

What is My Pickleball Rating?

Many pickleball players want to know where they rate in comparison the USAPA rating scale which is associated with a lot of skill-level tournaments. Even in open-play venues we'll find there is a lot of uncertainty for players who are trying to organize competitive games with similar level players. Often the terms "Beginner, Intermediate, and Advanced Levels" are used to try to help players separate themselves in skill specific games.

It is difficult to find official USAPA pickleball raters. Right now if you play in a USAPA sanctioned tournament and the tournament director identifies you as a certain rating or you are fortunate enough to medal in a certain rating, then you'll probably will be ranked in that skill-level rating. *However, the majority of players have not played in sanctioned tournaments and must rely on self-ratings and descriptors (like the scale below) to help them with this process.*

While the goal for most everyone playing this game is to "improve" and be competitive, this often comes as a result of, according to Coach Mo, "playing with players of equal abilities". Therefore, finding our ability or skill rating is important so we can compete, improve and more importantly have fun.

The following is a skill level assessment guide compiled by pickleball book author Gail Leach to help you identify where your games are. The terms Beginner, Intermediate and Advanced, have been added to her definitions to help you use those ratings.

Pickleball Skill-Level Assessment Definitions

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Skill Level Rating Definitions

Level 1.0 - Beginner

- New—has minimal knowledge of the game.

Level 1.5 - Beginner

- Has taken at least one beginner lesson
- Learning how to serve
- Developing a forehand
- Fails to return easy balls frequently
- Learning to play the game, scoring and some basic rules

Level 2.0 - Beginning

- Has participated in novice and beginning skills practice
- Moves around the court in a balanced and safe manner
- Gets some serves "in"
- Realizes aspects of score-keeping, rules and where to stand on the court during serve, receive of serve, and general play
- Has some basic stroke skills, backhand, forehand, volley but has obvious weaknesses
- Familiar with where to stand in doubles play

Level 2.5 - Beginning/Novice

- Able to serve "in" more regularly
- Knows the two bounce rule and demonstrates it most times
- Knows where to stand on the court during serve, serve receive and general play
- Is mastering keeping score
- Aware of the soft game and occasionally tries to dink
- Working on form for ground strokes, accuracy is variable
- Makes longer lasting slow paced rallies
- Sometimes lobs with forehand with varying degrees of success
- Beginning to approach the non-volley zone to hit volleys
- Court coverage is weak but is improving
- Knows fundamental rules and can keep score

Level 3.0 - Novice

- Working to keep the serve and serve receive deep
- Moves quickly towards the non-volley zone when opportunity is there
- Trying to make flatter returns (where appropriate)
- More aware of their partner's position on the court and moving more as a team
- Developing more power in shots
- Beginning to attempt lobs and dinks with little success and doesn't fully understand when and why they should be used
- Demonstrates improved skills with all the basic shot strokes and shot placement but lacks control when trying for direction, depth or power on shots

Level 3.5 - Intermediate

- Demonstrates a broad knowledge of the rules of the game
- Gets high majority of serves "in"
- Able to serve deep and return serve deep
- Hits to the weak side of opponent often
- Demonstrates more strategies of playing during games
- Works better with partners in communicating, covering court, moving to net
- With varying consistency executes: lobs, forehand/backhand ground strokes, overheads, net volleys, and sustained dinking
- Starting to use drop shots in order to get to the net
- Knows when to make some specific placed shots in the game
- Working on mixing up soft shots with power shots to create an advantage
- Hits fewer balls out of bounds or in the net
- Dinks mostly in opponents' kitchen and dinks lower over the net
- Able to sustain dinking in the game
- Has a moderate number of unforced errors

Level 4.0 - Intermediate/Advanced

- Beginning to play more consistently in all phases of the game
- Anticipates opponent's shots resulting in good court position
- Primarily plays offensively

- Controls and places serves and return of serves to best advantage
- Puts strategy into play in the game
- Consistently varies shots to create a competitive advantage
- Works and moves well with partner – easily switches court positions when required
- Very comfortable playing at the non-volley zone. Works with partner to control the line, keeping opponents back and driving them off line
- Can block volleys directed at them
- Has good footwork and moves laterally, backward and forward with ease
- Uses strategy in dinking to get a put-away shot
- Consistently executes effective drop shots
- Demonstrates 3rd shot strategies: drop shot, lobs and fast paced ground strokes
- Hits a low number of unforced errors per game

Level 4.5 - Advanced

- Able to regularly convert a hard shot to a soft shot
- Exhibits patience at a superior level
- Shows noticeably increased skills, a higher level of strategy, quickness of hands and movement, judicious use of power, superior placement of shots, anticipation of play, sustained volleying skills, superior put-aways – all with consistency
- Understands strategy and can adjust style of play and game plan according to opponent's strength and weaknesses and court position
- Beginning to master dink and drop shots
- Makes very few unforced errors

Level 5.0 - Advanced

- Has mastered all skills and strategies
- Dependable in stressful situations
- Athletic ability, quickness, and agility separates these players

Pickleball is an evolving sport and the officials at the USAPA are working on trying to improve this process, just like we are all trying to improve our games.