

# Pickleball Fire



Pros Leigh Waters & Anna Leigh Waters

Photo by  
Belinda Dettman

## PROFILES

Pros Anna Leigh Waters & Leigh Waters, Steve Wong, Laura Fenton Kovanda

## Industry

What It Takes to Run a Pickleball Tournament

## INSTRUCTION

- Attacking Dinks by Leigh Waters
- Doubles Strategy with Helle Sparre
- Off Court Training with Catherine Parenteau
- Stretching with Dotti Berry
- Taking Your Game to the Next Level with Coach Mo and Coach Matty

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## From the Publisher

The weather is warming up and many are starting to see the light at the end of the tunnel with the COVID-19 vaccine rolling out to combat the pandemic that started in 2020. I just learned my age group in Connecticut can start signing up for vaccines March 1. So, after a long winter without Pickleball I'm looking forward to playing outside in warmer weather. Admittedly, I haven't played Pickleball for almost a year other than in my driveway as I decided to stay away from crowded courts due to COVID-19. I know other players have done the same or played in very small groups with others who were steadfastly practicing social distancing and limiting contact with others.

Professional players Leigh and her 14-year-old daughter Anna Leigh also made social distancing a priority. In fact, they only played in a couple of tournaments early in 2020 to make sure they stayed safe. But they came back in January 2021 at the APP tournament in Punta Gorda Florida and won women's pro doubles. Leigh and Anna Leigh are featured on the cover of the magazine this issue. You can also read a feature article on the mother-daughter team and Leigh even wrote an instructional article for this edition on attacking dinks.

Other professionals featured in the second edition of the Pickleball Up Magazine include:

Onix and Armour Pickleball founder Steve Wong  
Former #1 racquetball professional Laura Fenton Kovanda  
Certified Pickleball instructor Kathy Pederson

Other instructional articles in this edition include:

Off Court Training with Catherine Parenteau  
Taking Your Game to the Next Level With Coach Mo and Coach Matty  
Stretching with Dotti Berry  
Doubles Strategy with Helle Sparre

Besides player profiles and articles on instruction, the second edition of Pickleball Up also contains:

What it Takes to Run a Pickleball Tournament with Mike Hoxie  
Pickleball: The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly with author Marlene Bell  
Commentating for the APP tour with Lauren McLaughlin  
Wheelchair Pickleball with Joe Dowling and Jim Loving

## Pickleball Fire

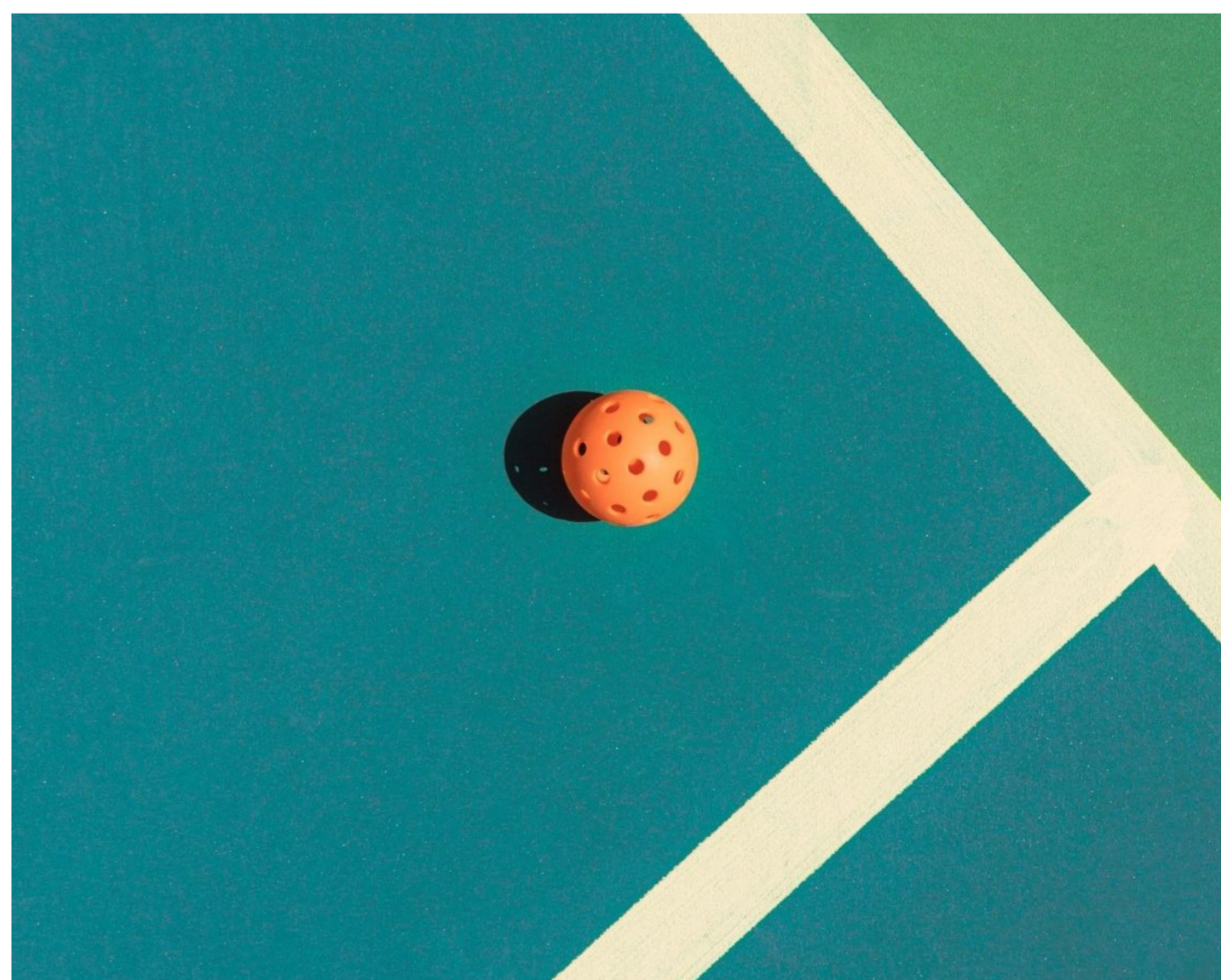
Published by  
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# ***TEAM WATERS***

## ***#RIPITPICKLEBALL***



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# Winning with Aggressive Pickleball

Hurricane Irma was a life-changing event for Leigh Waters and her daughter Anna Leigh Waters. And it's not because they suffered the loss of a house or injuries from the September 2017 hurricane. Instead, they were to be without electricity for a couple of weeks so they travelled from Florida to stay with relatives in Pennsylvania. During this time, they fell in love with Pickleball. Two years later when Anna Leigh wasn't yet a teenager, this mother-daughter team finished in first place at the 2019 Pickleball nationals in the professional division.

