palmetto Dunes, Pickleball, and Tennis. So essentially half of the facility is tennis and half is Pickleball... We run a round robin every day of the week and we have filled it to capacity."

Pickleball players can go to Palmetto Dunes for clinics, round robins, and camps plus the facility holds tournaments. And Sarah and her staff have even more plans for the future. Still, it's already become a destination where people want to go to play and learn more about Pickleball. Clearly the facility has Sarah's stamp on it as the Pickleball educator she is.





Sarah's Surprising Tips on How to Move

It's always amazing to watch the professional players as they seem to have so much time to hit the ball. They are not rushing and play in control. Professional player, Sarah Ansboury, says this skill has everything to do with balance and being able to move forward. She stated, "One of the most important things for Pickleball movement is a forward motion. And when you are more balanced, you can turn and go forward. Whereas if you are chasing the ball or shuffling side to side or moving backwards and all those types of things, it's not only an uncomfortable position to be in but you're also making reactions instead of making choices. If I'm balanced, I can make the choice to move forward. I can make the choice to put my paddle in front of me. Whereas if I'm not balanced, maybe I don't know where my paddle is. Maybe I don't know exactly where the ball is. But basically, if you are not balanced, you can't make choices. You are making reactions and reactions are a very stressful place to be on the Pickleball court."

The goal with your movement is to be stable and move in a forward direction so you can do the most with every shot. One way to practice moving forward is to walk rather than run on the court. Yes, you read that correctly. Sarah says if you are playing a recreational game, don't run on the Pickleball court, not even from the service line to the kitchen line. The problem is if you sprint, you are going to be out of control. If you walk, you have the choice to walk faster or slow

down if you need to while still being in control. Try to develop rhythmic motion whenever you are on the court while giving yourself time to breathe and get your hips and chest underneath you.

The idea is when you are moving slower, it's easier to accelerate forward and attack or change directions. It's also easier on your body. Small, quick decelerated steps like shuffling are bad for your knees and hips. This movement can also lead to tripping or falling. When you are in constant motion, it's easier on your joints to accelerate. Sarah expanded on the idea of moving slower, "If I go too fast, then I stop, then I usually go backwards or sideways before I go forwards again. So, it's tough. It's interesting because a lot of times in sports, we think we have got to go really fast, or we have got to get really low. And, in Pickleball, it's a lot about the ability to accelerate. And essentially that kind of walking gives you a leg up on acceleration from your lower body while keeping your paddle in front of you. Whereas if you run too fast, the tendency is people get their paddle jammed in at their hips or their body, or even behind them as they're charging the net."

So, if you want to play more like the professional Pickleball players, be sure to stay balanced and in control. If you need to, slow things down so you are moving forward and stay away from needing to decelerate because you are going too fast.

Between the Covers With Pickleball Librarian Drew Evans



Drew Evans has both a Master's degree in library science and law degree. And before learning to play Pickleball, he was actually a law librarian at the Washburn University School of Law. So naturally, once Drew found Pickleball he became a Pickleball Librarian, too.

Drew said, "I enjoyed Pickleball, and I wanted to learn more. I wanted to get good at it. So, I picked up a book called Smart Pickleball, the Pickleball Guru's Guide by Prem Carnot. And before I bought that book, I was reading reviews on it. And all I could find were like a sentence here, word here, sentence there. There weren't any in-depth reviews. As a librarian, I used to write reviews for various state and national library publications. Also, as a martial artist, I used to review products for Dragons Way Martial Arts. So, I knew I had something to offer in this field. I knew I could write a very good review. And I wrote my first review and I got so many positive comments from a lot of folks."

Both Prem and well-known instructor, Mark Renneson, gave Drews positive feedback and Mark even suggested Drew start doing video reviews. So, now the Pickleball Librarian has created so many videos he has lost count, but there are hundreds (or perhaps more) posted on both YouTube and Facebook. The videos not only include reviews of Pickleball paddles, but also other gear. One example of this is a product which is a clip that attaches your shoes to your Pickleball bag.

Of course, the Pickleball Librarian also reviews books and one of his favorites is History of Pickleball: More Than 50 Years of Fun. It is written by Jennifer Lucore and Beverly Youngren. According to Drew, "It's more than just a book. It's a real detailed research book where they went in there and they interviewed folks. They found newspaper clippings. I mean the research in this book is incredible. The last few pages, there's all these footnotes of where they went. So, when I talk to folks about research and doing history, I sometimes actually show them this book. I was like, check this book out. This is when I saw the librarian in me and the Pickleball love in me just meet."

Drew said this about his team,

"We love Pickleball, and we love spreading Pickleball information."

While Drew may be the head of reference for the Pickleball library, he gets lots of help from others on the team. Colleen Mendosa is head of marketing and while you will see her in some videos, she does a lot of behind-the-scenes work. Drew also mentioned Shelly Wilson, who does outreach, meeting lots of people at a recent tournament in Atlanta. Then there is Drew's son, Walter, who definitely gives Drew feedback on the videos before being released to the public. Drew also has a number of Pickleball librarians in training so you can see their videos, too.

Drew said "We use the term access. We create access. We built the information to go elsewhere. We share it. I mean, Matt Mayfield of Wichita recently said he felt that Pickleball was like an underground movement and folks like us, the Pickleball librarian team, we helped share that information with other folks. And now it's not so underground."

Drew is definitely helping to popularize the sport of Pickleball, and this includes his bookmobile. He travels around to different Pickleball venues in his hybrid SUV, carrying lots of paddles which other players can try. At times, the Pickleball librarians also go to places at the request of others. They often do commentary at Pickleball tournaments and it's not always on the professional or 5.0 matches. Drew said, "A lot of times when you look for Pickleball, you're seeing the high-level matches. But we tried to cover Pickleball for all types of ages, genders, and skill levels."

Tournament Preparation with Pro Lauren Stratman



Professional Pickleball player Lauren Stratman wasn't one of those people who found themselves immediately hooked on the sport. In fact, it wasn't until she played in her first tournament that she knew the sport of Pickleball was for her. Lauren said, "I've always enjoyed the competitive side of tennis. So, I grew up playing tennis and I always loved going to tournaments. I was never really big into practice, but I would always get so excited about going to travel and going to a new place and staying in a hotel as a kid. So, I felt like when I went to this Pickleball tournament, it just brought all those feelings back of competing, like as a kid again. So, I don't know, it was just kind of a new outlet for me, and I had already stopped competing in tennis tournaments. So, I think it just brought all of those feelings back."

Lauren competed in tennis tournaments every weekend from the time she was seven years old. She played tennis in college and competed in some of the lower-level professional tournaments. According to Lauren, she did okay in some of the doubles events, but she knew she wasn't going to be a top professional tennis player, so She let that dream go. Now she is

a professional Pickleball player near the top of the sport and she has plans to be one of the top players.

One of the things that helps Lauren compete at the highest level is something her Dad taught her in the fifth grade. Proper preparation prevents poor performance is a mantra always in the back of her mind. Lauren described what it means to her, "I always needed to be prepared or properly prepared. And so, what that entails is just making sure you're doing it. You're on the right training regimen that you are training the right way, training properly, not showing up to a tournament without obviously your bag, your equipment, your shoes, having all your travel preparations all laid out. So, I've been very meticulous about how I travel and how I'm getting ready and preparing."

The idea of preparation is not just the physical component but mental preparation as well. Lauren said a few days before a tournament, she visualizes how she wants to play and imagines the results she wants to have. When she was young, her Dad would take her through guided imaginary for 15 or 20 minutes right before she walked on the court. He

would take Lauren through an entire match, starting with shaking hands with her opponent and then through all the points and scenarios.

