

From The Picklehood. February, 2022.

10 Guidelines For Fun And Successful Social Play.....

I play for fun, exercise and camaraderie. Honestly. It's nice to win, but not paramount. What is nicer is to play well. To be competitive. To walk off the court after a social game and feel like you executed, successfully, most of your shots. The following is a mental checklist that may very well help you play well, play smart and give you the feeling that you are getting better.

- 1. You are only as good as your partner and vice versa.** Don't kid yourself. The play of you and your partner—together is crucial to being successful. Notice I didn't say crucial to winning. That's a by-product. You need to make your partner feel comfortable. Positive talk. Compliment good shots. Encourage. Lots of smiling. If you have suggestions, that's OK too. but not after every rally. Do most of your suggesting and teaching after the game. And, by the way, make sure to extend the above philosophy to your opponents. Your next game may find you playing with one of them.
- 2. You are responsible for your partner's success and enjoyment** of the game you just played. I repeat this just in case you skimmed No. 1.
- 3. If this game were easy, everyone would be good.** Remember, that. Play your strengths. Play smart. Play the percentages. Play positively. Sooner or later you will realize that you are responsible for the improvement in your game. If you never practice (drill), then the games will be your on-the-job training. Play the game right. Going all whack-a-mole is not good playing.
- 4. Master the fundamentals.** If you don't, the fancy stuff will rarely work. Understand the three P's (you may need to read a previous post). I chose to make this a related, but separate guideline just in case you missed the point of No. 3.
- 5. You are responsible for the DIAGONAL shot.** Much easier to explain in person, so if you see me on the courts sometime, ask and I will explain. In short, it is the shot, during a rally, that comes at you from the opponent on your diagonal (imagine that diagonal opponent's shot is actually a serve coming directly at you). Too many of those diagonal shots go untouched or are not returned successfully because the player on the receiving end of the shot assumes their partner is going to get the ball. They may. They may cut it off before it reaches you. You may have some agreement about who takes the middle or who takes the forehand or backhand. That's Ok. However, to allow the ball traveling in your direction to go between the two of you because you weren't ready....well that can't happen.
- 6. Always be ready for the drive (hard) shot.** Much easier to adjust to something soft if you are ready for the hard shot. Tougher the other way around.

7. **Poach at least twice a game.** Fake the poach as often as you feel comfortable. It is good strategy and helps keep your mind and feet active. It can also distract your opponent.

8. **Your put away shot is a 'control shot' at 75% effort.** Don't overswing. Firm placement. Eyes on the ball and remember, the sidelines and baseline are not your friends. Neither is the net. Aim small, miss small.

9. **Additional food for thought** for guideline number 9. All good to remember.

.....Play the middle more. It decreases the angle of your opponent's return shot.

.....Same with the return of serve. Down the middle to decrease the return angle.

.....Before you can win a game, you have to not lose it.

.....If you are not sure, the opponent's shot is always called 'IN.'

.....Tell me..I may forget. Show me..I may remember. INVOLVE me..I will understand.

.....What you allow, you encourage. Play smart. Be consistent. Hit low risk shots.

.....If can, do. If no can, don't try!!

.....Move with your partner. Cover the middle. In social play 60% of winners are hit down the middle. 25% of those winners are never touched by either partner.

.....Communication with your partner is key.

.....Track the ball with your paddle.

10. **And finally, on a lighter note, I ask this question:** If you were arrested and charged with possession of multiple pickleball skills, would there be enough evidence to convict you?