

Delta Pickleball - Member Ratings / Self Ratings

In my January newsletter, I wrote an editorial (aka my opinion) about player ratings. Some of the key points were:

1. Ratings in clubs can be both controversial and divisive;
2. Self ratings for players are often .5-.75 higher than their actual playing ability; and
3. It has proven itself to be the single most talked about and dividing issue in clubs across North America.

The results of players playing above their rating levels can be:

1. Watered down sessions for those players properly rated at those sessions;
2. Less competition and satisfaction with those sessions by properly rated players; and
3. Properly rated players feeling like they have no place to play within their DPA rated session.

The other main point that I stressed about our hope for DPA is that we are a social club first and foremost. We want people to enjoy playing and want to create more sessions where players can crossover and play with better players to try their skills and abilities. We have also started mentoring sessions that are designed to help players assess and improve their skills to play at their current level or seek to advance should they desire it.

Now I want to discuss the problem of “ratings creep” within our club. There are objective measures of what constitutes a player rated at each level. When you read those charts, they outline the skills, knowledge of the game, physical abilities and game attributes of players rated at each of the described levels. These descriptions can be found here: iptpa.com/iptpa-rating-skills-assessment/. If you don't meet those criteria in game situations (not just practice), then you are not at that level and should be playing lower. If you regularly enter tournaments at lower levels but play within the club .5-.75 rating points above that tournament level then you should be playing at the level you are entering tournaments in.

While we are hopeful that people are being responsible with their self ratings, there is a lot of evidence that suggests that too many of our members are rating themselves much too high for their skill set. In my previous newsletter I suggested that if your friend arbitrarily decides to increase their rating and you decide to join them then you are contributing to “ratings creep”. You will not get competition at the higher level because the players who are appropriately rated there will move on to find other sessions. While some may choose to stay and play, these sessions are often not fulfilling.

Within our club, ratings are a measure to attempt to equalize play within a session. By inappropriately changing their ratings, players engaged in this practice are creating (perhaps inadvertently) problems in our club. We utilize what we see in the spread of our members' ratings to help us create an appropriate schedule and when there is a significant amount of “ratings creep”, the information we use to try and put together a good schedule that meets everyone's needs is highly flawed, as is the resulting schedule.

For us as executives, the effects of this are numerous, full of friction and time consuming. When we get complaints from players frustrated with the “watered down” play within many of their rated sessions, we review this. But you can see that all of these investigations and discussions with these players that may be inappropriately rated are time consuming and uncomfortable. We need all of our members to be more accountable to the ratings description, realistic about their abilities and sign up to the appropriate sessions.

I am asking the following of all of our members:

1. If you have changed your rating with the last 6 months then please change it back. If you really feel that you should be rated at the higher level then you have three options:
 - a. Pay to get a professionally adjudicated rating; or
 - b. Earn your rating by entering a tournament at that level and perform competitively.
2. Do not sign up on a regular basis for sessions that you struggle to play at. Some of the “higher rated” sessions are not even playing at those levels because actual rated players are avoiding or vacating those sessions because of inadequate competition.
3. Talk to one of your Board members and ask them for advice.

As I mentioned in my player ratings editorial, it is difficult to actually move your rating .25 points. Some players take years to move that much. Personally, I have not moved my rating .25 points in 2 years (measured by the change in my tournament ratings against players appropriately rated at that level). While it is technically possible for a younger, very athletic player who has a background in other racquet sports to advance faster than that, the majority of players will, in reality, follow my pattern.

If you are one of the people who have changed your ratings then you are contributing to “ratings creep”. Inadvertently you are also contributing to conflict within our club which ultimately causes your volunteer board who are looking to focus on moving the club forward with player development, social sessions, creative new sessions, etc. to waste time considering these issues.

For some this will be a hard message. You don’t have to raise your level to have fun. If everyone signs up and plays at the appropriate level then there are so many opportunities to play and interact. For the good of the club and your fellow members, I am asking for all of your help with this matter.

Regards,

Landon Kitagawa
President, Delta Pickleball Association