Nowadays, Lauren spends 15 to 20 minutes the morning of a tournament event visualizing the match. She said, "I do the same thing just with myself where I just will go through the match. If I make mistakes, I shake them off quickly, no negative reactions. I envision how I'm feeling when I'm playing. So, I literally just want to go through like the actual feelings of how I'm striking the ball as it strikes clean. Am I making the right shot selections? If somebody cheats me out, I'm imagining how I mentally just am moving past it. I'm visualizing myself on the medal stand with my partner, who else is on the medal stand? So, stuff like that where I just try to get as specific as I possibly can so that I'm really ready for everything that could possibly happen out there."

After all the years Lauren spent as a child training her mind, the concepts translate directly to Pickleball. And it's why she will become a top tournament player in the sport if she isn't already.



TEAM WATERS

#RIPITPICKLEBALL



www.Paddletek.com

fayeandflorie.com CODE: RIPIT15

[Jewelry x studiomargaret.com](http://Jewelryxstudiomargaret.com)

[Socks x lassogear.com](http://Socksxlassogear.com) CODE: RIPIT

[Shoes x Babolat.com](http://ShoexBabolat.com)

Pickleball and Family: Mother's Day Edition

by Leigh & Anna Leigh Waters

A Mother's Perspective:

For me and Anna Leigh, Pickleball started out as a family activity. I think probably a high percentage of Pickleball players played their first game with someone in their family. Maybe it was a parent, grandparent, child, brother or sister. For us, our first game of Pickleball was with my father, Neil, and Anna Leigh's grandfather, aka NeilPop. We, along with my mother, Ann, had flown up to Pennsylvania to stay with my dad as Hurricane Irma pummeled the east coast of Florida. My husband held down the fort with no electric at home with our bullmastiff, Maggie. Little did we know the game of Pickleball was about to change our lives.

My dad had been playing Pickleball for about a year at that point, and since Anna Leigh and I were both tennis players, he thought we'd enjoy learning how to play. For two straight weeks we did nothing but play Pickleball! Needless to say, we picked up the sport pretty quickly, and as soon as we returned to Florida, we found our local pickleball club in Delray Beach and continued to play, learn, and improve. This began the journey of Team Waters in the making.

Anna Leigh was young. She was only 10 going on 11 when we played in our first tournament in Delray Beach. She started at 3.0 but mid-tournament was bumped up to 3.5 because she was playing so well. I was playing 4.5 mixed and 5.0 women's, so we were not yet playing together. We were, however, already a team. I can still remember drilling together before the tournament. You can still find a video floating around Facebook of Anna Leigh (AL) doing a quick volley drill to get ready for her big day. At that point, I was still Mom, coach and practice partner. We had no idea that AL would eventually become my partner: Women's PRO partner!

It didn't take long for AL to work her way through the ranks. Our first tournament win against Simone Jardim and Corrine Carr came earlier than expected at the Florida Grand Slam. AL had just turned 12. I knew then that she was going to be a force to be reckoned with. I couldn't wrap my brain around the fact that she was so composed and determined against a team that had literally won everything for years. I was so proud and so excited because I knew that we could compete as a mother/daughter team on the professional Pickleball tour.

We went on to medal in many pro events, and were crowned victors at two Majors: Tournament of Champions (TOC) and USAPA Margaritaville Nationals 2019. I could write pages and pages of our experiences, our travels, our epic matches, but instead I will simply say that the memories we have made together as mother/daughter through Pickleball are those that I will never forget. Our journey together through Pickleball has made us stronger, closer, and we both hold such respect for one another. We have learned how to be friends, partners, and parent/child. We know how to take constructive criticism from each other without getting angry. AL is the coach sometimes. I am the student. Through Pickleball we have strengthened our bond. And for that, I am eternally grateful.

From a Child's Perspective:

I can honestly say that if you told me five years ago that I would be playing and winning professional Pickleball tournaments with my mom I would've said that's crazy. Now, I can't imagine not competing with my mom. Having a partner is one thing, but having a partner on and off the court is another. Due to this unique "partnership" that we share, we have been with each other through not only the wins and losses, but also through the ups and downs of life. That is pretty special to me. Some people say to me, "You're a teenager, you're supposed to hate your mother!" I always respond to this by saying, "For me it's the total opposite, my mom is my best friend!"

One of my favorite things about Pickleball is the traveling. I get to visit so many states, cities, and towns that I probably wouldn't have gotten to visit otherwise. The best thing about this is that I get to experience it all with my mom! We have bonded and made countless memories together on these trips. Sometimes we even go to tournaments early just to explore the city and its attractions. I remember one trip we left two weeks early to go to a tournament in California. I had never been to California before and I had the best time in Napa, Monterey, and Pebble Beach. This was definitely a trip I will never forget because my grandmother, GaGa travelled with us. Talk about creating special family memories! When I am older I will be able to look back at this chapter in my life and remember what an amazing chapter it was. And I have Pickleball to thank for that.

Stacking With Pro Meg Charity



Stacking is an advanced doubles strategy you don't see often in recreational Pickleball play; however, almost every professional player does it and even lower-level tournament players can benefit from the strategy. Most players have a favorite side of the court they like to play on to take advantage of their stronger side whether it is forehand or backhand. As an example, a player who favors their forehand and is right-handed prefers to play on the left side of the court so they can take the forehand balls coming down the middle. So, stacking allows players to take advantage of their strengths and hide their weaknesses.

So, the question is how does stacking work? Normally, players stay on the same side they serve on. So, if you are serving from the right side, you stay on the right side during the rally while your partner stays on the left. With stacking, however, both you and your partner start on the right side. Then after serving the ball, the server moves left and plays on that side of the court while their partner stays on the right. Stacking can also be used on the serve return. However, it requires one player to do a lot more running to get to the far side of the court. The same idea holds true in that both players start on the same side of the court with the non-returner needing to move to the other side of the court after the return.

When playing mixed doubles, professional teams almost always have the male player cover the left side of the court if both players are right-handed. Professional player Meg Charity, however, likes to play on the left side so she and her partner reverse stack. Meg commented on the strategy she and her mixed doubles partner use, "I really love this position because it puts me in front of the female player. So, I found myself in a vulnerable position when I was across from the male players because they were able to speed up that ball down the line which caught me out of position. And the guy hits that ball so hard. I was unable to really defend that shot. So, when you get the resistance, I was in front of the girl player. And when she attacks the ball down the line, I was ready because one, it was my backhand, which is the strongest shot, and two, just because it's the girl and I'm used to seeing the speed from the female player."

When playing women's doubles, Meg still prefers to play the left-hand side of the court; however, she has been working on playing the right-hand side also, so Meg and her partner can mix things up, if necessary. Still, whether Meg is on the right or left, she and her doubles partner are either stacking or reverse stacking. Another team which stacks and trades sides during a game are the mother-daughter team of Leigh and 14-year-old Anna Leigh Waters. In watching the semi-finals of the APP Tour's Delray Beach tournament, the Waters used this strategy effectively when they needed a change of pace against Simone Jardim and Catherine Parenteau.

Meg elaborated on the idea of stacking and switching from the normal side of the court you play. She said, "I think it's a fun skill to learn. So, it gives you the most tools in the toolbox and it just gives you a lot of options. Honestly, when things are going wrong or when you're falling behind or you want to shake things up. I think it's a great skill to have. So, I think you can stack it at any level, honestly, even just to practice it and see sort of what that does for your game."



Pickleball and the Art of Living: The Power of Positive Dinking

You might consider Mike Branon to be unlucky as he was stuck on a cruise ship for 20 plus days at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic when no countries would let the passengers get off the ship. At the time, however, he made a crucial decision. Mike said, "I had a decision to make after I worked out at about 8:00a.m. I was done with that and I had to either go to happy hour immediately or start doing something constructive and liver saving. And so, I decided I'd better start writing. So, I just started to write all the things I'd been thinking about, but have been too busy to put on paper."

