

Cochrane Pickleball Skill Level Guidelines

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

2.0 Skill Level - Assigned to those who have completed Introductory Course

Basic Skills

- Moves in a balanced and safe manner
- Knows the 2 bounce rule and applies it during games. Can keep score comfortably.
- Can execute forehand, serve and serve return. Is attempting a backhand groundstroke.
- Are learning where to stand on court during serves, returns and point play but are still not comfortable with some positions

Critical Skills

- 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 – As observed by a qualified member of the Ratings Committee

Basic Skills

- Moves in a safe and balanced manner
- Developing good hand-eye coordination
- Knows the basic rules including the “two bounce rule”, and scoring
- Attempting to control forehand groundstroke (direction, depth, height over net)
- Attempting backhand groundstroke
 - Can execute serve and serve return more consistently

Critical Skills

- 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
- Attempting to “dink” the ball at the net.
- Becoming more proficient at all basic strokes

3.0 Skill Level – Must successfully complete an assessment by the Ratings Committee and be approved by the Ratings Chairperson

(will ALSO possess most/all of the 2.5 skills)

Basic Skills

- Knows basic rules including how to keep score
- Getting most of serves and return of serves “in”
- Beginning to develop placement of serves, including lob serve, and deep serves
- Beginning to use the forehand lob with some success
- Showing more consistency in all strokes, including better control
- Attempting to adjust to differing ball speeds (hitting & returning)
- Has good mobility
- Developing good hand-eye coordination

Critical Skills

- Developing control on forehand and backhand groundstrokes (placement, direction, depth)
- Approaches the non-volley line quickly rather than staying back
- Moving as a team to approach NVZ (non volley zone)
- Punch Volley to back half of opponents court
- Sustains a short volley session at the net
- Exhibits correct court positioning for doubles and how to “move as a team”
- Developing a “dink” exchange at the net, using cross court and straight across
- Can perform a baseline 3rd shot drop to approach the net with some success
- Using 3rd shot drop during game play with some success

3.5 Skill Level– Must successfully complete an assessment by the Ratings Committee and be approved by the Ratings Chairperson.

(will ALSO possess most/all of the 3.0 skills)

Basic Skills

- Knows all the main rules including how to refigure the score and correct server
- Can regularly place serves deep into the court
- Can use deeper & higher returns of serve to allow time to approach net
- 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
- Learning when to use soft shots vs. power shots to their advantage (make better choices)
- Developing consistency on shot placement, including ability to create and hit “gaps”
- Beginning to adjust to differing ball speeds (fast to slow)

- Developing ability to hit overheads with control
- Using a forehand and backhand lob when appropriate

Critical Skills

- Getting 80% of serves and return of serves “in” Serve should have more consistency in depth and beginning to have placement
- Demonstrates control on groundstrokes, forehand and backhand (direction, depth and pace)
- Approaches the non-volley line quickly (when appropriate) rather than staying back
- Sustains a short volley session at the net with some control and placement. Developing blocking skills to “deaden the ball”
- Initiates and maintains a sustained “dink” exchange at the net, beginning to aggressively dink
- Consistently executing a 3rd “drop shot” to approach the net (3rd, 5th, etc shot) Can reset the ball into the opponents NVZ from the transitions zone with some consistency.
- Developing patience in rallies

4.0 Skill Level – Must successfully complete an assessment by the Ratings Committee and be approved by the Ratings Chairperson

(will ALSO possess all of the 3.5 skills)

- Consistent and dependable forehand and backhand groundstrokes, including directional control, depth, placement and pace.
- Consistent and dependable overheads, including some directional control, depth, placement and pace
- Has good accuracy in placing lobs
- Ability to maintain a “dink” exchange at the net until a “put away” shot is received.
- Can block and return hard volleys
- Developing the ability to return difficult shots hit at their feet
- Can handle speed on shots without over-hitting or hitting out of bounds
- 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
- Recognizes and exploits the weaknesses in their opponent’s game.
- Learning to poach effectively

Critical Skills

- Controls and places greater than 90% of both serves and returns of serves. Can place serves effectively, using depth, and pace
- Consistent and dependable volleys, including some directional control, depth, and pace. Has good use of “punch volley”
- Consistently makes successful “drop shots” from the back court to approach the net (3rd, 5th, etc shot)

- Ability to dink aggressively, using depth, and placement to unsettle opponents. Can create “opportunities” for put away shots.
- Able to change from a soft shot strategy to a hard shot strategy, and vice versa
- Moves effectively with partner, easily switching courts and communicating when required.
- Consistently uses shots to create and hit “gaps”
- Maintains patience in rallies (improved shot choices)
- Makes fewer unforced errors.

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, ability to change shot speeds from fast to slow, superior placement of shots, better shot choices, 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.

All players are encouraged to familiarize themselves with these skills. Whether it is to identify the skills they already have or those they need to achieve the next level.