Mother Leigh Waters attributes their rapid rise to both of them having a tennis background. Leigh was a Division I tennis player so she started playing in Pickleball tournaments at the 4.5 level. Anna Leigh entered her first tournament at the 3.0 level, but during the tournament she was bumped up to the 3.5 division. In 2018, Anna Leigh quickly improved and was winning everything according to Leigh.

Anna Leigh played with her mother in her first professional tournament in 2018 in Texas and lost in three games in the finals to get the silver medal. Leigh said about the finals, "It went three games. We actually got a game and I looked at Annalee who was 11. And for the first time I thought, 'Oh my gosh, Anna Lee might be ready to be my partner.' And because when I was playing tennis, we had always said maybe one day we'd play tennis together and some tournaments just for fun."

While they may not be playing tennis tournaments together, they certainly are a great team in Pickleball. Not only did they win gold in 2019 at the nationals, but they also won another big event called the Tournament of Champions. The Waters were ready for a big year in 2020, but they took a break due to the COVID-19 pandemic. However, the mother-daughter team played in their first tournament of 2021 and won the professional event in Punta Gorda, Florida, in January.

Prior to the pandemic, Leigh and Anna Leigh played at crowded parks. But in 2020, they changed how they trained. Leigh said, "We really just didn't feel comfortable doing any of that last year. So, basically, we trained with each other and a couple other people who are kind of doing the same thing as us quarantine wise. And we just, we worked on a lot of things. We tried to expand our game because you know, people can become predictable and everybody kind of knew what to expect when they played us. And we just felt like there were areas that we could really improve upon. And we did that, and I think it showed this past weekend."

Leigh and Anna Leigh shared some of the things they worked on in 2020. Anna Leigh said, "I worked a lot on the transition or defense in no man's land. They call it that, but it's not no

man's land. I call it the land of opportunity." Anna Leigh also said she worked on moving from the back line to the kitchen line, and also from the kitchen line back to the baseline to defend.

Leigh was always the most comfortable on the left-hand side of the court so she could hit her forehand in the middle since she was the aggressive one. So, she focused on the right side of the court as she trained in 2020. Leigh said, "I felt like I really needed to learn how to play on that forehand side. And so, I really worked on that side, dinking and learning how to be aggressive from that side as well. Now both players can be aggressive wherever they are on the court."

If you haven't seen the Waters play or watched them on video, they are both extremely aggressive. Leigh said Anna Leigh has always been a powerhouse but now the 14-year-old can hit the ball harder than Leigh. Like many tennis players who come to Pickleball, the Waters hit everything hard when they first started playing. Many people said they would never win at the professional level with their style, but Anna Leigh said their club was supportive. Anna Leigh said, "But our club, our Delray club, I don't think they ever told us that we played incorrectly. I felt like they really encouraged us to play our game."

The Waters stayed true to their aggressive style, but they did learn to dink, hit a third shot drop, and reset points. Still, even during quarantine they worked on how to be aggressive off the dink. Leigh said, "We proved in 2019 that you can play an aggressive game and win at the pro level. It's just, you have to be smart about it, you know? No, you can't hit every single ball hard and no, you can't hit 5,000 miles an hour from the kitchen line. But we figured out how you can be aggressive and how if you are aggressive and smart in a strategic manner that in fact, it's a really hard game to defeat."

The aggressive game in Pickleball is definitely here to stay. An example of this was the men's play in the Punta Gorda tournament. Anna Leigh said, "The men's mostly was just banging. Like it was insane how much people were hitting hard and the rallies they were having of the fast, quick balls." In asking the Waters if they have changed the game Leigh said, "It'd be pretty cool if our name became synonymous with changing the game a bit. So, we would definitely be proud of that."

There is no doubt Hurricane Irma changed the Waters lives. But it also looks like the mother-daughter duo has returned the favor by changing the game of Pickleball.



Photo by Steve Miller

# 5 Tips for Attacking Dinks

## By Leigh Waters

As you probably know by now, Anna Leigh and I are known for being aggressive and playing an attacking game. Attacking the dink is a big part of our aggressive strategy. You don't have to play like us or become a "banger" to incorporate the dink attack. In fact, adding this type of attack to a finesse game will create that element of surprise and unpredictability that wins so many free points. Let's look at some tips that will help you become successful in attacking dinks from your opponent.

### Tip #1

Look for dinks that bounce high. As you are dinking with your opponent, look for dinks that you know are going to bounce high, around net level. The last thing you want to do is try to attack a low bouncing ball, as many times your attack will end up straight into the net. Once the ball bounces at a higher level, you now have the ability to attack with a much higher margin of error. The number one mistake I see when players are trying to attack dinks is incorrectly choosing the ball to attack. Be patient, choose correctly, and reap the benefits.

### Tip #2

2. Attack with 50%-60% pace. Many times when players think "attack" they think hit the ball at Mach speed, or they use a "hit it as hard you can" mentality. Yes, the attack is a speed-up, but think of it more as a 50%-60% pace hit ball. Again, now you have raised your margin of error as you have much more control over a 50% ball than you do an 80%-100% ball. Remember, you are close to the net and close to your opponent's baseline. With this type of attack, you have to avoid the net and keep the ball inside the baseline. Stay within yourself and keep control of your body and balance. This is fairly hard to do if you are hitting with 100% pace.