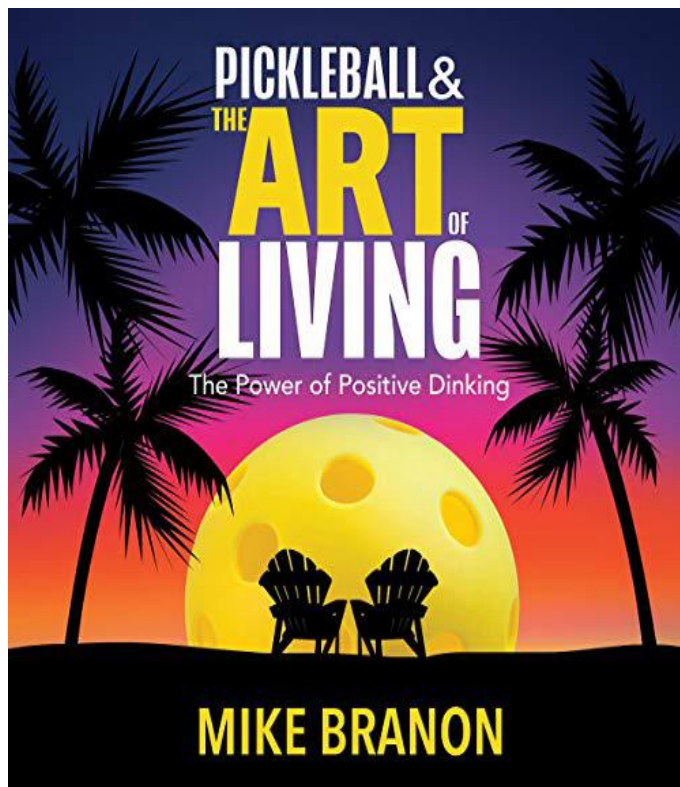
As it turned out, the book he wrote wasn't about Pickleball. It had just one paragraph on the sport to make a point. But, when Mike was finally able to get off the cruise ship, he sent the draft to some friends in the book industry. They both gave him the same advice. His friends said the writing and the humor was great, but in today's publishing world no one will read your book unless you're famous. But what about Pickleball? The result of the feedback was Mike writing *Pickleball & the Art of Living: The Power of Positive Dinking*, a book which is a metaphor for life. It combines humor, advice on how to live fully, and of course guidance on how to play Pickleball.

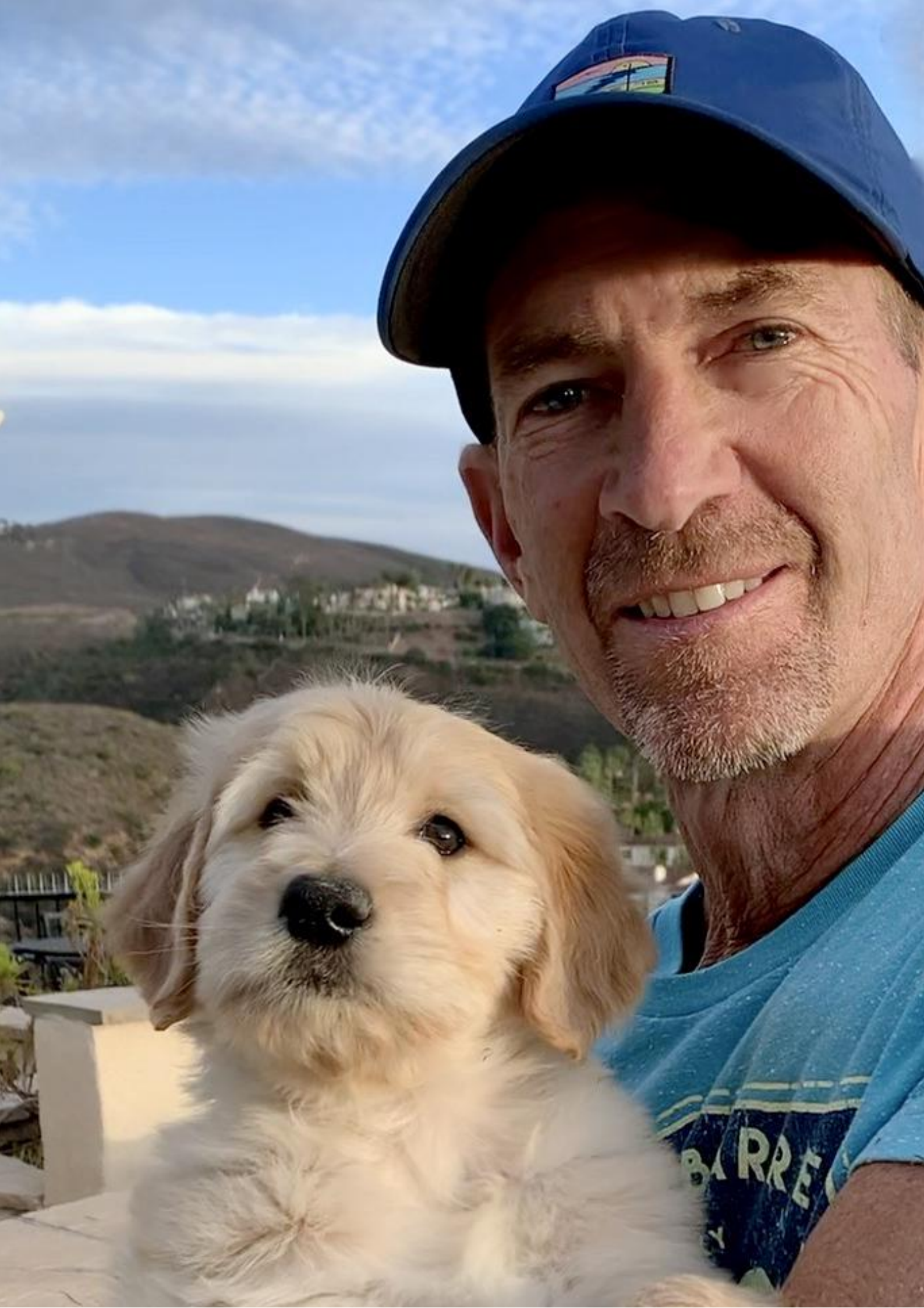
Mike wasn't sure whether the title of the book should be *Pickleball and the Art of Living* or the *Art of Living and Pickleball*. He said the former won out as it sounded better. Mike said, "So when I wrote the book, I originally had the Pickleball section altogether up near the front where I write about some of the perspectives of the different pros and some stuff that's much more Pickleball centric. But I finally figured out I'm going to put all my instructional stuff at the very end of the book as a postscript. And I try to be humorous about it and tell all the Pickleball players, 'You need to be patient and set up your points. So, you hit the right shot at the right time.' So, I'm going to ask you to be patient right now and wait for my instructional stuff to come at the end of the book."

One of the Pickleball concepts Mike describes in the book is how you learn the game. He says you go through different sequences when you learn anything new. The first is unconscious incompetence where you don't know what to do and you don't know how to do it. A later stage is conscious competence where you know what to do, but you're having to think about everything as you

do it. For example, you need to think about whether to place your feet and where the paddle should go. The final stage is unconscious competence where you are doing the right thing and you don't need to think about. Mike said, "It's just happening. It's unfolding without conscious thought. And that is the fun place to be. You see it in great sports stars when a basketball player gets hot and he's just throwing in three pointers from 35 feet out without a second thought. And you'll see it in great Olympic athletes when they're at their best. And when the commentators ask them, 'Well what were you thinking then?' Most of them will say, 'I wasn't thinking anything. I was just doing what I know how to do.' And it's a wonderful place to be."

And yes, unconscious competence is a great place to be and certainly better than being stuck on a cruise ship like Mike was for 20 plus days. Still, he made the most of his time and he even has plans for writing a second book on Pickleball for seniors albeit on land.





It seems that every month there is a posting on the Pickleball Forum about pickleball getting into the Olympics. Generally, the response is that the prospect of our sport getting into the Olympics is many years off.

