

Assigning courts by Skill Level

Assigning courts by skill can be a challenge, but we are trying this at a request of some members. Below are some skill guidelines that might be helpful in identifying the best place for you. Help us work through the transitions to determine the best plan for our club as we put some trials into action. Most importantly, be patient and let the system have a chance to work.

Here's a sample of how we would like to set up the present plan to assign courts by skill level 3 times per week.

We can label the four courts like this:

- Court 1 – beginners and recreational players (SW court)
- Court 2 – intermediate players (SE court)
- Court 3 – upper intermediate players (NE court)
- Court 4 – advanced competitive players (NW court)

*Note: These guidelines are a compilation from several sources.

– **Beginners:** If you are just learning the fundamentals of the game, you are a beginner! You might have paddle skills, but you need to learn how to serve, the two-bounce rule, how to keep score, and the non-volley (kitchen) zone rules. You probably look to your partner to help with position and some rules.

– **Recreational players:** You know how to serve and keep score, and you understand the two bounce and non-volley zone rules. You tend to hang at the baseline and drive the ball, or you stop in no man's land (3-6' behind the kitchen line.) You can hit the ball if it comes to you, but with little strategy or control. You may have some mobility problems that keep you from playing in the optimal position, but you love the game, the people and the exercise it provides.

– **Intermediate players:** You are beginning to learn the soft game, but you have more success hitting it hard, so that's what you usually do. Your serving goal is simply to get it in, and have no aim point yet. You are starting to come to the kitchen line, but often you step back to let the ball bounce, or when the tempo of the rally speeds up. You hit some lobs, but not for any good offensive or defensive reason. You drive low shots, causing them to go into the net, long or right onto your opponent's waiting paddle. You try to use spin, but not with intended purpose or control. You have longer rallies due to your athletic ability, but you often choose power over control.

– **Upper intermediate players:** You have a better ability to see the “whole” court and are placing your shots. You realize the power of hitting to the middle, and are also starting to hit some angled shots. You are comfortable playing at the kitchen line and quickly get back to it when having to step back. You are able to use power or soft shots to set up points. You apply spin with a purpose and are more aware of your opponent’s court position.

– **Advanced Competitive players:** You are able to use a variety of shots including lobs, spin, dinks and drive shots with a purpose and at the right time. You are very comfortable playing at the kitchen line and return to it quickly when forced back. You are more patient and choose shots based on your opponent’s position, or weakness. Keeping the ball in play is more important than forcing a low percentage shot. You use the dink to move your opponent and create an opening. You can hit serves to your opponent’s forehand or backhand, resulting in an occasional ace.

Court skill assignments are not meant to box anyone into one court. At another session, players can move to the court above or below their level. This will allow players to compete one level higher and will help them improve. They should however, be considerate and not move two levels until they have achieved the appropriate skills to offer a good game at that level.

On the first day or 2, players may be confused and perhaps somewhat resistant. Some will consider themselves higher skilled than they actually are. The important thing is to be patient! These issues will work themselves out.

Remember that skill sorting is not a plot to segregate the advanced players from everyone else. It is simply a way to provide the best games for everyone. There is no intent to try to direct players to specific courts unless asked, OR if it’s obvious that someone is continually bringing down the level of play on a higher skilled court. Pickleball is to be fun, and there is no intent to hurt feelings or create conflict.

Everyone is there to play.