### Tip #3

The attack is more often the set-up shot than the point ending shot. Piggybacking with Tip #2, the 50%-60% attack often will create an element of surprise and cause your opponent to hit a weak shot back, allowing you to now have a much easier put-away or point-ending shot. Simply having this mentality with your dink attack will give you a high success rate. Don't think, "I have to hit a winner" off the dink. Instead, think "set up" then "put-away." Where you hit your attack will help you set up that winner. Many players are very good at blocking. When you choose to speed up, aim at the right hip or higher at the right shoulder (for a right-handed player). Because most players block with a backhand and even stand in ready position with this blocking backhand, hitting to the right side either low on the hip or high on the shoulder will be a difficulty shot to block in that split second they have to react. Most likely this ball will come back to you weak or as a pop-up; an easy put away for you!

### Tip #4

Most dink attacks will be down-the-line or at the opponent directly across the net from you. Why is this? Because you are closer to this opponent rather than the opponent diagonal from you, the player will have a shorter time to react to your attack. Remember, however, this is the higher part of the net and so you must plan accordingly (going back to Tip #1: Higher bounce). Does this mean you can never attack a dink cross-court? Absolutely not. For example, maybe the diagonal opponent is the weaker player of the team. Of course, you would want to attack the weaker player. Another example for attacking cross court would be that you have used the down-the-line attack many times in the match. The team is starting to catch on and is maybe setting up earlier and anticipating the attack resulting in a counter block attack. Now would be the perfect time to switch your attack cross-court, catching your diagonal opponent off guard. Finally, don't forget about shooting your attack down the middle. You've heard the saying "down the middle solves the riddle?" How many times do we see teams that fail to cover the middle of the court? Maybe one teammate in particular fails to shift to the middle when his/her partner is pulled wide? This is the time to push that dink attack right down the middle of the court and make them pay for that lack of coverage.

### Tip #5

Your attack on a dink can also be an offensive lob!! Many players think about the lob as being only a defensive play to get out of trouble or a last resort shot. Think again! The offensive lob attack can be so effective off of a dink. When you are in a dinking rally with your opponent, again look for a dink that bounces a little higher so that you can better get under the ball and control your offensive lob. So many times we are so intent in the dink rally and waiting for that next dink to come our way that we never expect a lob. Once the lob is over our heads we have to quickly move backwards (not always an easy task), play the ball back in such a way that we don't get ourselves killed, and then try to recover back to the non-volley zone. Preferably, you want to lob over the player's backhand side so that they are unable to crush your lob with an overhead. With both the speed up attack and the lob attack off the dink, you will become so unpredictable and will have your opponents guessing all the time!



# What It Takes to Run a Pickleball Tournament



Mike Hoxie didn't know when he volunteered to run a tournament in 2012 for his newly formed Pickleball club that years later he would become a full-time tournament director. But his experience running tournaments for the Columbia River Pickleball Club grew over the years.

Mike said, "I ran the club tournaments with the help of Michael Wolf. He was a police fire guy games organizer down in California for years. So he helped with a lot of the organization, essentially mentored me on how to get started and organize these events. Our club continued to grow and go from one a year to two tournaments a year and next thing we know the state games of Oregon. I was lucky enough to join that group of organizers to help run their tournaments and modernize it from 25 years of being on paper and pencil to moving it over to the website, [pickleballtournaments.com](http://pickleballtournaments.com). And really helping increase the fun of the tournament because there was less waiting and more playing."

Nowadays, Mike has a company called Pickleball Is Great which runs tournaments for clubs, facilities, and even visitor bureaus. He "blames" Melissa McCurley from [Pickleballtournaments.com](http://Pickleballtournaments.com) for the idea. Apparently, Melissa contacted Mike after the Oregon State Games and asked him if he would consider starting his own company. She would then send referrals up to the Northwest so he could be a tournament organizer.

The challenge was how to run tournaments when working full time. Mike started off small in 2016, running six tournaments. Because he enjoyed it so much, he ran 13 tournaments in 2018 and 26 tournaments in 2019. Mike said, "Sadly enough, I ran out of vacation time and I had to decide, am I going to take this seriously and make it a full-time job? Or is it just going to be a part-time hobby?"

So, in 2018 Mike left his full-time job. Mike was a retail manager for 30 years and his experience as a sales and operations manager is an asset when organizing Pickleball tournaments. As an example, Mike's experience when at Grainger included planning for the swine flu so this was good preparation for dealing with COVID-19.

In 2019, Mike hired Kathy and Gigi and they ran 46 tournaments plus 10 tournaments the first week of 2020. Then the COVID-19 pandemic hit and that has been both a financial and logistic challenge. He stated, "We've morphed into doing everything outdoors. All of our tournaments have been outdoors. We have a set pandemic plan that we use as a base model. And then we essentially revise it for each city, whether that is a new ball for every match, or whether it's just sanitizing the balls they have. Some cities don't allow water jugs so it's just taken extra communication and flexibility."

His ability to plan and communicate also makes the Pickleball is Great tournaments very player friendly. He explained, "All players really want things to start on time, end on time, minimal wait time, and clear communication. You know, there are things that we just believe are the core to keeping a great event." The Pickleball is Great organizers do a lot of pre-planning to make sure the day of the event things run smoothly.

Pickleball Is Great is going to be running a series of tournaments called the road to the AAU Junior Olympics which is in Houston the first week of August. Pickleball will be an exhibition sport at the Junior Olympics. Currently his company is looking for places where they can run AAU Pickleball tournaments

which are for all ages and skill levels. Venues with 10-12 courts are preferred so 300-400 players can participate. Mike said, "We know it's more exciting and more fun when we can do these fun family events where grandma can play with her grandson and dad can play with his mom. What we're really trying to do is really embrace that amateur spirit, where sports are for all forever, which is part of what AAU sports is really focused on."

While Pickleball is Great runs AAU tournaments they also run sanctioned events. Mike recently worked with Steve Cole to run a tournament at the Plaza in Las Vegas. While 30% of the tournaments are sanctioned, Mike also runs tournaments which do not count towards a player's ratings. So, this means people can play with a friend or relative and have fun rather than being concerned about whether their rating will drop if they lose.

Mike commented, "Essentially Pickleball is Great was designed to partner with whoever needs us, whether it's a visitor bureau, a local club, or a facility. We have that flexibility to kind of fit what the needs are of the area. So, it's been nice to have that flexibility. Part of being a small business owner and trying to survive in this time is I'm not rigid on who we do business with. We're looking to help grow the sport of pickleball."