That response is correct because it will take pickleball being played in at least 75 countries and for those same countries to have a recognized federation governing the sport which in turn is a member of the world governing body for pickleball.

The world governing body for pickleball needs to be a member of the Global Association of International Sports Federations (GAISF) and needs to be constitutionally set up to meet their strict criteria. The World Pickleball Federation is already constitutionally set up to meet their criteria but needs to be in existence for 5 years before we can apply.

That doesn't mean that we can't prepare for when we are eligible. So, we are creating the World Pickleball Games, the first true team competition for pickleball. Each country that enters will send a team of 4-6 men and 4-6 women to compete on behalf of their country. Each country will gain experience of the selection process and refine it over time until we are accepted in bigger events like the Commonwealth Games or Olympic Games. Competing at major events is good for the national pride of the sport in their respective country. The athletes representing their country have a great responsibility on their shoulders and all eyes will be on them as they compete the best they can, for their country, for their team and for their own pride.

You might be asking yourself, what is the point? The USA will win the World Pickleball Games, the game was invented in the USA and all the best players play in the US. That is partly true. The game was invented in the USA and a lot of the best players play in the USA but not all the best players are from the USA. Simone Jardim is from Brazil, Catherine Parenteau is from Canada, Jocelyn Devilliers is from France, Dekel Bar from Israel, so you get my point. Also, who doesn't love an underdog story. David and Goliath. In this case, up to 30 David's against one Goliath. Each of the competing countries have 12 months to select their potential team and to get them to train intensively for the Games.

There are many stories of underdogs competing successfully in competitions. In 2016, the Icelandic football (Soccer to Americans) team qualified for the Euros. Their success through the group stages captured the whole nation, turning the competition into a nationwide fairy tale when they got through to the Quarter Finals by knocking out the England team. It was reported that the success of the Icelandic football team brought the people together in joy and pride even though they were knocked out in the Quarter Finals by France who got through to the finals before losing to Portugal. Losing to the finalists is seen as success!

Talking of the Euros, in 2004 the Greece team qualified for the first time in 24 years. Nobody expected much of the team, but they made it to the Quarter Finals to play against France (who won the Euros in 2000). They won that match 1-0. From there the Greece team rode the wave of that upset to get to the Finals and beat Portugal, the host nation. Sometimes the best moments happen when no one is expecting them!

The fact that no-one would expect the USA to lose the World Pickleball Games will mean that all the other teams will be doing their best to represent their country and come second. And if they so happen to meet the USA in the finals, who knows there could just be an upset or two along the way!

World Pickleball Games: Making History

By Karen Mitchell, Director



World Pickleball

Pickleball Opening Pickleball

World Pickleball Federation

Story



World Pickleball Federation

Where and when are the Games taking place?

The Group Stages will take place on 4th and 5th of May 2022. The Quarter Finals on the 6th of May and the Semi Finals and Finals on the 7th of May. The Event will take place at the Austin Pickle Ranch in Texas. This is a new venue currently constructing 32 outdoor courts. It will also be the site of the Pickleball Hall of Fame museum.

What is the format of the Games?

Countries will be grouped with up to four other countries to compete against each other in the group stages. Each fixture will comprise: two men's doubles, two women's doubles, one mixed doubles and one men's singles and one women's singles matches. Matches are best of three games. The top teams from each group will go through to the knockout stages.

Who selects the country teams?

The National Governing Body for the sport in each of the respective countries unless the governing body chooses not to. For instance, we anticipate that USA Pickleball will not enter a team, so we have appointed Jennifer Lucore to lead a USA Team Selection Committee. The Tournament of Champions will be a qualifying tournament for the Selection Committee to select players for the USA team.

How many teams are you expecting?

We have had interest expressed by 17 countries so far, but we are hoping that there may be up to 30 countries participating.

Who is organizing the Games?

We have a core Committee made up of experienced Tournament Directors: John Gullo, the founder of Tournament of Champions (TOC), Kristy Welford (TOC), Winnie Montgomery (The US National Indoor Championships and other tournaments), Karen Mitchell (English OPEN) plus Seymour Rifkind President of WPF, Founder of IPTPA and Pickleball Hall of Fame. We will also be recruiting other experienced organizers to be on sub-committees over the coming months.

What is the weather like in Austin in early May?

The temperature is between 63-87 Fahrenheit (17-30 Celsius) in May. We didn't want the Games to be any later than the first week of May because the weather can get very hot and humid later in the month. Rainfall is possible but we think we are early enough to miss the 'rainy season'. The venue does have some covered courts which should minimize any impact to our schedule.

Will we be able to come and watch the Games?

Yes, we plan to offer tickets to our Opening Ceremony and to both the Group Stages and Knockout stages. We also plan to livestream the Games for those that cannot travel to Austin. We also plan some activities immediately prior to the Games. There will be a Pickleball Trade Show, WPF Member Country Meeting, Seminars, and a Media Day.

If you live in the Austin area and would like to volunteer to help at the event, please email info@worldpickleballfederation.org. If you want to enter a country team visit worldpickleballfederation.org/world-pickleball-games-team-sign-up.

Scott Golden Interviews Leigh & Anna Leigh Waters After the U.S. Open in April of 2021



Scott Golden interviewed mother-daughter duo Leigh and Anna Leigh Waters shortly after the 2021 U.S. Open. The Waters earned the bronze medal in women's professional doubles during the tournament. In the interview, Scott asks them about their experience playing against and with each other.

Scott: Since we're coming off of the 20-21 U.S. Open Pickleball Championship, we're going to start with two good questions from that. This one is personally my favorite and that question is what was it like playing against each other in the doubles pro event on Sunday?

Anna Leigh: It wasn't the first time we played each other, but that doesn't make it normal. It's still the weirdest experience you could imagine. If you think it's weird, you can multiply that by 10. Even though you want to win and you don't want to let your partner down, you also want them to do well and win. So it's just like a weird dynamic going on there.

Leigh: I personally hate it. It makes me physically ill when I see that I have to play her in a draw. She's a really good mixed player so it's scary from that perspective, but it's also the mother daughter dynamic. It's like Anna Leigh said. I want her to win and do really well. But I'm playing with Tyson McGuffin. He wants to win so I've got to suck it up and try to beat my daughter.

Scott: I actually streamed that match live on Sunday. And I think that was the most nervous that I was. I was nervous for you guys, watching you battle it out on the court. After the game ended, for anybody that didn't get to see it, mother Waters won that one 15-12. There was a special embrace that I saw after the match ended. Can you guys elaborate on that?

Anna Leigh: There were a lot of emotions going on after that match.

Leigh: So like I said, we played before and I think we were learning from our mistakes a little bit. Like the first couple times we played, it was very competitive and we both wanted to win and nobody wanted to lose to the other.

Anna Leigh: And we had played each other in singles before too.

Leigh: We would have these moments after the match was over. One goes here. One goes there and it's awkward. But I think we've grown past that and we understand that somebody's got to win and somebody's got to lose.

Anna Leigh: It's kind of like the Serena Venus kind of thing going on. Weird.

Leigh: And so I think we understand that at the end of the match. Most importantly we're mother daughter. And so afterwards I could tell that Anna Leigh was upset as I would have been had I lost. And I knew that if I could just grab her and get a hold of her and hug her and just say a few things in her ear that it would help the situation.

Scott: Now tell everybody what it was like to compete together on center court. You guys played for the bronze. It was kind of a unique situation because...you actually started, but didn't get to finish. And then you had to finish the next morning. So, talk us through that and what that experience was.

Anna Leigh: It was our first us open playing together and it was our first time playing together on the stadium court at the U S Open. So that was really cool to get to play together in that stadium. But we were winning. We won the first game in the bronze match and we were up in the second 8-3 and then it started to rain. And we were like, come on quick, let's win this and get some points together because we had a lot of momentum going at that moment. And then it just started pouring.

