

Pickleball Canada Club Rating Assessment Guide



Introduction to Club Rating Assessments

The purpose of this document is to assist pickleball clubs across the country in assessing their memberships' ratings. Ratings are very subjective and sometimes personal and this guide is meant to guide clubs to a consistent level of ratings.

Most clubs divide play between levels of players to ensure that participants are allowed to play with players of a similar level. Determination of this level can be controversial as often players believe that they are at a higher level than their skills dictate.

Levels at different clubs can vary wildly. My summer club in British Columbia simply divides play between advanced, intermediate, and recreational, while my winter club in Arizona divides play from 2.0 all the way up to 4.5 plus. Part of difference is due to the size of the club. The summer club has 300 members and the winter club has 1,000 members which causes you to have more levels of play.

The assessment provided here is based on the 3.5 level. This is generally the mid-point in skill ratings. It can be used to rate people from the 3.0 to 4.0 level.

This guide is broken into 3 parts:

- The Pickleball Canada Skill Level Guidelines – These guidelines outline the skills that must be demonstrated from 2.0 all the way up to 4.5 plus.
- An Assessment form that can be used to assist club raters in placing club members at various levels. It is broken into 2 parts:
 - Part 1 is a skill assessment
 - Part 2 is a performance assessment when players are playing a game against players at the level they aspire to achieve.
- Explanations as to how the raters should complete the Assessment form



Pickleball Canada Skill Level Guidelines

The following skill sets are a guide for evaluating your own skill level. They were developed to provide greater detail than guidelines listed by the USAPA on their website (www.usapa.org).

*** If a person cannot move quickly enough due to physical restrictions, then a rating will be reduced according to the physical limitations as related to playing the game.

2.0 Skill Level

- Moves in a balanced and safe manner
- Getting at least 50% of serves in the service court and returning 50% of serves
- Are learning where to stand on court during serves, returns and point play but are still not comfortable with some positions
- Knows the 2 bounce rule and applies it during games. Can keep score comfortably.
- Will have basic ground strokes with a very limited use of backhand, overhead, and volley.
- Capable of keeping ball in play for a couple of shots.

2.5 Skill Level

- Knows the basic rules including the “two bounce rule”, scoring
- Attempting to control forehand groundstroke (direction, depth, height over net)
- Attempting backhand groundstroke
- Getting 60% of serves in the service court and returning 60% of serve returns
- Knows where to stand as the server, server’s partner, and receiver
- Consistently Approaches the non-volley line for volleys
- Can keep the ball in play for longer lasting rallies
- Sometimes lobs with forehand
- Attempting to “dink” the ball at the net, can do so for short durations.
- Moves in a safe and balanced manner
- Developing good hand-eye coordination

3.0 Skill Level – (will ALSO possess most/all of the 2.5 skills)

- Knows basic rules including how to keep score
- Developing control on forehand groundstroke (placement, direction, depth)

- Developing control on backhand groundstroke (placement, direction, depth)
- Getting 70% of serves and return of serves “in”
- Striving to place serves deep into the court
- Beginning to develop placement of serves
- Uses deeper and higher returns of serve to allow time to approach the net
- Approaches the non-volley line quickly rather than staying back
- Sustains a short volley session at the net
- Exhibits correct court positioning for doubles and how to “move as a team”
- Beginning to use the forehand lob with some success
- Developing a sustained “dink” exchange at the net
- Attempting to hit a soft “drop shot” to approach the net (3rd, 5th, etc shot)
- Attempting to adjust to differing ball speeds (hitting & returning)
- Has good mobility
- Developing good hand-eye coordination

3.5 Skill Level – (will ALSO possess most/all of the 3.0 skills)

- Knows all the main rules including how to refigure the score and correct server
- Demonstrates control on forehand groundstroke (direction, depth and pace)
- Demonstrates some control on backhand groundstroke (direction, depth and pace)
- Getting 80% of serves and return of serves “in”
- Regularly placing serves deep into the court
- Regularly uses deeper & higher returns of serve to allow time to approach net
- Approaches the non-volley line quickly (when appropriate) rather than staying back
- Able to play with partners effectively. Beginning to use court strategies such as partner communication and team coverage of court
- Avoids hitting “out” balls
- Hitting the ball lower over the net consistently
- Developing a wide variety of shots with some consistency
- Learning when to use soft shots vs. power shots to their advantage



- Developing consistency on shot placement, including ability to create and hit “gaps”
- Sustains a short volley session at the net with some control and placement
- Initiates and maintains a sustained “dink” exchange at the net
- Able to execute a soft “drop shot” to approach the net (3rd, 5th, etc shot)
- Able to adjust to differing ball speeds consistently
- Developing ability to hit overheads with control
- Using a forehand and backhand lob when appropriate
- Developing patience in rallies
- Has good mobility
- Has good quickness
- Has good hand-eye coordination

4.0 Skill Level – (will ALSO possess all of the 3.5 skills)

- Controls and places 90% of both serves and returns of serves
- Consistent and dependable forehand and backhand groundstrokes, including directional control, depth, placement and pace.
- Consistent and dependable volleys, including some directional control, depth, placement and pace
- Consistent and dependable overheads, including some directional control, depth, placement and pace
- Has good accuracy in placing lobs
- Consistently makes successful “drop shots” from the back court to approach the net (3rd, 5th, etc shot)
- Regularly initiating and sustaining a “dink” exchange at the net until a “put away” shot is received
- Able to change from a soft shot strategy to a hard shot strategy, and vice versa
- Can block and return hard volleys
- Developing the ability to return overheads hit at their feet
- Can handle speed on shots without over-hitting or hitting out of bounds
- Moves effectively with partner, easily switching courts and communicating when required