# Doubles Strategy with Helle Sparre



Five years ago, Helle Sparre came to Pickleball after years of teaching tennis and playing in the pros during the 1970's. She found the game of Pickleball to be well suited to her playing style since she was not a power player. Helle remembers how she took to Pickleball, "I could do all those kind of fun shots like a swinging volley, the drop shots, all the kind of trick shots that you get to do in tennis every so often. But it usually doesn't work because you get so little practice at it. And in Pickleball, that's kind of all you do. So, it really suited my game, which is not a power game. It's more touch finesse and kind of a chess game out there."

When Helle started playing Pickleball she felt like there wasn't much strategy to the game and the common strategies really were not right. This means Helle often has to unteach her students the strategies like the forehand always takes the ball down the middle and run to the kitchen line as fast as you can after serving. Helle said, "I would see people hit the ball, run to the kitchen, and get slammed because they didn't hit a good third shot or it was an attackable ball. So those two things in the beginning I was saying, there's something wrong with this so that I didn't really feel there was any strategy out there other than those two main things."

Helle stresses in her teaching that the most important thing is your position in relationship to your partner. As an example, you and your partner should never be side by side even though many people believe you should move to the net

together. This makes balls hit down the middle a challenge since you and your partner are both fighting to take these shots. Instead, you and your partner should be slightly staggered with one player a step or two behind the lead player.

Helle said the best strategy is to first defend before you attack. She explains, "It's not as important what your opponents are doing as what you and your partner are doing together. So, you don't leave that hole or have an easy winning shot for your opponent to explore it. So, I'm always trying to find the hole or the gap in the opponent's court while I'm defending my gap at any cost. So those are things, different things to think about, then get to the kitchen line."

Just as chess pieces have certain roles or moves they can make, Helle has a similar analogy for a doubles team. She calls one player the workhorse and the other the blocker. The blocker is the player directly in front of the opponent who is hitting the ball. This player stands in front of the workhorse and covers less of the court. However, the blocker has a dual role of being the one most likely to attack a ball or be attacked by their opponent.

Since the blocker is more likely to be attacked by their opponent, the blocker needs to be able to reset the point. This means they are not hitting the ball hard, but instead hitting softly with precision. Helle describes the blocker's role, "As you become a better player, you need to keep the ball in play more than trying to kill it. Everybody can kill it. And the lower level players have that idea that they can kill any ball. And that's where they have to learn to reset."

On the other hand, the workhorse is the person on a diagonal line from the player hitting the ball. The workhorse should be a little bit behind the blocker and should be covering two-thirds to three-quarters of the court. So, this player covers the angle, plus lobs, and the middle if the blocker does not take it. The workhorse is the more defensive player who is steady on the court and keeping the ball in play.

If the workhorse mistakenly moves in front of the blocker, Helle calls this person "Wrong Way Wanda" because this player has moved the team out of the correct position. So, your opponent can now attack the large gap that exists down the middle of the court. While you don't want to be a Wrong Way Wanda, you should take advantage of this situation when your opponents get out of position. And like Helle said earlier, Pickleball is a chess game.



To learn more  
about Helle's  
doubles strategy,  
go to

[PickleballFire.com/  
doubles](https://PickleballFire.com/doubles)

It's not often you hear about an athlete who has won national championships in five different sports including Pickleball. But Laura Fenton Kovanda loves sports even though there was a time when she couldn't play Friday nights or Saturdays because she was raised as a Seventh Day Adventist. When Laura was young, she had always wanted to become a professional basketball or tennis player. And even though she received a full ride scholarship to the University of Nebraska, she was not allowed to go.

Laura said, "Basketball was probably my best sport. But at that time, they didn't have women's professionals and I wasn't allowed to go play at the university at the time. So, it wasn't a question whether I wanted to, or didn't want to, it just wasn't something we did. And it's what was ingrained in me. It's the way I was raised. But I had a lot of anger. And so, at I would say about the age of 30, I started going to a counselor because I had so much anger built up and I needed to deal with it."

Laura's frustrations with not being able to play sports on Friday nights or Saturdays extended to racquetball where she could compete at a national and professional level. Again, she would fall short of making the U.S. National Team because she had to forfeit. Laura went to what she thought was going to be her last racquetball tournament to say goodbye to her friends. She had not even trained for the event, but Laura and her partner upset the number one player in the world who had not lost a match in five years.

After the match, a man came up to Laura and asked her why she was not playing on the professional racquetball tour. In response, Laura said it was a long story, but she shared her frustrations with him. Later that night Laura spent the night on a mountain and cried out to God. She said, "I was screaming, screaming, and crying. And I don't understand. You gave me these talents for a reason. You tell us that you give us talents." Laura knew she needed to come down off the mountain as her match was at 10:00 a.m. She said, "There was no question and God was telling me that I was supposed to play the sport for the next 15 years."

As a result of Laura's time on the mountain, she had an extremely successful racquetball career, but her personal life was a challenge. She played on the professional tour, made the U.S racquetball team, and won five world titles and at least 30 national titles. Laura said, "I was sent a lot of nasty letters from the church for quite a while. I was disowned by my parents. I ended up going through a divorce and I still felt a lot of peace in regard to that because that's what God was telling me to do. Why, honestly, I don't know. I was very fortunate. I'm very driven, very highly driven. I trained extremely hard, but I was a single mom at the time. I worked full-time. Sometimes I worked two full-time jobs to make ends meet."

Laura played racquetball at the highest levels from the age of 31 to 46. The only reason her career ended was because of a knee injury inflicted by another player. Laura said, "My right knee was taken out by a 17-year-old kid. We're getting ready to play the world outdoor championships in California, which I was getting ready to move to and go back into teaching at a university there in Riverside. The rally was over, and he basically got

# Not Just a Pickl But All Around



# Pickleball Champion Sports Talent



pissed at his last shot and he went to rip the ball after the point, missed the ball, and took out my knee."

While Laura has not been able to play racquetball after the injury, she did return to other sports and entered her first Pickleball tournament without ever having played the game. This occurred because Laura had the chance to play as many sports as she wanted in the Illinois Senior Games, so she signed up for Pickleball. At the time, Laura and her husband had never heard of the game and did not know the rules.