Leigh: And we were like, what is going on? So we begged. We were like, can we just wait it out to see if the rain will stop and the courts will dry out? They agreed. And we all sat there for 20 or 30 minutes. And it was apparent that the rain was not going to stop. We had to come back at eight o'clock the next morning at 8-3 in the second game. And the whole night, neither one of us slept because you worry about those momentum swings. You see it all the time.

As it turns out, Leigh and Anna Leigh went onto win the bronze medal despite having to come back the next day and play early in the morning. The final score of the match was 11-3, 11-5.



Putting Mind and Body to the Test for the Pickleball Hall of Fame

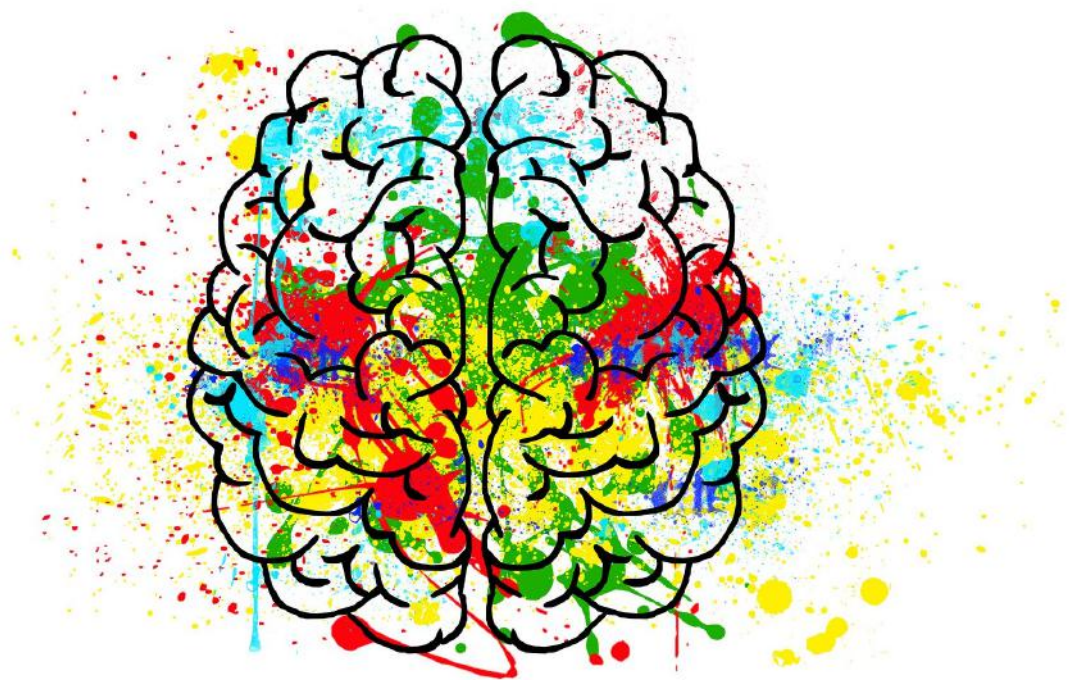
By Fran Myer

It is rare to find a leader who is willing to put all of his heart and effort on the line for the benefit of his organization. That is what the Pickleball Hall of Fame (PHOF) has in its founder and president, 70-year-old Seymour "Rif" Rifkind. Shortly after announcing that a brick-and-mortar Pickleball Hall of Fame and museum was being built, Rif was faced with the need for funds to design and furnish the interior of this facility. The completion is due later this year at the Pickle Ranch, a private Pickleball club in Austin, Texas. He decided that a great idea would be to ride his bike 3,000 miles across the U.S. in 44 days to raise money for the cause. His wife Holly thought he was crazy but agreed to be his partner in this huge endeavor. She would be his support team, following him every mile of the way in their RV.

The ride began on February 28 after Rif dipped his rear tire in the Pacific Ocean in San Diego, CA. During the first few weeks, he dealt with cold temperatures in the mornings, a dust storm and flat tire, but overall, he felt strong and energetic. He took time to post pictures of

sights and historic buildings in the old mining town of Bisbee, AZ. He took pictures of roadside artwork, cows and javelina as he crossed from Arizona into Texas. He posted pictures of beautiful murals from Alpine, TX. Then, as he neared the halfway point, things got hard. On day 19, he had a grueling 120-mile ride from Sanderson to Del Rio. That challenging day was followed by two days of over 80 miles each that were filled with demanding hill climbs that crippled his knees. Arriving in Ingram after the second day of hills, he had to ice his swollen knees through the night, limiting the amount of much needed sleep. That was his most difficult time. He had doubts about whether he could get on his bike the next morning and wondered if this was as far as he could go. But the next morning, Rif got on his bike, and after 15 minutes of riding, the pain subsided, and he was on his way. It was supposed to be a shorter ride that day, but Rif's phone went dead, and he got lost, adding an extra 10 miles to his trip. Hilary Marold (PHOF 2020 inductee) was in Fredericksburg that afternoon to greet Rif and Holly and take them out to dinner. That really lifted Rif's spirits and





with an extra night to rest, he was refreshed and ready for the second half of his epic journey.

Texas still had more challenges for Rif, however. There were several terrifying dog chases as Rif made his way from Texas to Louisiana. In one incident, a dog actually bit Rif's shoe as he pedaled furiously to get away. During his stop in Ville Platte, LA, Sharon Richard drove up from Rayne to greet Rif and show a little Pickleball support from Louisiana. The next day, the last part of Rif's ride turned from 70 degrees to 50 degrees in an instant, followed by torrential rains which left Rif completely soaked by the end of the day. Once again, he was greeted by well-wishers. Yvonne and Jim Hackenberg (PHOF 2020 inductee) made a point of being in St. Francisville to cheer on the Rifkinds and to join them for some social time and a good meal.

By now, Rif was less than two weeks from reaching his goal. His body was totally stressed and beat up. Mentally he was spent. Two days later, as he was leaving Bogalusa, LA with Holly following him, she got into an accident in the RV. She was unharmed, but the RV was damaged and had to be towed. Rif continued his ride in order to stay with a support vehicle that was with a separate group making this same journey. This left Holly to arrange for the RV's repairs, find a rental and transfer all the supplies into that vehicle before proceeding to Wiggins, MS where she finally met up with a very exhausted and worried Rif at the end of the day.

Early the next morning before getting on his bike, Rif sent out a message to his supporters. "No matter what challenges Holly & I are faced with, we're going to complete Rif's Ride for Pickleball." Those who know Rif's gymnastics history know the story of Rif writing in the wet cement at age 16 that in two years, "I will be the 1969 State All-Around Champion and State Parallel Champion." It was the cement that was used to anchor the parallel bars into the ground that he built in his backyard, and that a lot of teammates would come and practice on. His statement was there for all to see and it kept him working hard to reach his goal, which he

achieved just as he said. Now with Rif's new proclamation, there would be little doubt that he would reach his destination. The remaining days were filled with more dog chases, more rain, and a near disastrous accident when a car came too close to Rif, forcing him to "lay his bike down" to avoid getting hit. With his scrapes cleaned up and bandaged, Rif continued on his way. He did say "No matter what..."

After the RV accident, Rif was without his home on wheels, so he and Holly stayed in the same hotels as the group they had followed throughout this cross-country journey. The group was very supportive and kind to them. On the last day, April 12, the group invited Rif to join them, even giving him one of the group's matching shirts to wear. Just before noon, Rif and the other cyclists rode to the finish through a crowd of cheering supporters at the St. John's County Pier at St. Augustine Beach in Florida. Rif dipped the front wheel of his bike in the Atlantic Ocean followed by a victory handstand on the beach. Exhilarated and feeling great to have completed this epic journey, Rif expressed appreciation for all the support and donations. In an interview with Byron Fresco, Rif was asked about that very challenging day when he wasn't sure if he could continue, yet he got on his bike anyway. Rif replied, "...there's a lesson learned there, just get out and try. You'd be amazed at what might happen." No doubt, a lot of people are amazed by what Rif has accomplished.

