

Bellingham Pickleball Club
Skill-Level Rating Scale

April 26, 2019 (subject to change)

These pickleball skill-level descriptions are **a guide for evaluating your own skill level** and determining the level at which you play. They are written to be a practical guide to measure proficiency for skill-level placement and seeing next steps to improve.

They were adapted from USAPA skill-assessment sheets for levels 2.0 thru 4.0, the IFP rating system for other levels, and IPTPA skill-assessment sheets. The required number of successful shots is stated; for example, 4/10 means 4 successful shots out of 10 attempts. The purpose of this rating scale is to encourage a consistent and competitive level of play for all players in a skill-level game.

Level 1.0 (Beginner Newbie)

- New and have only minimal knowledge of the game and the rules

Level 1.5 (Beginner)

- Played a few games and is learning the court lines, scoring, and some basic rules of the game
- Limited rallies
- Learning how to serve
- Developing a forehand
- Fails to return easy balls frequently and occasionally misses the ball entirely

Level 2.0 (Lower Novice)

- Knows some of the basic rules including the “two-bounce rule”, scoring
- Gets some serves into the correct service court (4/10)
- Demonstrates service returns (4/10)
- Demonstrates forehand and backhand groundstrokes (4/10)
- Demonstrates volleys (4/10) and dinks (4/10)
- Knows where to stand as the serve team and the return team

Level 2.5 (Upper Novice), *skills from previous levels plus:*

- Serves to correct service court (6/10)
- Returns service (6/10)
- Demonstrates control (direction, depth, height) on forehand groundstrokes (6/10)
- Uses backhand groundstrokes (6/10)
- Attempts to hit a drop shot from mid-court (4/10) to move to the net
- Approaches the net to hit volleys
- Hits volleys (6/10) and dinks (5/10)
- Uses the forehand lob
- Attempts overhead smash (4/10)
- Keeps the ball in play on short rallies

Level 3.0 (Lower Intermediate), *skills from previous levels plus:*

- Serves and returns serve deep and with placement (7/10)
- Demonstrates control (direction, depth, placement) on forehand and backhand groundstrokes (7/10)
- Uses deeper and higher returns of serve to allow time to approach the net
- Executes slow-paced drop shot from mid-court (5/10) and baseline (6/10)
- Quickly approaches net rather than staying back
- Sustains a short volley session at the net (7/10)
- Sustains a dink exchange (6/10)
- Uses the forehand lob (6/10) and overhead (6/10)
- Returns the ball lower over the net
- Adjusts strokes to differing ball speeds
- Displays sound footwork
- Exhibits correct court positioning for doubles and how to “move as a team”

Level 3.5 (Mid-Intermediate), skills from previous levels plus:

- Knows all main rules including how to correct the score and correct server
- Serves and returns serve deep and with placement (8/10)
- Demonstrates variety with control (direction, depth, height, pace) and consistency on groundstrokes (8/10)
- Executes slow-paced drop shot from mid-court (8/10) and baseline (6/10)
- Quickly approaches net
- Sustains short volley session at the net with some placement and control (8/10)
- Initiates and sustains dink exchange (7/10)
- Hits overheads with control (6/10)
- Uses forehand and backhand lobs when appropriate (6/10)
- Consistently returns lower balls over the net
- Avoids hitting opponents' balls that are going out
- Able to adjust to differing ball speeds consistently
- Uses slower-paced shots to advantage
- Able to create and hit to coverage gaps
- Developing patience during rallies
- Able to play with partners effectively using court strategies like partner communication and changing a losing game

Level 4.0 (Lower Advanced), skills from previous levels plus:

- Serves and returns serve with control and placement (9/10)
- Consistent and dependable directional control, depth, placement, and pace on groundstrokes (9/10), volleys (9/10), and overheads (8/10)
- Accuracy in placing lobs (8/10)
- Consistently executes successful slow-paced drop shots from the baseline to approach net (7/10)
- Initiates and maintains a sustained dink exchange at the net to elicit a "put away" shot (8/10)
- Able to change between slow-paced and fast-paced strategies
- Can block and return fast, hard volleys (6/10)
- Can handle speed on shots without over-hitting or hitting out-of-bounds
- Controls play at the non-volley line, keeping opponents back, driving them off the line and controlling the speed or placement of the ball
- Consistently creates coverage gaps and hits to them
- Recognizes and exploits weaknesses in opponent's game
- Poaches effectively
- Developing use of spin on a variety of shots
- Maintains patience in rallies
- Moves effectively with partner, easily switching sides, and communicates when required

Level 4.5 (Upper Advanced), skills from previous levels plus:

- Beginning to master the use of power and spin, can successfully execute all shots, can control the depth of shots, and can handle pace
- Beginning to master dink shots (9/10) and drop shots (8/10) and their importance to the game
- Beginning to master 3rd shot choices
- Displays sound footwork and moves well enough to get to the non-volley zone whenever required
- Understands strategy and can adjust style of play and game plan according to the opponents' strengths and weaknesses and court position
- Serves with power and accuracy and can also vary the speed and spin of the serve
- Understands the importance of "keeping the ball in play" and the effect of making errors
- Making good choices in shot selection
- Anticipates the opponent's shots resulting in good court positioning

Level 5.0, skills from previous levels plus

- Mastered all the skills – all shot types, touch, spin, serves, with control and can use them as weapons
- Excellent shot anticipation, extremely accurate shot placement and regularly hit winning shots
- Forces opponents into making errors by "keeping the ball in play"
- Mastered the dink and drop shots
- Mastered the 3rd shot choices and strategies
- Uses soft shots, dinks and lobs to set up offensive situations
- Mastered pickleball strategies and can vary strategies and styles of play in competitive matches
- Dependable in stressful situations, such as tournament match play
- Athletic ability, quickness, agility, and raw athleticism are also qualities that are sometimes what separates the top players from those near