Laura said, "You know, we're supposed to play Pickleball first thing in the morning, like 8:00 a.m., and we're getting into Springfield, Illinois, about five o'clock the day before. And neither one of us had a clue what Pickleball was. So, I hopped on my computer and Googled it and we're watching this and we started laughing. I'm like, we don't even know how to keep score in this game. We don't have any paddles. We have no idea what we're doing."

So, Laura called up a good friend from racquetball and asked him if he knew anything about Pickleball or had any paddles. Fortunately, he was also heading to Springfield for the state games, so he met Laura and her husband at a park where they received a crash course in how to play Pickleball. When they played in that first tournament, they didn't know about the third shot drop or how to work your way to the kitchen. However, Laura and her husband did make it to the finals of the tournament losing in the tiebreaker.

Here's what Laura had to say about the experience. "So, we came outside of the fence and people said, 'did you not know that they were in the kitchen the entire time?' So, we had no idea. We were trying to put a ball in the kitchen or somewhere, and they are stepping in the kitchen every single time. And there were no referees. We had no idea. It's like the first day I'd ever played this game."

Laura's initial success in the game of Pickleball and her later championships come from her long sports background. As a youngster she won national championships in basketball, softball, and tennis. In Pickleball, she won four U.S. Open titles despite her severe knee injury.

Recently Laura had her knee replaced and she's hoping to come back stronger than ever. Since she has a background in biomechanics, kinesiology, and motor learning, she knows how hard she can push herself. She said, "When I'm going in the gym and being able to lift my foot off the ground, not just lift it, but actually jump. Like I'm doing side to side lateral movements and off the ground, it was huge for me. So, when those kinds of things happen, it gives you a lot of hope. It gives you a lot of perseverance that you want to just keep pushing forward and saying, I'm going to do the best that I can. I know how I could play and pick a ball when I was not in very good shape or when I couldn't move very well. And so, I'm thinking, can I even get better in this sport still?"

While Laura wonders whether she can get even better in Pickleball, it doesn't seem to be a question of if but when. And since she no longer has issues playing sports on Friday nights or Saturdays it will not be a surprise to see her medaling in Pickleball all weekend long.

# Kathy Pederson: Passionate About Teaching Players of All Levels and Abilities

Kathy Pederson is still a student of the game despite being an instructor certified by two Pickleball organizations. But Kathy enjoys taking lessons from other professionals so she can take new tips back to her students who include both able bodied players and those with disabilities.

Kathy was a teacher for 30 years and was involved with adaptive sports her entire life. She even wrote her college thesis on the task analysis and biomechanics of wheelchair tennis versus able-bodied tennis. Kathy transitioned from teaching wheelchair tennis to Pickleball after an impromptu lesson with Pickleball professionals Scott and Daniel Moore. Now she can teach the game of Pickleball in two hours to anyone whether the person is able-bodied, a youngster, or young adults with disabilities.

This past summer Kathy was teaching a group of women about Pickleball and she talked about her background with adaptive sports. One of the players mentioned her son was in a severe motorcycle accident two years earlier. Kathy said, "Get him on my court. And he came on my court this summer and he was a highly ranked junior tennis player when he was younger. And the kid was phenomenal. His chair wasn't perfect. We had a loner sports chair that didn't quite fit him. So, when you have an athlete that has a spinal cord injury, it's really important to have a chair that fits because that is their legs when you think about it. So, when they have a real good, comfortable chair and it's appropriately fitted and they're able to maneuver it correctly, it makes it a lot easier for the athlete. So, when I was teaching him, we had to make some adjustments which I know how to do. And I put him in a longer paddle and he just picked it up."

Kathy's goal is to empower all individuals with disabilities to participate in the game of Pickleball. This includes physical disabilities along with children who have autism, adults with autism or severe learning disabilities, and posttraumatic stress disorder with veterans. As part of this plan, Kathy became certified by the International Pickleball Teaching Professional Association three years ago.

As part of the certification, she had to do a practicum where professional Gigi Lemaster watched her teach. Kathy chose to use her husband as the client because 10 years ago he had a massive stroke. Kathy commented, If you can teach someone with a severe disability, then you can teach anyone because you have to break it down so minute.

And that is just what Kathy does as she teaches players of all levels and abilities.



***~Kathy Pederson  
talking about what  
happened to her  
husband when they  
were skiing***

***"I gave him CPR on  
the mountain and  
flight lifted him to  
the University of  
Utah where he was  
in surgery for 36  
hours. And they had  
to wrap his aorta in  
surgery, had 10  
massive strokes. He  
went from a year in  
the hospital to not  
walking, talking,  
moving, to walking  
and talking. I started  
teaching him  
Pickleball right after  
I picked up  
Pickleball."***

# Pickleball: The Perfect Sport for People with Disabilities

Like many people who come to Pickleball, Joe Dowling has a tennis background. He played wheelchair tennis for 40 years. Joe said, "I realized that Pickleball is such a wonderful opportunity to raise the consciousness relative to disabled people. And also, it is so good for socialization of people in wheelchairs from the point of view that they aren't generally willing to go out and participate in social events because there just doesn't seem to be an opportunity. But Pickleball, I recognized immediately that this is an event that wheelchair players can participate on the same level and with the same people as stand-up players can. And even though wheelchair players may never rise to the competency level, they can get very competent at it and therefore it can be a great social event for them. And that's what appealed to me."

Joe played in a number of tournaments including the U.S. Open and 2019 Mid Atlantic Regional tournament run by Jim Loving. In both of these events, however, there were only six wheelchair participants. Jim said, "So we basically allowed them to play in a wheelchair division against each other. And then what we also did was we allowed them to play in doubles and mixed doubles with a stand-up partner. And that was a first, and a new, experience for many players to get to play against wheelchair players."

While Joe is helping to develop the rules for wheelchair Pickleball, he believes wheelchair players should be treated the same as other participants. This means they should be subject to the same rating program and play under the same set of rules rather than having concessions such as getting two bounces. The idea is that when a person signs up for a tournament and shows up in a wheelchair, it is just the same as someone showing up in orange tennis shoes. All players need to adapt their style of playing to his or her own abilities as some people are fast and some slow. Some players have a great serve or are great at being aggressive.

