

PICKLE SMART

SMART PICKLEBALL WINS

PICKLE SMART ACADEMY
MEMBER MANUAL



SEPTEMBER 5, 2025
SAN CARLOS PICKLEBALL CLUB
KEVIN DUFF

INDEX

| | |
|-------------------------------|----|
| INTRODUCTION..... | 1 |
| ELIGIBILITY..... | 1 |
| TERM..... | 1 |
| CANCELLATION AND REFUNDS..... | 1 |
| BENEFITS AND SERVICES..... | 2 |
| BENEFITS..... | 2 |
| Kickoff Party..... | 2 |
| Drill Manual..... | 2 |
| Fitness Manual..... | 3 |
| Mindset Manual..... | 3 |
| WhatsApp Group..... | 3 |
| Meetups..... | 4 |
| Training Sessions..... | 4 |
| Skill Share Program..... | 4 |
| Progress Check-ins..... | 5 |
| Farewell Party..... | 5 |
| SERVICES..... | 5 |
| Private Lessons..... | 6 |
| Semi-Private Lessons..... | 6 |
| Group Lessons..... | 6 |
| Workshops..... | 7 |
| Gameplay Assessments..... | 7 |
| Video Assessments..... | 7 |
| Tournament Coaching..... | 8 |
| Pickle Fit Classes..... | 8 |
| MEMBERSHIP PLANS..... | 9 |
| STANDARD..... | 9 |
| PLUS..... | 9 |
| PRO..... | 9 |
| COMPARISON..... | 10 |
| TRAINING RECOMMENDATIONS..... | 11 |
| ASSESSMENT..... | 12 |

| | |
|-------------------------|----|
| PRIORITIZATION..... | 12 |
| ACQUISITION..... | 14 |
| CONTINUAL LEARNING..... | 15 |

INTRODUCTION

This document outlines the benefits, requirements, and policies associated with membership in the Pickle Smart Academy (hereafter referred to as "the academy"). It is intended to help you understand what academy membership entails and how to make the most of the services and support provided.

For questions about the academy or to enroll, please contact the academy Director and San Carlos Pickleball Club (SCPC) Teaching Professional, Kevin Duff, via text or WhatsApp at +52 622 147 2979, or by email at kvnduff@gmail.com.

ELIGIBILITY

To join the academy, you must be a current SCPC member in good standing. Academy dues must be paid prior to participating in any academy training or events.

There are no skill-level requirements for enrollment. All coaching is personalized based on each member's current level, physical ability, and playing style. The academy instructor has extensive experience coaching players from novice to expert level.

TERM

Membership in the academy is valid for six months from the date of registration. Members receive access to academy training, events, and benefits during this term. To continue participating beyond the six-month period, members must renew their academy membership.

Members are responsible for using the services and benefits included in their membership during the active term. Unused lessons or services do not carry over and are not eligible for refund or credit. Exceptions may be made in cases where the academy is unable to deliver services, such as an extended instructor injury or unforeseen program suspension, in which case appropriate accommodations or partial refunds may be offered at the academy's discretion.

CANCELLATION AND REFUNDS

You will receive a two-week trial period from your date of enrollment. Within this two-week trial period you can choose to leave the academy and you'll receive a full refund. After the two-week trial, if you choose to cancel then you'll be refunded the prorated amount based on the number of days remaining in your academy term from the date of cancellation.

If a member is suspended or banned from SCPC, their academy membership will be suspended or permanently terminated accordingly, with no refund issued in either case.

BENEFITS AND SERVICES

As a member of the academy, you'll receive both free benefits and access to a range of optional paid services to support your individual growth. The specific benefits you're eligible for and the services included in your membership depend on your membership type, with each type designed to offer varying levels of instruction, resources and support (see the Membership Options section for details).

BENEFITS

Benefits are considered free "perks" for enrolling in the academy. Academy benefits include social events, resources, and training. Members are encouraged to take advantage of their membership benefits, as they are designed to enhance the academy experience both on and off the court. Active participation helps foster personal growth, build community connections, and refine skills introduced during instruction.

