

TECHNICAL TIP #3 LET'S KEEP OUR GAMES ENJOYABLE

Hello BVPA Pickleballers,

Happy New Year and welcome to the third edition in a series of occasional, somewhat irregular newsletters 😊, intended to provide informative, interesting and useful information about some of the technical aspects of pickleball.

I hope you found the first couple editions useful and interesting. For reference, you can find those initial editions on the Bow Valley Pickleball Association website under the following link:

<https://www.trackie.com/club/bow-valley-pickleball-association/1001036/technical-tip-of-the-month/2344/>

The BVPA community is experiencing rapid growth which is awesome and along with this growth comes the experience of playing pickleball with many people that we are meeting for the first time. Creating a fun, engaging culture is a key objective of the BVPA. This edition of the newsletter focuses on some suggestions around our individual & collective responsibilities to make the game more enjoyable for ourselves, our partners and our opponents. After all, the game is supposed to be fun, so let's consider what each of us can "do" and how we can "be" to make that fun happen.

So, what are some of the things that make a pickleball game more fun and what are things that make the game less fun in your opinion? In our association's collective goal to enhance the enjoyment of the game, here are some thoughts and suggestions from my perspective:

1. **Longer rallies** – We all smile and say 'great rally' when an extended rally happens whether we lose that rally or win it. Here are some skills, strategies and actions that are within our individual control to create longer rallies:
 - **Utilizing drop shots** is often a key to longer rallies as it puts the ball into areas on the court that lead to more strategic shots and unattackable balls. Continually working on and practicing the drop shot skill is a key to game improvement and game enjoyment. Recently Doug Thomson shared this excellent YouTube video on how to hit a drop shot. I encourage you to invest 15 minutes of your time as the video is extremely clear and helpful – your investment of time will payoff!
 - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bz2wXIKHXcs>
 - Here is the Coles notes summary – Remember the Three L's
 - Loose grip
 - Less swing
 - Lift the ball.
 - **Avoiding the urge to smash every ball** – yes you may win the rally (or you may lose the rally) but the rally is probably going to be done and over with quickly if everyone is hitting the ball as hard as they can 😊. Sometimes in the heat of the moment we all 'panic' momentarily and revert to a hard shot – it's easy to do but each of us can challenge ourselves to try a different shot in those situations. Hitting it hard has a much better chance of the ball going into the net or going long—the result—end of rally!

- **Fewer lob shots** – Have you ever noticed that a lob shot seems to lead to a quick end to the rally one way or another? Either the ball is hit long and out, or it is very difficult to return for the retreating player or the lob is short, and it gets smashed back at you. Three likely outcomes and all, usually, bring the rally to an end very quickly. The lob shot is a useful defensive weapon occasionally but used too often, especially offensively, is a rally (and fun) killer. **Note** - One more aspect of lob shots that isn't fun – sometimes injuries seem to occur when people are chasing down lob shots – Not fun! Do not back pedal to get a lob!!
 - **Not relying as much on the use of the serve to try and win points** – If your opponent clearly can't handle your serve then perhaps back off a bit and see if you can create a more competitive enjoyable game for all four people by not relying solely on the serve for points. Take it as an opportunity to improve other parts of your game and it will lead to longer rallies.
2. **More strategic precision shots** such as good drop shots, strategically placed block shots, crisp angular passing shots and well-placed dink shots all lead to longer rallies where all players gain from the experience.
 3. **Positive Feedback** – A 'good shot', 'nice drop', 'well done', 'good effort', 'that was the right shot even if it didn't work out' is always pleasant for both your partner and your opponent. Building camaraderie within our pickleball community definitely adds to the fun.
 4. **Being generous to your opponent on your ball "out" / "in" calls** – More on this topic in the section below.
 5. **Practicing skills** – We all have weaknesses in our game that we can work on. Part of the fun is practicing the skills needed to improve on those weaknesses. I think it also makes it more fun if we acknowledge each other's improvements and attempts at improvement in game moments. If you know someone is struggling with a particular shot but they are working diligently at using that shot in the right moment of the game, it is very beneficial to acknowledge that effort.
 6. **Always hitting to the perceived weaker player** -- Sure, it will likely get you points. But it will also alienate the perceived "better" player because they're not part of the action. It also impacts your game negatively because it doesn't challenge you to deal with better returns. Think about this.

You will have your own list on the topic above and it may vary from this one, but I do think it is helpful for all of us of to spend a few minutes consciously thinking about the concept of pickleball 'fun' and our individual responsibilities in making each game more enjoyable. Pickleball is generally a four-person game so each of us is 25% of the equation in whether the game itself is fun or not fun. One term that I like related to this overall topic is '**collaborative**' play. If everyone approaches each game in a 'collaborative' manner I would suggest that our overall enjoyment score will be higher.