Joe said, "I try to understand what my capabilities are and play the best way I can within my own physical capabilities including the fact that sometimes I can't get to a ball as fast as another player or I can't get to overheads or lobs as easily. I try to adapt my game so that I don't expose my vulnerabilities to my opponents, the very same way that most stand-up players do. And so that makes it when people show up and see me as their partner or as their opponent, they just do the same thing. They figure out how they're going to protect their vulnerabilities and attack my weak parts. And that's what makes it fun. And that's what makes it socially integrating. And that's what makes it so challenging for me. And hopefully I provide a good challenge for the people who choose to play with me."



After Joe's tournament experience, he became an ambassador for USA Pickleball to try to cultivate wheelchair participation. He has done a couple of clinics including one for the ambassadors to show what it is like to have wheelchair participants in their divisions. Joe has also put on a clinic for a local rehabilitation hospital and has more plans to promote wheelchair Pickleball in the spring. While his plans for expanding wheelchair participation were slowed by the COVID-19 pandemic, he did have a chance to participate in an exhibition at the Billie Jean King Tennis Center in New York with all stand-up players.

Joe commented on his experience at the exhibition, "I played with all stand-up players and they were really fascinated, and they loved playing with me. They really enjoyed it not because I'm such a sparkling personality, but because they enjoyed my approach to the game, and they enjoyed the fact that I could play at least well enough to be on the same court as them. So, I think it just opened up another avenue for them. And of course, every single one of them knows somebody who's disabled in some way. So, that's the opportunity that I was looking for to expose the game to them. And they could go back and say, 'Hey, gee whiz. You know, I saw this guy and he did this, and he did that. Why don't you come on out with me? And we'll start you playing.' So that's the hope."



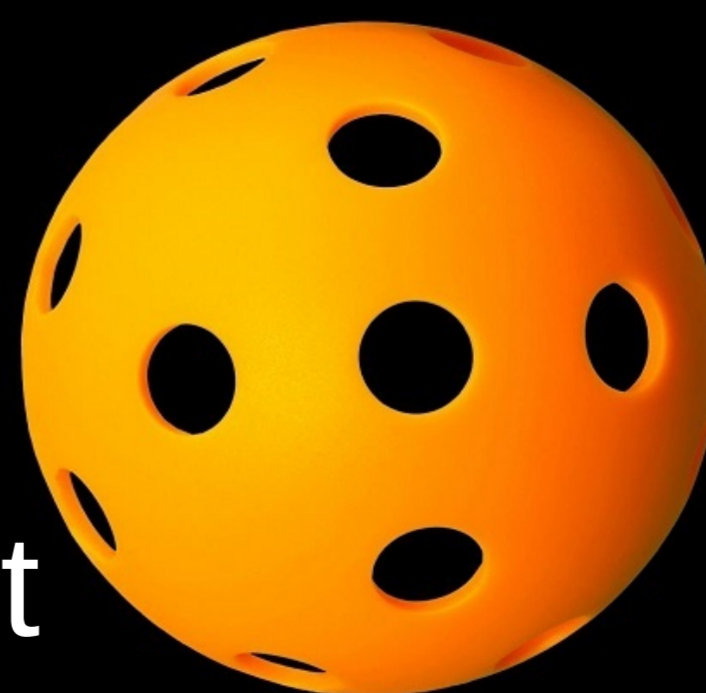
## Off Court Training with Pro Catherine Parenteau

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As more players come into Pickleball, the competition is getting tougher and tougher especially if you are a tournament player. As a result, off-court training is becoming more and more necessary to have success. Just ask Catherine Parenteau, a former Division I tennis player at Michigan State University and current professional Pickleball player, how things are changing. She stated, "Right now I'm teaching quite a lot and playing, I believe I have 20 tournaments coming up in 2021. But I'm slowly trying to get away from teaching and I'm going to be starting to work more on training than teaching. So more of a full-time professional athlete in a way."

Catherine has two aspects to her off court training which she really believes helps with her game. The first is high intensity interval training (HIIT) which she started doing in the past year. HIIT doesn't require equipment, but it can involve watching a workout on television or YouTube. You alternate between exercising at a high intensity and then resting. The exercise portion can last anywhere from 20 to 40 seconds. The rest period would then be 20 to 40 seconds. Catherine does this for 25 to 30 minutes to really get her heart rate going. She makes sure to do different workouts so she doesn't get tired of the same routine.

The impact of HIIT training has really made a difference in her game. Catherine said, "That's what I feel like really improved my game in the past year is working on my fitness and not just working on my Pickleball game. And I would say that's probably one of the biggest things that made a change in my game."

The other area of off court training comes from her interest in sports psychology. She was planning to become a sports psychologist before she found Pickleball in her fifth year of university. So, Catherine's off court training includes working on her mental game. She meditates in the morning to clear her mind. This can come in the form of counting while she sits in bed or counting her steps when walking. The idea is to only focus on counting and to push everything else from her mind. This technique helps Catherine to stay in the present moment when playing Pickleball.

She said, "Sometimes I think too much on the court and you cannot think too much when you play Pickleball. You have to think about your strategy and your decisions, but you cannot start thinking about this is who I'm going to play next, if I win, or if we don't get this point it's match point for them. You don't have time to think about that because it's so quick. So, you have to make sure you're in the present moment to make right decisions."

Catherine will be getting back to Pickleball tournaments after her time being in quarantine when she went to visit her family in Canada. She'll definitely be ready for some action on the court as she had to focus on off court training the last few weeks. But as Catherine says the off court training in the form of interval and mental training are necessary to perform at the highest level. This is especially important as the competition in Pickleball continues to get tougher each year.



# The Growth of Pickleball



It's not often you find someone who has played Pickleball since the early 1990's. But Steve Wong, founder of Onix Pickleball and Armour Pickleball, has enjoyed the game since 1991 when he was in eighth grade. Steve didn't get to play Pickleball when he lived in Minnesota, but he returned to the game in 1998 when he moved back to Bellevue, Washington. Steve said, "I moved back to Washington in 1998 and I found that Bellevue 24 Hour Fitness had Pickleball courts inside the gym. And that's when I really got hooked on it. I used to play all the time after school, after work. And so really since '98 I've been playing fanatically."