Kickoff Party

The kickoff party, held off-site in early November, marks the official launch of the academy season. It's more than just a social gathering. It's a chance to connect with fellow members, share a meal, and start building the sense of community that defines the academy experience. The party will include a short presentation outlining the year ahead - what to expect, how to take full advantage of the academy, and tips for structuring your training to maximize progress. Whether you're new or returning, this event sets the tone for a fun and focused season.

Drill Manual

This manual provides a comprehensive set of drills you can use to target the skills you're committed to improving. Think of it like a versatile toolbox that contains the tools you need to build, refine, and reinforce different parts of your game. The manual includes drills to help you serve more accurately, dink more consistently, refine your footwork, improve your decision making, and much, much more! The manual follows the "3S approach", a framework developed specifically for this manual to guide players through progressive stages of skill development. Drills are categorized as shots, scenarios and simulations based on the type and purpose of training. Together, these categories provide a complete pathway from technique development to applied competition. *Shot* drills include technical repetition. These are simple, structured drills designed to groove mechanics and build consistency without scoring or role complexity. *Scenario* drills introduce specific court situations where players take on defined roles to practice movement and positioning, shot selection and targets, and overall decision making and strategy. Scoring formats are optional and the drill layout is more involved. *Simulation* drills are modified gameplay drills with a stronger emphasis on overall performance. These drills are designed to mimic real

match dynamics and help players transition from structured practice into full play, while still targeting specific skills and tactics.

Fitness Manual

Pickleball players of all ages can boost performance and prevent injuries by improving fitness. For older adults in particular, maintaining and enhancing fitness becomes increasingly important, not only for sports performance, but for long-term joint health, mobility, and quality of life. Pickleball requires rapid directional changes and acceleration, sustained rallies, and stability while under pressure or fatigued. These physical challenges can strain the body, especially as it ages. The fitness manual provides evidence-based training protocols designed to improve fitness and performance in older adults according to the specific movement demands of pickleball. Each section is organized around a key component of fitness including flexibility (static and dynamic stretching), strength, power, agility and speed. The protocols are built on established principles from sports science and draw from best practices in similar racquet sports such as tennis and badminton. The exercises and progressions are selected with older adults in mind, focusing on practical methods that reduce injury risk while promoting athletic development. Also included is a section describing best practice for warming up and cooling down pre- and post-exercise.

Mindset Manual

The mindset manual will provide you with tailored strategies to cultivate mindfulness, sharpen mental clarity, and master the psychological aspects of the game. Within this comprehensive manual, you'll explore goal setting techniques designed to clarify your intentions and drive purposeful practice. You'll harness the power of mental imagery and visualization to vividly rehearse success, enhancing muscle memory and preparation. Strategies for building confidence will reinforce belief in your abilities, while techniques for handling pressure and anxiety will equip you to perform calmly in high-stakes situations. Additionally, you'll learn to sustain focus and concentration amid distractions, develop effective routines and pre-performance rituals, and refine your emotional control to maintain composure throughout matches. Embracing the principles of a growth mindset, you'll transform setbacks into opportunities for continuous improvement and resilience. The mindset manual includes 50 practical strategies, blending academic insights and examples from elite pickleball players. Ultimately, the mental skills and strategies you'll develop will not only elevate your pickleball performance but also empower you to navigate life's challenges with greater confidence and determination.

WhatsApp Group

All current and former academy members are invited to join the Pickle Smart Academy WhatsApp group. The group is a central hub for academy communications and community engagement. Important

announcements, schedule updates, and event reminders are shared here, ensuring members stay informed and connected. The group also serves as an interactive space for discussion, questions, and friendly debate. To keep things fun and educational, themed content is posted weekly, including *Technique Tuesday*, *Fun Friday*, and *Strategy Saturday*. Members are encouraged to participate actively and contribute to the ongoing exchange of ideas, insights, and support.