[Those who are interested in donating to the Pickleball Hall of Fame Museum can go to this link: Pickleballhalloffame.com](https://Pickleballhalloffame.com)

Pickleball and the Organ Transplant Games

Michele Dabal had acute liver failure and was given a 50% chance to live. She not only survived but started participating in the Transplant Games in numerous sports. The United States Transplant Games normally occur every two years on the even year and raise awareness for organ donation. The competition on the odd years is international and is similar to the Olympic, but for transplant recipients. When Pickleball was added to the U.S. games in 2018, Michele decided to learn the sport. Now she teaches Pickleball to everyone on Team Liberty which is the transplant team she plays on with others from New Jersey, and parts of New York and Connecticut.

Michele said, "Some that receive heart transplants are people that were so sick their entire life that they were never allowed to exercise. So, they are told you can't exercise. Your heart can't take it. Now, they get this transplant, and they can come do an exercise like Pickleball because they can learn slowly. They have to learn how to move their body, but they can do it without too much effort in the beginning, and then they can progress and get better and better."

Michele wasn't one of the transplant recipients who was sick for an extended period of time. In fact, she didn't even know she was sick. She had just opened her own business and was working long hours, so she wasn't surprised she felt tired. But, once she got to the point where she felt significantly more tired, Michele went to the



doctor. The physician said she needed to take a month off, but this was not practical with the new business and two small children at home. So, she agreed to do a blood test every two weeks. Shortly after the second test, the doctor called saying she needed to be admitted to the hospital. The hospital ran many tests and even had to transfer Michele to another hospital for more extensive testing. Michele said, "I got transferred on a Saturday and on Sunday morning when they came to check on me, they found me unconscious. I had acute liver failure. I shocked the doctors. They didn't expect that to happen. They really did think they were going to bring me back after a couple of tests. And when you have acute liver failure you only get about 24 maybe 48 hours, if you're super lucky, to live. So, they put me in an induced coma, and they called my family, and they kindly told my husband that I had a 50-50 chance of survival."

Michele received the liver transplant and had a tough road to recovery. She wishes she would have known

about Pickleball earlier because the road back from an organ transplant is extremely difficult. Despite being active before the transplant, Michele had to relearn how to walk. She found just getting from the kitchen table to the couch was such an effort. Michele said, "Thinking back on it, I was super frustrated when the doctor said you can't do anything right now. You're going to go home and the most strenuous thing you're going to do is probably eating. And then after you get through that, you can maybe wipe the table. And I was just floored. Like how could that be? And then I realized when I tried to walk how difficult that was. So then when I got to walking, I was like all right, now I'm bored out of my mind. I can walk. What else can I do? If I would've learned Pickleball earlier on, I think I would've probably found it much more effective mentally and physically than walking."

The great thing is Michele found Pickleball and she now teaches the game to everyone possible including organ transplant recipients.

Community Outreach Through Pickleball

Professional Pickleball player, Taylor Taylor, wasn't sure if Pickleball was real when she first heard the name of the sport. In fact, she booked a trip to watch the U.S. Open Pickleball Championship in Naples before she played in her first tournament. Taylor remembered the experience, "I'll never forget walking into that facility where I had played tennis in the past and there not being a single tennis court there anymore. And you know, 50, 30, or however many Pickleball courts and 1,400 people. Crazy. And then I came home, and I haven't looked back. I was hooked weird name or not, maybe I'm just a weird name person, but I think Pickleball is the greatest thing that's ever happened to me."

Two years ago, after Taylor found Pickleball, she was thinking about what she wanted to do with the "second half" of her life. She felt at the time there was something bigger than what she was doing. During one of Taylor's brainstorming sessions, she remembered her graduate school thesis for clinical social work. It was titled *The Ground Strokes of Life* and it was about a tennis program that not only taught tennis but valuable life lessons. Taylor said, "I started thinking about whether I would do that for tennis. It wasn't as exciting to me as thinking about maybe I could apply it to Pickleball and Pickleball is so easy to facilitate. It's relatively inexpensive. Even now it's for everyone. People with no racket sport experience can do it. People with no athletic background can do it. People that are big people, that are small people. It really does cross a lot of boundaries."

So, Taylor started to adapt her thesis to create a curriculum and apply it to Pickleball. As an example, she attaches a life lesson to each letter of Pickleball, so P stands for participation, I is impulse control, C is communication, K is Kindness. After developing the curriculum, she started talking to organizations in the community and was even awarded a three-year grant from a Memphis foundation to get the program off the ground. The result of this is Group Activities Meaningful to Everyone or GAME. So far, the focus of GAME has been on children and the significant adult in their life because Pickleball fits perfectly with the intergenerational aspect of the program.

According to Taylor, participants in GAME feel they have accomplished something after a session of Pickleball and life lessons. She said, "They walk away feeling like they've accomplished something that they weren't born knowing how to do. They've learned something new. They've challenged themselves. They've bonded with their child. They have a sense of confidence. They tell us that they feel really proud of themselves and of their children."

Unfortunately, the COVID-19 pandemic put a stop to teaching classes in person. But Taylor had a garage full of Pickleball equipment she wanted put to use. So, she posted on Facebook asking if anyone wanted to borrow the equipment since people can play in their driveway. The result of this was selling what Taylor called 60 "COVID kits". These included a net, four paddles, and three balls. Soon people also started asking her to install a court at their home. So, now she has a partner that can build a full Pickleball or tennis court from scratch. Taylor said, "I'm shocked by the number of people who want to have an actual Pickleball court at their house. And I think I told my husband the other day, I was like, I don't think anybody's going to have a swimming pool in 10 years, but they're all going to have a Pickleball court."

Half of the profit from putting in courts at people's houses goes to GAME so the organization can build courts in neighborhoods where they are developing programs. Taylor said, "We hope that in the next two years that we've got a Pickleball court in every under-resourced neighborhood here. And then we are training people outside of our area to do the same in their communities."

While the pandemic helped GAME to build its donor base, Taylor's mission is to be with the families and children she wants to serve, and she is confident GAME will be back on an even bigger scale.

**For more information on GAME,
go to www.aceandgame.com.**





Drilling with Coach Dominic Catalano

Many people like to just get out on the Pickleball court to have fun, but if you really would like to improve your game coach, Dominic Catalano, believes you need to spend time drilling and you may even need a coach. Dominic said, "You look at the top players in our sport, they make things look so easy. And the reason is because when they do go out and drill, they drill with a purpose. And they go out and they do their drilling and they do it meticulously and they do it over and over and over and over again."