It was at the Bellevue 24 Hour Fitness that Steve met future Pickleball Hall of Famer Mark Friedenber. Steve and Mark were both co-founders of the USA Pickleball Association along with others in 2005. Steve commented, "So we were talking about growing the game and I had an IT background. I used to work for AT&T Wireless. I did web stuff, so we started talking and he saw that I was kind of a young entrepreneur that was really gung-ho in the sport. So, after talking about it for months and months, we just said, 'let's just do it'." Steve jokes that Mark "roped" him into it, but they were also joined by many other people who were founding members and volunteered their time also.

Steve considers 2009 to be a turning point for the sport of Pickleball. That was when the USAPA board created a national tournament for the sport which has been held every year since then, except 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Steve's prime came in 2012 when he won both a mixed doubles and men's doubles national title while co-running the tournament.

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Steve said, "I'm just really blessed because my resume for Pickleball is great. I tell people I'm probably really crappy at everything else, but in Pickleball, I'm pretty good."

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About the same time the national tournament began, players were doing more interviews and creating more YouTube videos, so the sport really started to grow. As a result, Steve was able to quit his full-time job to focus on Pickleball full-time as a professional, instructor, and running Onix Pickleball, which he founded with his ex-wife Heidi, in 2005. They continued to grow the company until they sold it to Escalade Sports in 2015.

Then in 2019, Steve founded Armour Pickleball with five other families. Steve is the face of Armour Pickleball, but the company is doing a lot to grow the game. He stated, "We have ambassadors and sponsored players out there everywhere. We're doing a lot of charitable things to grow the game and also just kind of grow the community. And we just did a clinic just a few days ago. That was a free clinic for just a small group of people in Arizona. And that's kind of what we're about. We're really grassroots trying to enrich lives to this sport of Pickleball."

Pickleball has come such a long way since Steve started playing in 1991. At one point the bottleneck in the growth of the sport was not having many Pickleball courts available to play the game. But that's changing with the opening of more Pickleball courts, dedicated Pickleball facilities, and even restaurants combining great food with Pickleball courts like Chicken N Pickle. Steve commented, "But really the dream that I've had is can you imagine if there's Pickleball courts in every school, you know, all the way from elementary all the way up to high school and college...Then Pickleball is going to grow from three and a half million people to all of a sudden 20 million people. And then it's going to really take the world by storm that's well, that's what I predicted. That's what I hope."

# Coach Dotti Berry on Stretching



For thousands of years through yoga and martial arts, humans have understood the importance of stretching before physical activity. But how often do you see someone stretching before a Pickleball game? Unfortunately, the answer is not very often. According to Dotti Berry, a former women's basketball coach at the University of Kentucky, "I see a lot of people still just walk out on the court and start playing. And then what do they do? They pull a hamstring or they, you know, do different things."

Those different things or injuries can often be prevented by stretching. And preventing injuries is just one of the benefits of stretching. Others include things which can benefit your Pickleball game such as increasing range of motion. This helps you get to more balls when you are in a dink rally, especially if your opponent is hitting wide angles. Stretching after you play helps to decrease muscle soreness, so if you are playing in a Pickleball tournament you will feel fresher for a longer period of time.

The benefits of stretching are clear so the question is whether you should use a static or dynamic method. Static stretching was popularized in the 1960's and involves focusing on one muscle group and holding a position for 15 or 20 seconds. A good example of this is sitting on the ground, leaning over, and reaching for your toes. The idea is you should stretch a muscle to nearly its furthest point, but be sure not to over stretch as you can pull a muscle. Most people

who you see stretching use this method, but it is not always the best choice.

According to Dotti there is a right time for both static and dynamic stretching. She stated, "You can go out there and not properly warm up. You know dynamic stretching is the real key before, static stretching afterwards. A lot of people don't even realize that. I'll see people all the time doing this static stretching before they play pickleball. And it's really the opposite. You want to use dynamic stretching that mimics as closely the type of activity you're going to do on the court."

So, static stretching is best for you to do during your cool down period after a match. Dynamic stretching is best to use in your warmup before playing a game. It involves using a full range of motion similar to the movements you will be doing on the court. One example of dynamic stretching for Pickleball is shuffling side to side. This mimicks the side-to-side movement needed when you are at the kitchen line in a dink rally. Another example of dynamic stretching is back pedaling. Again, this is similar to what happens in a Pickleball game when you need to move back to cover a lob or to defend better when your opponent is attacking.

It's clear both dynamic and static stretching are good for your Pickleball game. But the key is to take the time to perform both of them, one before playing and the other afterwards.

# Taking Your Game to the Next Level

Back in 2010, legendary Pickleball Coach Richard Movsessian, at 70 years old, won a silver medal in doubles at nationals with Phil Bagley in the Men's Open 35+ division. So how did he and Phil have so much success? They practiced as a team and played percentage Pickleball.

Coach Mo said, "Percentage pickleball is strictly only hitting the ball as fast as you can, be accurate and consistent. Unforced errors decide who wins or loses at every level, even at the national level. It's the team that makes the least mistakes."

To give an example of how this translates to the court, Matty Klein, who is Coach Mo's teaching partner, talked about his experience on the court. He said, "I would say personally, my wife and I try to keep her unforced errors down to two or three per game. Usually, we win our games if we each have only two to three or four unforced errors. So, the team that of course has more unforced errors is usually going to lose the game. So really this game is about keeping it in play and having somebody make a mistake."

Practice and playing percentages might seem boring to many players; however, if you want to succeed in competitive play and in tournaments then you may need to adjust your game. According to Coach Mo, you need to be able to make a shot 80% of the time before you should be hitting it in a game. The idea is that you should clearly know your strengths and be working on your weaknesses in practice. If you are working on hitting serve returns, you should only hit the ball as deep in the court as you can be accurate and consistent. Then in practice keep trying to hit deeper without sacrificing placement.

When Coach Mo and Phil earned the silver at national, they practiced every afternoon before the tournament.