Meetups

Each month, academy members are invited to take part in a themed meetup designed to strengthen community and elevate play. These gatherings may take many forms including off-court presentations, focused on-court instruction, structured or unstructured social play, or friendly competitions. Occasionally, select high-level non-members will be invited to join certain meetups, offering a fresh challenge and opportunities for informal mentorship. Beyond skill development, these events are about building camaraderie, reinforcing shared goals, and staying inspired throughout the season. A meetup schedule will be provided to members at the kickoff party.

Training Sessions

Weekly training sessions are a key component of the academy's instructional program. These sessions blend focused coaching with drills from the 3S approach - *shots*, *scenarios*, and *simulations* - providing a progressive pathway from technical repetition to applied match play (see the drill manual section for more details). Players are grouped primarily by skill level, particularly during competitive simulation drills, to ensure appropriate challenge and development. However, some mixing may occur during technical drills, for which execution is less dependent on skill level. Each session is followed by a short debrief posted in the WhatsApp group, summarizing what was covered and offering suggestions for continued improvement. These debriefs also serve to keep members who couldn't attend up to date with the key themes and drills from the session. Participants are encouraged to share feedback and reflections, helping shape future training and fostering a culture of collaborative learning.

Skill Share Program

New to the academy this year, the skill share program is a peer-driven initiative designed to promote mentorship, exposure, and growth through cross-level play. The program gives members the opportunity to schedule play or drill sessions with players above their current level in a structured and mutually beneficial way. Each participant begins with one skill share credit, which can be used to organize a session with two players from a higher skill tier. These sessions are a chance for lower-level players to be challenged, observe advanced play firsthand, and receive informal mentorship and guidance. For the higher-level players, it's a chance to solidify their own understanding by teaching and to work on aspects of their game that are harder to address during competitive matches. When higher-

level players accept a session, they earn a credit of their own, allowing them to "trade up" for sessions with players of even higher caliber. This creates a continuous cycle of knowledge sharing, motivation, and development across the academy community.

Progress Check-ins

Weekly progress check-ins are available for pro-level academy members as a way to stay accountable, troubleshoot barriers, and ensure continued momentum toward personal goals. These check-ins may take place online, by phone, or in person, either on or off the court, depending on preference and availability. During each check-in, you'll briefly review your current focus areas, assess what's working, and identify any challenges or bottlenecks that may be limiting progress. The goal is to provide regular touch points for reflection, refinement, and support as your training evolves.

Farewell Party

Scheduled for mid-April, the farewell party offers a chance to celebrate the season's progress including skills gained, connections made, and milestones reached. Held at the courts, you can join a few casual games and still plenty of time to socialize, all in a lively and celebratory atmosphere. The highlight of the evening is an informal awards ceremony recognizing both genuine achievements and lighthearted moments from the season, ensuring the event ends with plenty of laughs and lasting memories. And of course, continuing the tradition from the inaugural season, all members will receive their very own custom pickleball playing card - a unique keepsake that celebrates the spirit of the academy.

SERVICES

Pickle Smart offers a wide range of instructional services. Each service is unique and will benefit different aspects of your game. The services have been rated in terms of personalization (P), assessment (A), repetition (R), technique (T) and strategy (S).

Personalization: Customization for your own unique skills and abilities.

Assessment: Amount of technique/strategy analysis and feedback.

Repetition: Amount of on court drilling.

Technique: Focus on technique, the way in which you move and swing.

Strategy: Focus on tactics and strategy, the decisions you make on the court.

Please note that some instructional services are included as part of the plus and pro member plans. Academy members receive a 15-20% discount on all services compared to non-academy members.

Private Lessons



1 person



P A R T S



personalization = max, assessment = max, repetition = mod, technique = mod, strategy = mod

During a private lesson you'll receive individualized guidance to help you refine your skills in a supportive environment. Working one-on-one with the teaching pro provides you the opportunity to receive instruction on the specific areas of your game that need improvement such as movement and positioning, shot selection, stroke technique, and overall strategy. It's also ideal for learning new skills that are challenging to learn in a group setting such as split-stepping, the reset shot, and the two-handed backhand. You'll receive a video recording of the lesson and comprehensive lesson notes which are useful for reviewing your lesson and tracking your improvement over time. The discounted academy price is 1,000 pesos per hour.