Reflecting on your own game play, what are things you already do to make each game a collaborative experience? What areas of your game are you willing to expand in to further improve your game collaboration skills? How will you hold yourself accountable to the 'collaborative' challenge with the goal of making the game even more fun for yourself and your partners & opponents? All good questions to ponder before each session.

Out or In?

Recently, the official pickleball rules have changed with respect to whether a ball is called 'out' or 'in' with the goal of making the game more enjoyable for all. The simplest summary of this rule is as follows:

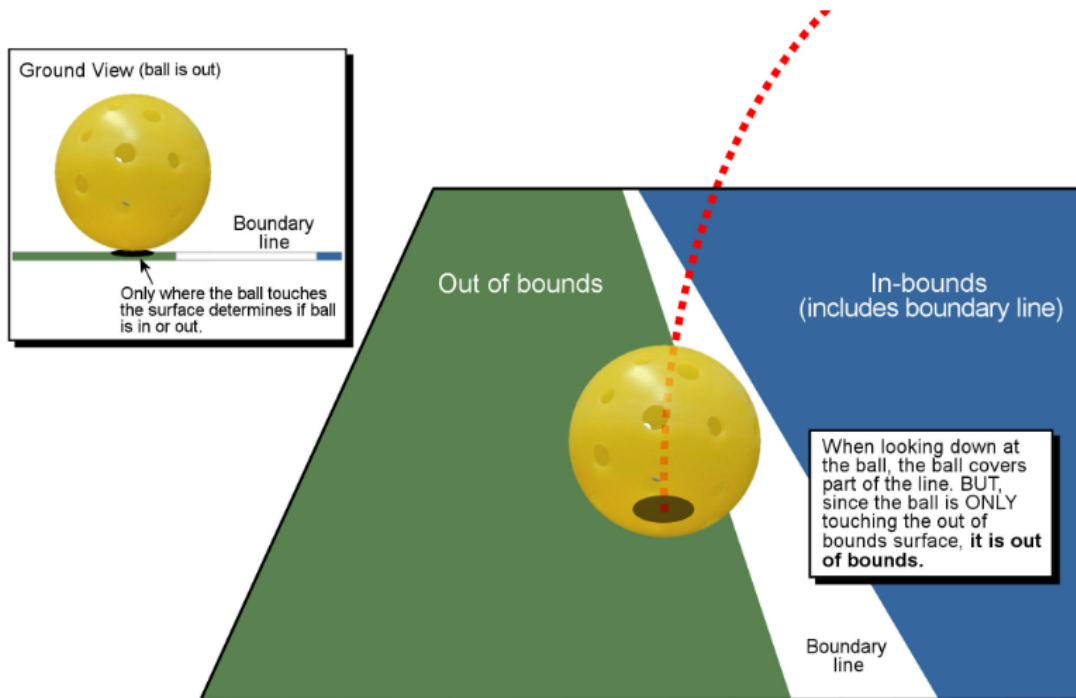
"The rule is that if you can see a gap between the ball and the line, the ball is called 'out'. If you do not see a gap and can't determine if the ball is out, the ball is 'in'."

What I like about this rule change is that as we all have experienced and know, it can be extremely difficult to determine whether a ball is actually in (touched the line) or out (did not touch the line). The speed and curvature of the ball often makes it impossible to see whether the ball is touching a line or not touching. There are so many additional factors that come into play - the ball is moving quickly, bad lighting, poor line markings, poor line of sight, bad eyesight (maybe just mine 😊) that also can affect an in/out call. A great bonus of this rule change is that it leads to longer rallies and it is very much in the spirit of 'collaborative' play which, of course, leads to More fun!

Key point to remember – you must be able to see a gap between the ball and the line for it to be called out. Thinking that there must be a gap or assuming there is a gap is not sufficient to call it out – in those situations the ball is 'in'. Call it "out" loudly and proudly. If it's in, just keep on playing.

The snapshot below gives a great visual of the rule:

Basics – Judging Ball ‘In’ or ‘Out’



From the above diagram, you can see there is a fine line for determining if a ball is actually 'in' or 'out'. The rule is that if you can see a gap between the ball and the line, the ball is 'out'. If you do not see a gap and can't determine if the ball is out, call it 'in'.

One additional point of clarification on out/in calls that sometimes leads to misunderstandings. The ball is not officially out or in until the ball lands on the ground and the determination is made according to the rule noted above. To reiterate, calling 'out' while the ball is still in the air means nothing other than verbal communication between two partners. Within the game's etiquette it is up to the receiving team to determine the line call. If there is a definite lack of agreement among all four players, then just re-serve the point and move on – the pickleball gods will sort it out over time!

One final note with respect to the concepts and ideas presented above. These are simply suggestions on techniques that can increase the "fun" in each game for all players. If all four players agree to play a highly competitive, "no holds barred" type of game then that in itself is a form of "collaborative" game. However, in reality, most of our BVPA games are not really of this type so let us work together to raise the collaborative play through a collective conscience which will increase the enjoyment of all the games as well.

Paddles Up! Keep smiling!