

# Pickleball Ratings: What Are They? How Are They Assigned? Why Should You Care?

*Please Note: This article is intended to provide information on how pickleball ratings are established and who might benefit from being rated. Many aspects of play go into a rating, and this article is intended to serve as a simple introduction to the process. The CMPC does not require its members to get rated, and it is up to each individual member to decide if he/she wants to get a rating.*

*Some players, especially those who want to participate in tournaments outside CantaMia, might benefit from getting themselves rated. Players who do not want to get rated can still enjoy play on the pickleball courts.*

*For those who want to be rated, it is up to you – not the CMPC – to set aside the time and to pay the fees and costs incurred.*

## **What is a Pickleball Rating?**

A pickleball rating is a number that is intended to tell the world your general skill level as a player. Many other sports have ways of assigning a skill level to individual players – for example, tennis has a rating system, and golf and bowling have a handicap system. In sports that have many individuals participating, and many competitive events spread across the country and the world, it is valuable to have an objective way to immediately establish which players are beginners, intermediate, or advanced.

Many major tournaments, and essentially all professional tournaments, require entrants to be rated, as a means of setting up balanced competitive brackets.

Also, in many communities in the U.S., players are required to be rated or to provide some estimate of a rating (specifically, a USAPA rating). The rating determines when and where residents can play. The goal is to ensure that court-time, which is a scarce resource, is used effectively for all players.

Not everyone wants to compete in tournaments and not everyone needs or wants to be rated. Players who are not competing in tournaments, however, might still choose to get an impartial, critical assessment of their skills.

## **How Are Pickleball Ratings Determined?**

Pickleball ratings are a number, and for the sake of this discussion they range from 1.0 (you just picked up a paddle and figured out which end is the handle) to 5.5 or over (you are a professional who competes regularly with other professionals for prizes). A very few of the world's best players have achieved ratings of over 6.0. This "legacy" system proceeds in increments of half-digits (e.g., a 2.0-level player advances to a level of 2.5, etc.), and is what most players use for amateur play.

There is also a 4-digit system used for professional level tournament play. If you are at this level you do not need to read this article.

## **What Do Ratings Indicate About a Player's Abilities?**

Over time, you will notice that some skills are crucial for winning consistently. Some categories that go into a rating are listed below, along with some examples of achievement in these categories:

1. Rules and Regulations: Do you understand how to keep score? Who should serve? What are legal serves? When has a shot has been hit out?
2. Positioning: Do you know where to stand during service? Where to position when play begins? How to position yourself in relation to your partner's play on the court?
3. Serving: Can you complete your serves consistently? Do you have a variety of serves (fast and low, high lobs, heavy spin, etc.)?
4. Return of Serves: Can you return hard serves? Serves with heavy spin? Can you consistently hit third shot drops?
5. Dinking: Can you dink accurately? Can you dink for many shots and long exchanges?
6. Shots and shot variety: Can you hit forehand and backhand shots consistently and accurately? Can you judge when to hit hard drives and when to place the ball away with a soft shot?
7. Lobbing: Can you lob against opponents effectively? Can you retrieve a lob hit by an opponent?
8. Volleying: Can you keep volleys alive over an extended number of exchanges?
9. Foot mobility: How well can you cover the court and retrieve shots that are placed far from you?
10. Strategy: Do you understand how to spot opponent weaknesses? How to adapt to an opponent's strengths?

This is a very simple overview of the many variables that a professional will look at when assigning a rating.

You will notice that ratings take into account both your mental focus (rules, positioning strategy) and consistency in play – especially in shot placement. The ratings system rewards players who can make many types of shots consistently. For example, a player who can serve a given number of times in a row without any faults will receive a better rating than a player who can only serve 75% or 80% of the time without faults.

For more in-depth discussion of ratings, some excellent reference resources are given below:

Pickleball Ratings Explained:

<https://pickleball.land/pickleball-ratings-explained/>

Pickleball Ratings – What is My Pickleball Skills Level?:

<https://www.pickleballmax.com/2020/04/pickleball-skill-ratings/>

USAPA Player Skill Rating Definitions:

[www.usapickleball.org/tournaments/tournament-player-ratings/player-skill-rating-definitions](http://www.usapickleball.org/tournaments/tournament-player-ratings/player-skill-rating-definitions)

## **How Do Players Receive a Rating?**

### A. Professional appraisal

For a small fee, anyone can arrange to be rated by a professional pickleball player. Over the course of one or two hours, the professional will watch you play, make shots and move on the court. Using the examples above and other variables, they will take notes and reach a conclusion.

### B. Self Appraisal

USAPA allows you to download their Skill Assessment Sheets for every level, from 1.0 to 5.5+ (refer to the link given later in this article). You can study these sheets and make a self-appraisal of your skills. If you are honest with yourself, you can compare your achievements to players against whom you play on a regular basis.

Please remember that a self-rating will not carry the authority of a USAPA professional rating, and this could affect your ability to register in certain tournaments.

### C. DUPR

DUPR is a phone app and system that enables players to enter information on their results every time they play. Over the course of a few games, DUPR will start to compile a record of wins vs losses, points scored and type of play entailed (recreational, league, tournament.) It is, in effect, similar to the handicap system used in golf and other sports, in which a player's performance is continually compared to his or her universe of peers to determine a ranking. DUPR charges a small subscription fee.

More information can be found on [www.support.mydupr.com](http://www.support.mydupr.com)

### **The Big Question: Why Should You Bother to get Rated?**

At the end of the day, you play against other players. You are in competition. Not all of you care about achieving pickleball greatness, but many of you will join in league play and tournaments simply for the benefit of meeting new people and forming new relationships.

It is therefore inevitable that you will find yourself in situations where you will have to claim a specific skill level. Optimism and positive thinking are admirable attributes, but over-confidence can lead to disappointment and wasted time when you sign up for competitive play. If you want to feel challenged, but at the same time feel like you have a good chance of winning, it could be a good idea to have a realistic assessment of where you stand relative to your peers.

And in the end, the more honest all of us are concerning our level of play, the better we will be able to grow our skills.

An accurate self-appraisal will allow you to:

- Identify the parts of your game that need improvement
- Choose your level of tournament competition for the best possible results
- Choose your partners with an eye to complementing your individual strengths and weaknesses.

Please remember that pickleball ratings are a tool. The system for assigning ratings tries to be objective, but there is still plenty of room for human interpretation. Instead of thinking of a rating as a final grade, think of it as a snapshot of where you are today, at this point in time. There is always time for growth and improvement.

“To thine own self be true.” Shakespeare, *Hamlet*.