Semi-Private Lessons



2-3 people



P A R T S



personalization = mod, assessment = mod, repetition = mod, technique = mod, strategy = mod

A semi-private lesson is perfect for partners or friends who want to improve together. The small group size keeps the learning experience intimate and impactful while also allowing you to focus on partner dynamics and overall gameplay strategy. You'll receive a video recording of the lesson and comprehensive lesson notes which are useful for reviewing your lesson and tracking your improvement. The discounted academy price is 600 pesos per person per hour(2 people) or 500 pesos per person per hour (3 people).

Group Lessons



4-8 people



P A R T S



personalization = min, assessment = min, repetition = mod, technique = mod, strategy = mod

Gather a group of friends or join other players of similar skill levels for a fun, engaging session. The teaching pro will guide the group through targeted drills, skill-building exercises, and mini-games to improve technique and strategy. Group lessons help build camaraderie and facilitate a fun and supportive learning environment. You'll receive a video recording of the lesson and comprehensive lesson notes which are useful for reviewing your lesson and tracking your improvement over time. The discounted academy price is 400 pesos per person per hour.

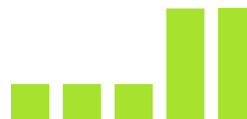
Workshops



6-8 people



P A R T S



personalization = min, assessment = min, repetition = min, technique = max, strategy = max

Workshops are in-depth, theme-based sessions designed to enhance a particular aspect of your game. Each workshop is two hours long and includes group discussion and custom drills. You'll receive a comprehensive handout that includes all of the workshop's content. The workshop curricula includes a wide variety of workshops with different streams (shots, movement and position, strategy) and levels (novice, intermediate, advanced). Weekly workshops are scheduled every Wednesday afternoon at 1PM and private workshops can also be booked for a minimum of six and a maximum of eight participants. A detailed list of workshops and the workshop schedule is available on Court Reserve or by request. The discounted academy price is 300 pesos per person.

Gameplay Assessments



3 people



P A R T S



personalization = none, assessment = max, repetition = none, technique = none, strategy = none

This interactive session gives you the chance to play with and against the teaching pro while receiving immediate, actionable feedback. Unlike traditional lessons, the focus here is not on isolated skills and drills but on recognizing and correcting mistakes as they happen. The format is fast-paced and situational, making it ideal for players who want to refine their tactical awareness and decision-making under pressure. While not as in-depth as a full video assessment, this session offers focused, real-time feedback you can start applying right away. With the gameplay assessment you'll be provided a video recording of your play session so you can review your play and the feedback provided. The discounted academy price is 500 pesos per person per hour.

Video Assessments



1 person



P A R T S



personalization = none, assessment = max, repetition = none, technique = none, strategy = none

How can you improve unless you're aware of the skills you need to develop? During the assessment, you'll be video recorded drilling for 30 minutes and playing games for another 30 minutes. With your assessment, you'll receive an assessment video, log, and report. The log is a spreadsheet that includes a

list of observations. While watching your video, it's useful to link these observations with your play in real time using the time stamps in the log. The report is a comprehensive document including an overall summary and roadmap for improving your game. The price is 1,500 pesos and this service is only available to academy members.

Tournament Coaching

2 people

P A R T S



personalization = mod, assessment = max, repetition = min, technique = min, strategy = mod

This package was developed for doubles teams wanting to perform their best. You and your partner will receive a pre-tournament lesson where you can fine tune your teamwork and strategy. During the tournament, the teaching pro will watch and video record a minimum of two of your matches, providing feedback during timeouts as well as post-match insights. After the tournament, you'll review the videos with the teaching pro to identify what worked well and what could be improved for your next tournament. The price is 1,500 pesos per person and this service is only available to academy members.

Pickle Fit Classes

8-12 people



New this year, Pickle Fit classes are a way for you to work on your pickleball-specific fitness! The classes focus on improving strength, power, agility and speed. You can expect improved reaction time, quicker court coverage, greater endurance and fewer aches and pains if you regularly complete structured pickleball fitness training. Ultimately, doing so will allow you to improve your health, spend more time on the court, compete at a higher level, and get even more enjoyment playing the sport you love. The price for academy members is 80 pesos per person per class (one hour), 350 pesos for a five-class pass, and 650 pesos for a ten-class pass.