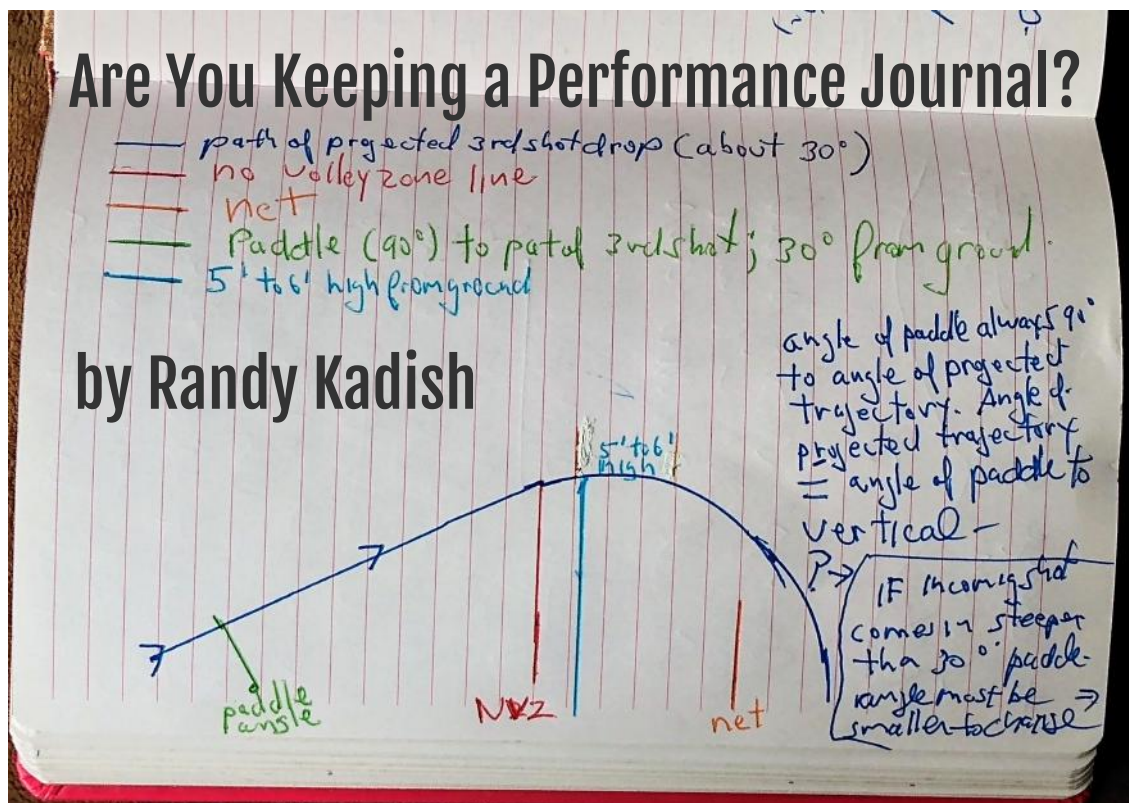
So, the question is what should you be doing when you drill? You might think higher level players should do harder drills than beginners, but the idea is that drills should not differ based on a person's skill level in Pickleball. According to Dominic, it's all about the basics, such as dinking, third shot drops, serve returns, serving, etc. Dominic said, in reference to the tennis great Rafa Nadal, "I heard an interview with Rafa Nadal's uncle who was his coach. And he was asked in the interview what drills do you do with Rafa that no one does? Tell us these drills. What are the secrets? Why is he so good? And he almost laughed at the question and said, 'I don't do anything different with Rafa than I do an eight-year-old junior player.'" But the difference is that Rafa does the drill perfectly, while the youngster is making mistakes because he or she is still learning.

While Dominic believes the types of drills you do shouldn't vary based on skill level, he does tie the amount of time you drill to your level. For example, if a 3.0 or 3.5 want to play for an hour, they need to drill for 10 minutes. If they play for three hours, then they should drill for 30 minutes. More advanced players should drill for 15 minutes for each hour they play so if they compete for three hours, they should drill for 45 minutes.

Dominic suggests keeping a Pickleball notebook and writing down the time spent drilling versus playing. He has seen this practice become very successful with many of his students. Dominic said, "Every week they'd come to me with their lesson, and they'd have to write it down for me. And they would show me, and they would be so excited because like a lot of the players in Pickleball, most of my clients are retired. And it was almost like they were back in school again, and they'd be coming to me with their notebooks and going hey coach look what I did. I did all this drilling. I was actually 20 minutes to 1 hour this week. I was 30 minutes to 1 hour this week. They'd get all excited. But if you can get them excited about doing something like that, that's great."

Dominic believes not only drilling is important for Pickleball players, but also working with a coach, especially at the higher levels. While Dominic works with a couple of professional Pickleball players now, there still isn't enough money in the sport for players to pay for full-time coaches. Dominic commented, "When the sport continues to grow at the rate it's growing and with some of these prize pools, the smart players are going to have coaches. They'll have coaches that work with them constantly because you can practice all you want and all day long with your hitting partner, but you need someone that can step back and look at what you're doing. You can't see yourself do everything when you're on the court. Look at every major sport. Every professional sport has coaching. We're the only one right now that doesn't have that full-time kind of coaching thing. We'll get there. But we're just not at that point yet."

Still, Dominic believes drilling at a minimum is necessary to improve your game and if you really want to get good or play at the highest levels, you'll need a coach, at least, in the future you will.



Are you keeping a Pickleball performance journal? Should I? you might be wondering. Well, Lanny Bassham, a Silver and Gold medal Olympic rifle shooter and author of the book, *With Winning in Mind*, believes performance journals are essential for athletes to measure their progress and to imprint positive self-images in their minds. Talking or writing, Bassham believes, makes a deeper impression than thinking.

Maxwell Maltz, a plastic surgeon, and author of the groundbreaking book, *Psycho-Cybernetics*, writes about how he came to believe—I am summarizing—that we often reach or don't reach our goals because of our self-image. A poor self-image hinders. A positive self-image helps. Luckily, we have the power to change our self-image.

Melissa Madeson, Ph.D., writes in *PositivePsychology.com*, "Effective journaling is a journaling practice that helps you meet your goals or improves your quality of life. ... One practical way to begin fostering healthy self-worth is to start a Self-Esteem Journal." To take these ideas further: to play Pickleball or any other sport well, a player must have, besides a good self-image, a reservoir of techniques and strategies. But Pickleball is such a fast game can a player pull up a technique and/or strategy in a split second? According to experts they can.

Harry W. Carpenter writes in his book, *Pickleball: The Mental Side*, "To perform at a higher level, you need to play with your subconscious mind. It can do trillions of things at one time, whereas your conscious mind can only do one."

John Shima, a Hall of Fame skeet shooter, writes in his book, *The Moment of Truth*, "The conscious mind controls all the intentional actions while a person is awake. The unconscious (subconscious) mind ... is involved with reflexes and other behaviors that are accomplished without thinking."

Harry Carpenter recommends that, when playing Pickleball, we have faith that our unconscious will know exactly where to hit the ball. We should, therefore, concentrate only on seeing the ball.

This idea more than any other has improved my Pickleball game. To get the most out of this idea I've found that writing in a performance journal an excellent way to download techniques and strategies into my unconscious, and to build up my mental memory.

So, what do we write in our performance journals? I don't believe there are set answers. I suggest googling journal writing and then deciding what journal format you think will work for you. Remember: you can always change your format as you go.

As for myself, I often use topic headings. Some of these headings, which will become clearer below, are: Guideposts, Improvements, Observations, Lessons, Affirmations, Practice log, and Goals. Often, however, I write entries without a topic heading. My journal is not very structured. I like to think of it as, in part, a stream of consciousness. On the next pages are some edited entries.

January 7th

Played for 2 hours.

Guideposts. I was late split stepping and often hit with poor foot position. Coach Evans says that if I don't split step early changing directions will be difficult. After hitting diagonal 3rd shot drop I did not come to the net diagonally and was in poor defensive position and vulnerable to angled shots.

Observations. If I am at midcourt I can hit a lower drop and still make it to the line. When at the line don't try to smash balls unless they are well over the net. Instead try to flick them slightly upward and directly at the player across from me. When a ball is rising and I hit a drop shot, the shot will go higher than I aim, so I must make an adjustment. 3rd shot drive is a better option when hitting a ball at a high apex.

Questions. I will have to watch some matches and see where the pros hit their 3rd shot drives. When returning serves where should I aim? I will try 6 feet above the far NVZ line, as I don't want to aim too deeply and risk hitting out balls.

Improvements. When hitting my backspin returns I shifted my weight forward and kept my follow through low (like Sarah Ansboury). My returns were lower.