Coach Mo said, "We practiced in the afternoon and broke the game down into segments and became like robots in a sense. So, you become mentally tougher the more you practice because you're confident. And when you're confident, you can make a shot. When it gets to be 10-10 you're going to be a much better player because you feel confident that you can outlast your opponent. And you've got to size up your opponent. If you feel that your opponents are not as steady, you don't have to beat them. Let them beat themselves. Don't try and win the point every time you touch the ball. Work the point and you'll be fine."

While Coach Mo didn't have the option of a drop serve back in 2010 when playing at the nationals, it is a serve approved for 2021. While he expects the pros to really be able to rip the drop serve, that's likely not going to be the case for the average player. Instead, amateurs will be making a lot more mistakes unless they practice the drop serve.

Coach Matty believes the drop serve is going to change the game. This is because the serve return team now has the advantage as one person is already at the kitchen line. Then after the return the non-serving team can both be at the net while the serving team is still back. So, the drop serve means the serving team can have more of an advantage. He stated, "I don't want to make the determination, whether this is good, bad, or whatever. I think that it's going to be a change. And I think it's going to change the game, especially for the younger people."

Regardless of a player's age, the one thing Coach Mo and Coach Matty would say about the drop serve is you need to practice it. Getting the drop serve deep in the court at least 80% of the time is still going to be the key to success. Again, it all comes down to practicing and playing percentage Pickleball.



# Pickleball: The Good, The Bad, And The Ugly



Marlene Bell wanted to be a writer like Erma Bombeck, a humorist, when she was growing up. But her mom persuaded her to major in business, so it wasn't until Marlene was in her 60's that she wrote her first book. After playing Pickleball for a couple of years, Marlene also wrote a humorous book on the sport called Pickleball: The Good, The Bad, And The Ugly. Marlene said, "I wanted to write books like Erma Bombeck and my mother completely talked me out of that. She said, there's one Erma Bombeck. There will never be another. Don't waste your time. And I got a degree in business banking and finance."

Marlene decided to write a humorous book on Pickleball because not only did she want to share some happiness with others, but the other books on the sport were serious since they were instructional in nature. Marlene realized that she had some good material for the book just from playing the game with her friends. Marlene added, "We just go to have fun and we laugh, and we joke and it's wonderful. It's so joyous. And I thought that's what needs to be covered. So, I just started writing down notes when I came home, and I'd write down something that somebody would say. And I'd laugh at it and then I'd write down something. And so, I had this little journal, little sayings, and little things that we did."

Marlene has written about some great characters in the book and many are based on her Pickleball friends. One of them is called Addicted Annie and her motto is coffee, Pickleball, wine, sleep, repeat. If Annie is not on the court, she is probably in the hospital. Another example is Dinosaur Dean who is in his 80's. He won't run, won't pick up balls, and won't put up with your nonsense. Then there is Hippy Harmony who refuses to wear court shoes and either plays barefoot or in her Birkenstocks.

Pickleball: The Good, The Bad, And The Ugly is a 5" x 7" gift book with 108 pages. It has five-star reviews and can be purchased on Amazon as a Kindle edition or paperback.

Marlene's future writing plans include writing another book on Pickleball. But this time it will be more of a novel. She will again base the book on her and her friends but will change the names of the characters to protect the innocent. This future book also will have some serious moments as it will be somewhat auto biographical in nature. Still, it will have lighthearted moments just like Pickleball: the Good, the Bad, and the Ugly.

## Chapters

1. Pickle Varieties discusses the various pickler personalities.
2. Getting Out of a Pickle lists some pickler's more colorful excuses.
3. Court Commentary shares some of the bizarre remarks specific to Pickleball.
4. Dear Pickler is a dime store version of Dear Abby designed to answer life's pressing Pickleball questions.
5. Keep It Kosher reminds picklers of court manners.
6. Spicy Pickles lists many of the spicier remarks heard around the courts.

# Commentator Lauren McLaughlin



## LIVE STREAMING

Lauren McLaughlin didn't take a traditional path to being a broadcaster as she made a conscious choice not to major in communications during college. In fact, it was a lucky set of circumstances that thrust Lauren into her current role. She was asked to be a guest commentator for an exhibition match and really enjoyed the experience. So, she decided to start live streaming at Pickleball tournaments including the Chicago Open in 2019. It was there where she met the soon to be founder of the Association of Pickleball Professionals (APP) tour, Ken Hermann, who was running the tournament.

Lauren said, "We connected and he kind of saw me live streaming and really thought I had a good work ethic and liked what I was doing. And basically, was like, 'Hey, let's keep in touch. You know I have this big sort of idea in the works'." Ken's big idea, of course, was the APP tour which launched the following year.

It was challenging in 2020 for Lauren, not just because of the COVID-19 pandemic, but because she had to wear many hats during the live stream production. This included setting up and tearing down equipment. But the worst thing was having to leave the broadcast booth to climb a ladder to fix a camera or get someone else to take care of an issue. This resulted in her not being able to focus on the commentary as much because she was responsible for so many other tasks.

Lauren's role changed in 2021 since the broadcast team

has expanded. She is able to just stay in her chair and focus on the broadcast along with the other commentators. Lauren said, "It's been so nice because Dominic Catalano and Dave Fleming, who are on the commenting team with me for the APP tour, they're just so knowledgeable in terms of the different players and the newcomers and just the game in general. Obviously, Dave being a senior pro player as well, knows all these pros super well. Dominic does a lot of teaching and coaching and is very knowledgeable. So, it's so great to have them because while I might be the head commentator, they're the experts."

As the head commentator, Lauren is responsible for making sure everything goes smoothly, but the days are grueling. At the Punta Gorda tournament in Florida, the livestream lasted 9 to 12 hours each day. Lauren said by Sunday the broadcast team is drained. She commented, "You really can't focus on anything else except the stream and the tournament while it's going on. And so, it takes just a lot of physical energy, and mental energy to focus that hard and that long on what's going on. So, certainly, by the end of Sunday usually is when everybody starts to feel it. And then once the tournament ends on Sunday, everybody is basically like, okay, bye everybody. I'm going to go sleep for two straight days. I don't want to hear or talk about Pickleball at all."

The good news is after a few days of rest, Lauren is ready to think and talk about Pickleball again. Thank goodness this is the case as she is the head commentator for the APP tour.

# Pickleball Fire

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# PICKLEBALL FIRE PODCAST

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