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From the Picklehood

August 2025

By Jack Hodges

Yesterday's play is history. Tomorrow's is a mystery. But today....ahh today. Today's play can be a gift. That's why it's called the "present." A slight rewording of a famous quote by [Eleanor Roosevelt](#)

I wrote the first column of "From The Picklehood" in December of 2021. Yes, almost four years ago. It was a Covid Christmas as I remember.

I told the story of my first day of play and how it was life changing. What follows is a reprint of the best bit of advice I have ever received about playing this wonderful game. Most of you reading this latest column have played the game long enough to know the advice was/is good. The game has changed in the last four years, but going back to basics or teaching the basics to new players will always be wise counsel.

To repeat.near the end of my first month of play, I was pulled aside by the club's best player and, at the time, the #1 ranked player in the U.S. in 60+ singles, men's doubles and mixed doubles. That pretty much meant the best player in the country because ten (now almost 14) years ago most everyone who played was 50+. He dominated in that age group as well. He was an awesome player and person. "Jack, tell me why you play this game." I answered...."Exercise, fun, camaraderie, to improve and win a few more than I lose. Maybe even play in some tournaments." "Good," he replied. "Now here's a bit of advice you need to take out to the court every day of social and tournament play. Play SOFTER and make sure EVERY shot you hit goes OVER the net and, if possible, BOUNCES on your opponent's side of the court."

That's it!! Words of wisdom. The net's not your friend (get it over). The sidelines and baseline....not your friends (keep the ball in play). Hit to the middle and you won't miss wide. If you hit an elevated shot that goes over the net but doesn't bounce, you may lose the rally, but you still made your opponent have to hit it back. You didn't miss into the net, wide, or long. You didn't hand them a point or a side out. As you get better, you won't elevate as many shots and, hopefully, you will be sticking with the BOUNCE advice. Every shot. The drop, the dink, the drive, the lob. Remember, if you bounce the ball on your opponents' side, you've expanded the possibility of them making mistakes. The bounce forces choices. Dink straight back. Opposite corner. Down the middle. Drive the ball. Lob the ball. Do everything with control and a bit of softness. With good choices comes more chance for error by your opponent. Force them to think. Force them to make choices. Make them move. And all the while, playing softer (and smarter) gives you and your partner time to square up, reset and rally a bit longer. I know you remember those good rallies and how all four of you shared compliments on a point well played.

I repeat. That's it. Simple advice shared with me fourteen years ago. Passed on to you....again. Thanks for checking in and reading (or re-reading). Now, take it out to the courts.

.....and that's my early Christmas gift to you. A reminder that keeping things simple is always a good way to go.

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