January 8th

Observations. Watched a men's gold medal match. The players didn't always make it to the line after they hit drop shots, and yet their feet were not exposed. Yates and Johns hit most of their drives directly at the chests—not the backhands—of their opponents. At first this surprised me. I guess hitting a drive directly at an opponent gives the opponent less time to react and get out of the way if the drive is high and headed out.

If the ball bounces close to me I will probably hit it on the rise. If the ball bounces well in front of me I will be able to hit it on the fall. If I can hit a ball at its apex I don't have to worry about the ball deflecting up or down off my paddle. I will control its direction. After it bounces a fast ball has a longer apex—sweet spot, I like to think of it—than a slower ball. When returning be aware of a ball's arc, and then adjust the angle of my paddle.

Goals. To keep them back when they are back. To add more topspin when I am at the line by rolling my wrist over. To play in the joy and not in the frustration of not playing well enough. To focus on the process, not the result. To always feel good about my game.

Affirmations. I am learning and experimenting, Success doesn't come quickly. I am getting better.

January 9th

Lessons. Interesting: Phil Dunmeyer says it is hard to attack a high bouncing ball when I am at or near the baseline. That is why a lob serve can be effective.

Observations. Returns of serve that are too hard do not allow players to make it all the way to the line. So, when an opponent attacks my serve, my best option is a hybrid shot—half drop, half drive—at the opponent's feet and force them to hit a shot when they are moving or to get trapped in no-man's land. Foot position is crucial to hitting a good shot.

Improvements. Most of my service returns were deep. After two early misses, all my serves landed in, and most were low.

3rd shot drives were much better because I tried to hit the ball at its apex.

Affirmations. Michael Jordan said the reason he succeeded was because he had often failed.

I am not playing as well as I would like. Still, I must feel good about my game. Achieving success is meant to be a struggle.

Guideposts. Hit too many out serves. For better accuracy I must visualize that I am not hitting one ball but four balls that are in a straight line.

Goals. To stop putting so much pressure on myself. To stop and split step when the ball bounces on the other side of net. e Box-A-Ball, watching Phil Kiner's eye-exercise DVD.

February 8th

Practiced at the Racquet Club for about an hour.

Improvements. My mechanics were much better when hitting underhand drops. Instead of stepping and hitting at the same time I stepped then hit, as Tony Roig insists. To keep my paddle open at about 30 degrees it is important that I lay back my wrist as Jordon Briones and Nicole Havlicek recommend. To keep my paddle at that angle during the execution of the shot I must shift my weight forward and finish on the front of my front foot. No wonder Dave Weinbach looks as if he is jumping up at the end of the drop shot.

Guideposts. Let too many balls get too close to me before I hit them. Therefore, I lost sight of the ball. When I turned my hips to hit groundstrokes I sometimes over rotated hips and my front shoulder, and my shots went wide of the target.

February 9th

Guideposts. When hitting forehand and backhand drops I am still sometimes rolling over my wrist and bending my arm. Keep wrist stable and arm straight. Didn't always let my legs must do most of the work—used too much arm—and my paddle face opened, and my drops went high.

Thought I was seeing the ball well, but I wasn't. Must really concentrate and hard focus on the middle of the ball. Between points be aware of my breathing.

Affirmations. I am getting better!

February 13th

Day of rest, mostly. Did some eye-hand coordination exercises: juggling, hitting the Box-A-Ball, watching Phil Kiner's eye-exercise DVD.



Pickleball Training with the Slam Master Practice Paddle Inventor

Pickleball is a very fast game, especially when you are at the non-volley zone so it's a definite benefit to have quick hands. Gordon "GG" Gebert recognized the importance of having fast reaction time so he invented the Slam Master Practice Training Paddle.

Gordon had the idea for the training paddle prior to COVID-19, but it took a while to find the right string length for the Pickleball paddle. As it turns out, seven feet is the right length and ironically, this is the distance between the net and kitchen line in Pickleball. Once Gordon had the right length for the string, he had to learn to gain control of the ball. At first, Gordon made the mistake of hitting the ball really hard, but he soon found you need to start slow with the training aid and work your way up to hitting the ball harder.

The great thing about the Slam Master paddle is not only do you improve your reaction time and learn to get your hands back in position quickly, but it benefits your game in other ways too. For Gordon, he finds the game has slowed down for him which is also something you hear from professional players. This gives Gordon more time to choose his shots, so you don't feel rushed when hitting the ball. Pickleball players can also get in a great workout. Gordon said that when he practices using the training paddle, he breaks a sweat in five to ten minutes. He said, "You're moving your feet around and driving it because of the cord. Everybody has practiced off a wall and it's too predictable off a wall. But when you use the Slam Master, the cord makes it more variable because you're hitting the ball off a certain angle of the paddle, and it might go left, or it might go right. You have to get control of it."

Gordon has done a number of clinics teaching people how to use the training paddle. He teaches players how to use it in stages. The first stage is to just pop up the ball a short distance straight in the air so you can get used to the paddle. Then Gordon has his students hit lobs, making sure to bring your hand back in position. From there, players hit two or three in a row and by the end of the clinic, people are banging the ball like you see Gordon doing on the videos. Gordon has even gone beyond clinics to doing online challenges with the training paddle. There are even prizes for who can hit the most forehands, backhands, dinks, etc. In fact, contestants can win thousands of dollars in these challenges which are online, so you need to create a video of your performance. At the time of this interview, Coach Z (Zorano Tubo) held the record for most consecutive forehand volleys at 161.

The Slam Master training paddle comes in a wood version for \$39.95 and a graphite version for \$79.95. Paddles can be purchased at <https://slammaster.net/>.



"I actually invented it as a training tool, and I equated it to the speed bag in boxing and the donut on a baseball bat. It's a tool to get your hand-eye coordination really fast... So, I invented it, and everybody equates it to the little red, rubber ball with the little rubber band."

How to be a Great Doubles Partner

One of the challenges in playing doubles in Pickleball is you rarely have the same partner. This is true whether you are a professional or recreational player. When professional, Vicki Foster, was asked about what she finds challenging in doubles, she said, "It's interesting coming from a tennis background, people tend to play a lot more with the same partner. And even at any level of Pickleball, it's very common to say who you're playing that tournament with? There are very few teams overall, in any level, that consistently play together. So, I think just getting used to a new partner and working through that adds an extra element of difficulty to Pickleball."

Vicki has a long history of playing and teaching doubles both in tennis and Pickleball. Currently she is one of the head instructors for Gamma's Never Stop Playing Pickleball camps. Her number one tip for being a great doubles partner is to avoid offering coaching advice even if your intentions are good. She commented, "Coaching your partner, especially during a game, just adds pressure. And that's usually not someone's intention. They just want to help their partner, but it just builds more pressure for your partner."

It can be difficult to be a good partner in doubles, especially if things are not going well during a game. But you need to work at it much like a marriage or friendship. Rather than displaying poor body language or saying something negative, be encouraging even if you don't think your partner made the best choice when hitting a shot. It really is important to cheer your partner on even if they miss a couple of shots.

Vicki also talked about the importance of using time outs when the opposing team goes on a run. This helps you and your partner to refocus. Vicki commented, "My partner and I have called time outs and we sit and ask ourselves whether we are beating ourselves or are they beating us?" So, the time out has a dual effect of coming up with a strategy and breaking your opponents' concentration. Even if you are playing socially, you can walk to the back of the court and have a quick conversation with your partner to come up with a game plan. This may be as simple as discussing who is going to take the balls down the middle of the court. You can even call a time out in a recreational game as this often gets a laugh from everyone on the court.

So, the bottom line is that communicating in a positive manner is the key to being a great doubles partner in Pickleball. This is true whether you are playing with someone you don't know or partnering with someone during the course of a Pickleball tournament. And don't forget to use your time outs whether playing for fun or competitively!



Pickleball Fire

Copyright © 2021 Pickleball Fire. All rights reserved!

PICKLEBALL FIRE PODCAST



pickleballfire.com/podcast