

PICKLEBALL RULES AND LINGO

WHAT IS PICKLEBALL?

Pickleball is a simple paddle game played using a perforated, slow-moving ball (similar to a wiffle ball) over a tennis-type net on a badminton-sized court. The rules are simple and the game is easy for beginners to learn! Pickleball is a ton of FUN! It is a great way to get and remain active. There are players of all ages and ability levels. Pickleball is also a very social sport – many friendships form via this wonderful game. Get out there, get active, make some new friends, and have fun!

HISTORY

Pickleball was invented in 1965 on Bainbridge Island, a short ferry ride from Seattle, WA. Three dads – Joel Pritchard, Bill Bell, and Barney McCallum - whose kids were bored with their usual summertime activities are credited for creating game. Pickleball has evolved from original handmade equipment and simple rules into a popular sport throughout the US and Canada. The game is growing internationally as well with many European and Asian countries adding courts.

RULES

Basic Rules Overview

- Pickleball is played either as doubles (two players per team) or singles; doubles is most common
- The same size playing area and rules are used for both singles and doubles (there is no 'alley' like in tennis)

The Serve

- The serve must be made underhand. It can be hit out of the hand or off of a bounce from a dropped ball.
- Paddle contact with the ball must be below the server's waist (navel level).
- The serve is initiated with at least one foot behind the baseline; neither foot may contact the baseline or court until after the ball is struck.
- The serve is made diagonally crosscourt and must land within the confines of the opposite diagonal court.
- Only one serve attempt is allowed.

Service Sequence

- Both players on the serving doubles team have the opportunity to serve and score points until they commit a fault *(except for the first service sequence of each new game).
- The first serve of each side-out is made from the right-hand court.
- If a point is scored, the server switches sides and the server initiates the next serve from the left-hand court.
- As subsequent points are scored, the server continues switching back and forth until a fault is committed and the first server loses the serve.
- When the first server loses the serve the partner then serves from their correct side of the court (except for the first service sequence of the game*).
- The second server continues serving until his team commits a fault and loses the serve to the opposing team.
- Once the service goes to the opposition (at side out), the first serve is from the right-hand court and both players on that team have the opportunity to serve and score points until their team commits two faults.
- In singles the server serves from the right-hand court when his or her score is even and from the left when the score is odd.

*At the beginning of each new game only one partner on the serving team has the opportunity to serve before faulting, after which the service passes to the receiving team.

Scoring

- Points are scored only by the serving team.
- Games are normally played to 11 points, win by 2.
- Tournament games may be to 15 or 21, win by 2.
- When the serving team's score is even (0, 2, 4, 6, 8, 10) the player who was the first server in the game for that team will be in the right-side court when serving or receiving; when odd (1, 3, 5, 7, 9) that player will be in the left-side court when serving or receiving.

Double-Bounce Rule

- When the ball is served, the receiving team must let it bounce before returning, and then the serving team must let it bounce before returning, thus two bounces.
- After the ball has bounced once in each team's court, both teams may either volley the ball (hit the ball before it bounces) or play it off a bounce (ground stroke).
- The double bounce rule eliminates the serve and volley advantage and extends rallies.

Non-Volley Zone

- The non-volley zone is the court area within 7 feet on both sides of the net.
- Volleying is prohibited within the non-volley zone. This rule prevents players from executing smashes from a position within the zone.
- It is a fault if, when volleying a ball, the player steps on the non-volley zone, including the line and/or when the player's momentum causes them or anything they are wearing or carrying to touch the non-volley zone including the associated lines.

- It is a fault if, after volleying, a player is carried by momentum into or touches the non-volley zone even if the volleyed ball is declared dead before this happens.
- A player may legally be in the non-volley zone any time other than when volleying a ball.
- The non-volley zone is commonly referred to as “the kitchen.”

Line Calls

- A ball contacting any line, except the non-volley zone line on a serve, is considered “in.”
- A serve contacting the non-volley zone line is short and a fault.

Faults

- A fault is any action that stops play because of a rule violation.
- A fault by the receiving team results in a point for the serving team.
- A fault by the serving team results in the server’s loss of serve or side out.
- A fault occurs when:
 - A serve does not land within the confines of the receiving court
 - The ball is hit into the net on the serve or any return
 - The ball is volleyed before a bounce has occurred on each side
 - The ball is hit out of bounds
 - A ball is volleyed from the non-volley zone
 - A ball bounces twice before being struck by the receiver
 - A player, player’s clothing, or any part of a player’s paddle touches the net or the net post when the ball is in play
 - There is a violation of a service rule
 - A ball in play strikes a player or anything the player is wearing or carrying
 - A ball in play strikes any permanent object before bouncing on the court

Determining Serving Team

Players use a coin toss to determine who will serve first. The winner of the coin toss will have the option to choose side or to serve or receive.

PICKLEBALL LINGO

Carry: Hitting the ball in such a way that it does not bounce away from the paddle but tends to be carried along on the face of the paddle during its forward motion.

Cross-court: The court diagonally opposite your court.

Dead Ball: A dead ball is declared after a fault.

Dink Shot: A soft shot that is intended to arc over the net and land within the non-volley zone.

Double Bounce: A ball that bounces more than once, on one side, before it is returned.

Double Hit: One side hitting the ball twice before it is returned over net. Double hits may occur by one player or could involve both players on a team.

Drop Shot: A groundstroke shot that falls short of the opponent's position.

Drop Shot Volley: A volley shot that is designed to "kill" the speed of the ball and return it short, near the net, to an opponent positioned at or near the baseline. This shot is especially effective when initiated close to the non-volley line.

Fault: A fault is any action that stops play because of a rule violation.

Groundstroke: Hitting the ball after one bounce.

Half Volley: A groundstroke shot where the paddle contacts the ball immediately after it bounces from the court and before the ball rises to its potential height.

Hinder: Any element or occurrence that affects play.

Lob: A shot that returns the ball as high and deep as possible, forcing the opposing side back to the baseline.

Non-Volley Zone: The section of court adjacent to the net in which you cannot volley the ball. It includes all lines surrounding the zone.

Second Serve: A term used to describe the condition when a serving team begins the game or subsequently loses the first of its two allocated serves.

Overhead Slam / Smash: A hard, overhand shot usually resulting from an opponent's lob, high return, or high bounce.

Passing Shot: A volley or groundstroke shot that is aimed at a distance from the player and is designed to prevent return of the ball.

Permanent Object: Any object near the court or hanging over the court that interferes with the flight of the ball. Permanent objects include the ceiling, walls, fencing, lighting fixtures, net posts, the stands and seats for spectators, the referee, line judges, spectators (when in their recognized positions) and all other objects around and above the court.

Rally: Continuous play that occurs after the serve and before a fault.

Replays: Any rallies that are replayed for any reason without the awarding of a point or a side out.

Service Court: The area on either side of the centerline, bounded by the non-volley line, the baseline, and the sideline. All lines are included in the service court except the non-volley line.

Side Out: Declared after one side loses its service and other side is awarded service.

Technical Foul: The referee is empowered to add one point to a player's score or a team's score when the opponent violates one of the rules calling for a technical foul or, in the referee's judgment, the opponent is being overly and deliberately abusive.

Volley: Hitting the ball in the air, during a rally, before the ball has a chance to bounce onto the court.

Content provided by the USA Pickleball Association (USAPA).