- Can control play at the non-volley zone line, keeping their opponents back, driving them off the line and controlling the speed or placement of the ball
- Consistently uses shots to create and hit “gaps”
- Recognizes and exploits the weaknesses in their opponent’s game
- Can poach effectively
- Maintains patience in rallies
- Has good mobility *
- Has good quickness *
- Has good hand-eye coordination *

4.5 and 5.0 Skill Level

The 4.5 player is distinguished from the 4.0 player by increased skills, a higher level of strategy, quickness of hands, judicious use of power, superior placement of shots and consistently fewer unforced errors. The 5.0 player is even more consistent in all skills than the 4.5 player with very few, if any, unforced errors.



Assessment for Club/Rec Players

Name _____ Raters _____ + _____

Description of Skill		3.0	3.5	4.0
Forehand	Technique, direction, depth, (70%) consistency ie: IN 8-10 Reps			
Backhand	Technique, direction, depth, (50%) consistency ie: IN 8-10 Reps			
Serve	Consistency, Depth, Direction (80%) 6-8 Reps each side			
Serve Returns	Consistency, Depth, (75%) 6-8 Reps each side			
Drop Shots	Technique, consistency, (50-60%) success 10-12 Reps			
Dinks	Technique, placement, 5-6 dink rally minimum			

Performance

Skill Level Rating Assigned: _____

Description of Skill		3.0	3.5	4.0
Serve and Receive	Consistency depth			
Dinking	Sustain short dink rally with some control. 5-6 dinks			
Drop/Third Shots	Can initiate during game situation			
Court Movement/ Court Position	Can move with partner, Communicates, Right place/right time.			

Raters _____ + _____

Final Skill Rating Assigned: _____



Raters _____ + _____

Explanations on How to Complete the Assessment Form

Part 1 – Skill Assessment

This assessment is broken into 6 parts. For each part you should assess the skill as to whether it falls from the 3.0 to 4.0 level.

Ensure players are warmed up prior to commencing the assessment.

It is recommended that the person feeding the ball to the player be rated be at least one skill level higher than the level the person being rated aspires to.

Forehand

Begin with cross court forehands. The assessor is looking for the technique being used, depth and consistency (70% landing in the court aiming for). If the player can do the cross-court forehands successfully request that they try hitting the forehand down the line. Assuming the technique being used is reasonable and the depth is at least 3 quarters of the way to the baseline a consistency of 70% is required for a 3.5 rating and 85% for a 4.0 rating.

Backhand

Begin with cross-court backhands. The assessor is looking to ensure the technique being used is reasonable as well as depth and consistency. If the player can do the cross-court forehand successfully request that they try hitting the backhands down the line. The assessor is looking for depth of at least 3 quarters of the way to the baseline. Assuming the technique used is reasonable a consistency of 50% is required for a 3.5 rating and 75% for 4.0 rating.

Serve

Begin with serves on the server's forehand side. The assessor is looking for consistency (80%) and depth (to within 5 or 6 feet of the baseline). After the candidate has hit 5 or 6 serves have him try to hit targets (down the middle or to the sideline) again with depth. The ability to hit a target tells the assessor much about the player's ability.

Now repeat all the same drills from the backhand side.

Serve Returns

The assessor will serve 6 to 8 serves to the player and request that the player return the serves. We look for consistency (75%), depth (last 6 feet of court) and control. Generally I will have the player return cross court first. Then I will request that the player return the ball down the line.

Serves should go to the player on both sides of the court (at least 6 to 8 on each side). The assessor should ensure that at least some of the returns are done with player's backhand.

Third Shot Drops

This skill is often the skill that will determine whether or not a player is a 3.5 or above. Many players' believe that hitting hard shots are all you need to do to become a good player. While the ability to hit good hard shots are important, the ability to hit a 3rd shot drop allows you to become a well rounded player and introduce soft shots into your repertoire.



In this drill we will have the player hit cross-court 3rd shot drops. The shots should have an arc and should land within 6 inches of kitchen line. For a person to achieve a 3.5 rating success rate should at least be in the 50-60% range. After attempting 10-12 drops try the same from the other side of the court.

Technique is important for this skill. Players should bend their knees and use a lifting motion.

Dinks

This is a very important part of the soft game. Technique should be to bend knees and use a lifting motion. The assessor should move the player around the court and the successful candidate should be able to maintain a controlled rally of at least 5 or 6 without popping the ball up or hitting it into the net.

Performance Assessment

This portion of the assessment will determine how players perform during game play. The ideal scenario would for the player being rated to play with players who have already achieved the rating desired. In other words if a player wants to achieve a 3.5 rating he/she should demonstrate their ability to play with other 3.5 players.

It is important to note that winning games during this part of the assessment is irrelevant. We want the player being assessed to clearly demonstrate their ability to compete at the desired rating level. At the same time they need to demonstrate that they are able to demonstrate all the skills they were assessed on during the skill portion of this test.



Players may believe that by winning games and playing the power game they are competing with players within their rating group. However, many players forget about the soft part of the game during this portion of the assessment. It is important that the assessor remind players during the games to demonstrate all skills.

If the assessed player does not demonstrate at least some third shots drops and dinking ability during the game section of the assessment they cannot achieve a 3.5 level