

Discussion Paper on Ratings for Pickleball

Members of YPA have one thing in common-their love of pickleball. At the same time, members have a diversity of interests and skills. Some love the social and recreational aspect of the game. Some appreciate the opportunities to learn and develop their skills. Some enjoy playing in competitive games with others of a similar skill level. We try to accommodate these diverse interests.

This year we ran a tiered round robin event on Sundays. We started with 3 levels and then created a fourth level. The names we used were: advanced, strong intermediate, intermediate, and novice. The intent was to have, within each skill level, a relatively small spread in skill, and thus competitive games. The board said we would assist players in selecting an appropriate level. Most players enjoyed playing with others at their skill level. But, to make this work, the board, from time to time, felt it was necessary to request that a player sign up in a different level. This was not done lightly, as we were acutely aware that this news would not be welcome.

The board wishes to relinquish the role of requesting a player to move down (or up) in levels. It is simply too controversial. And, with so many new players we no longer know all our members well enough to make an informed (although informal) assessment.

So, we are at a crossroad. We could eliminate all tiered round robins and simply offer open round robins, such as we currently offer on Fridays and Saturdays. This would make life easy for the board. But we feel it would be a disservice to many of our members. Open play is the only option at the Canada Games Centre. We want to provide an opportunity for competitive play. And, to do so, we need players to establish a formal “rating”.

What is a Rating System?

Ratings are a way of assessing each player’s skill level. Ideally the rating is a true reflection of the skill level of each player. The rating system used by Pickleball Canada is Pickleball Brackets. There are other rating systems, but they essentially are the same (think Pepsi versus Coke).

Rating systems are not perfect, especially when a club first establishes one. Why? When a player first signs up in Pickleball Brackets (PB) they are requested to self-evaluate and provide an “initial rating”. These ratings are even 0.5 increments. In other words, players declare their rating as either: 2.0, 2.5, 3.0, 3.5, or 4.0. The International Pickleball Teaching Professional Association (IPTPA) has produced skill assessment guidelines, for each of these levels. Here is a link to their rating skills assessments.

<https://iptpa.com/iptpa-rating-skills-assessment/>

Select a particular skill level (e.g. 3.0) and see what skills the IPTPA expects of a 3.0 player and what degree of consistency they expect (e.g. 6 out of 10). As you will see in the guidelines, players at a higher level are able to hit a greater variety of shots more consistently. Ideally, players should get an assessment from a professional assessor, who assesses several skills and a player's performance in both a modified game and regular game format.

We are planning to bring a certified assessor to Whitehorse on the May 11-12 weekend. Depending on interest, he could potentially assess up to 36 players. Unassessed players could reference assessments made of the assessed players as a guideline when they provide a "self-assessed" initial rating in PB. As a general guide, we expect that most players who have been playing in the "advanced" group will self assess as 3.5. Likewise, most "strong intermediate" are probably 3.0. Most "intermediate" are probably 2.5. and most "novices" are probably 2.0.

It is important to self-assess realistically. Some explanation for this can be found at: <https://pickleballcanada.org/ratings/self-assessment-skill-levels/>

Here is a self-assessment guidelines chart prepared by Pickleball Canada: <https://pickleballcanada.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/Ratings-Chart-EN.pdf>

Players' rating will be used to rank players from the highest rating to the lowest. This will be used to create a ladder league. For the league to be meaningful we will want to have a minimum of 30 players signed up each week. Even better would be 45 participants per week.

How does a player's rating evolve and become more accurate?

So, briefly, players would decide each week whether to sign up for the following Sunday league. (assuming we were playing indoors at Takhini). Every participant would be registered with PB and have a rating. Based on who signed up, and what their ratings are, PB software would group the top 5 rated players in group A, the next 5 in group B, and so on. If 30 players signed up then groups A, B, and C would play from 8-10, and groups D, E, and F would play from 10-noon. In Vernon with groups of 5, they play a round robin with each game to 15, win by 2. If the total number registered is not divisible by 5, the software makes groups of either 4 or 5, as required. In round robins with only 4 (and thus each player playing 3 games) in Vernon they play games to 21, win by 2. This works well within a 2-hour time frame.

The score in every game is recorded in PB. (In Vernon this is done by the players on-line at the end of each game). **The results of each game are used to adjust each player's rating.** PB uses a 3 decimal point rating, for example, a player who self assessed at 3.0 may

be rated after a few weeks at 3.146. Depending on the ratings of the others in their 4- or 5- person round robin, and depending on the results of the games, that player's rating next week could be, say, 3.205. Player ratings become increasingly more reliable as more data is captured on every player. Thus, over time, based on game results, players' rating become a more accurate reflection of their skill level, relative to other players in the club. Thus players will end up at a level with others with meaningful similar ratings, and consequently competitive games.

What next?

The board will have an outside certified assessor . Brooke Siver, from Kamloops, come to Whitehorse on May 11-12 weekend if there is interest in adopting Pickleball Brackets and establishing ratings. He charges \$35 per person and assesses a group of 4 at a time. Assessments take about one hour. We will want to know who would be willing to pay for such an assessment. Since most of our members will likely not get a formal assessment, we will need to set a timeline for players to register in Pickleball Brackets with a self assessment. We will only be able to set up a useful ladder league if we get a significant number of members (50-60?) registered in PB. This is a major shift for YPA. We would like to target the start our first PB ladder league for summer outdoor play. Hopefully, by next fall a significant number of players will have played enough games that their ratings will have migrated to a value which allows for a truly effective ladder league.