MEMBERSHIP PLANS

The Pickle Smart Academy offers three distinct membership plans - Standard, Plus, and Pro. Each plan is designed to meet different levels of availability, commitment, and preferred level of guidance. Whether you're looking for flexible access to instruction or a fully immersive training experience, there's an option that fits your needs. Below is a written description summarizing each membership plan, however, please refer to the comparison chart for more specific details. The Plus and Pro plans offer increasing levels of value, with greater discounts and more included services and benefits in each plan.

STANDARD

The Standard plan is ideal for players who want to stay involved and improve at their own pace. Several benefits are included such as access to the drill manual, weekly training sessions, monthly meetups, and social events, while keeping instruction on a pay-per-service basis. You'll have the flexibility to book lessons, workshops, assessments and other services as needed. This is a great entry-level plan for players who prefer to customize their own training program.

Price: 5,000 pesos. Your payment is applied entirely as credit toward instructional services - no extra fees or hidden costs. If you burn through your credit then additional services can be purchased at the discounted prices listed in the services section.

PLUS

The Plus membership bridges the gap between the flexibility of the Standard plan and the all-inclusive Pro plan. In addition to the benefits in the Standard plan, Plus members also receive access to the fitness and mindset manuals. Plus members receive a curated package of instructional service to provide structure and accountability. The Plus plan includes five private lessons, four workshops, two gameplay assessments, one video assessment, and five Pickle Fit classes. This plan is ideal for motivated players who want consistent coaching and community involvement while maintaining flexibility.

Price: 10,000 pesos. Your payment covers all benefits and services included in the plan. Additional services can be purchased at the discounted prices listed in the services section. Please note that the Plus plan only includes the individual member's fee for the gameplay assessments and tournament coaching package services (other participants are required to pay their fees).

PRO

The Pro membership is the academy's most comprehensive plan. It includes all the benefits of the Plus plan, along with weekly progress check-ins to help track your development and ensure steady progress toward your goals. Pro members receive eight private lessons, six workshops, two gameplay

assessments, two video assessments (start and end of season), one tournament coaching package, and ten Pickle Fit classes. This plan is for players who are serious about levelling up and want a guided pathway for maximum improvement.

Price: 15,000 pesos. Your payment covers all benefits and services included in the plan. Additional services can be purchased at the discounted prices listed in the services section. Please note that the Plus plan only includes the individual member's fee for the gameplay assessments and tournament coaching package services (other participants are required to pay their fees).

COMPARISON

The table below outlines the specific benefits and services included in each membership tier. Use this chart to more easily compare what's included in the Standard, Plus, and Pro plans and determine which option best fits your training goals and level of involvement.

| | Standard | Plus | Pro |
|----------------------------|-----------------|--------------|--------------|
| Benefits | | | |
| Kickoff party | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Training sessions (weekly) | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Progress check-ins | -- | -- | ✓ |
| Drill manual | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Fitness manual | -- | ✓ | ✓ |
| Mindset manual | -- | ✓ | ✓ |
| Meetups (monthly) | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Skill share program | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| WhatsApp group | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Farewell party | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Services | | | |
| Private lessons | -- | ✓ (5) | ✓ (8) |
| Workshops | -- | ✓ (4) | ✓ (6) |
| Gameplay assessments | -- | ✓ (2) | ✓ (2) |
| Video assessments | -- | ✓ (1) | ✓ (2) |
| Tournament coaching | -- | -- | ✓ (1) |
| Pickle Fit classes | -- | ✓ (5) | ✓ (10) |
| Pricing | | | |
| Structure | pay-per-service | package | package |
| Price | 5,000 pesos | 10,000 pesos | 15,000 pesos |

TRAINING RECOMMENDATIONS

Taking pickleball instruction or being a member of the academy does not guarantee your pickleball performance will improve. Like anything in life, improvement takes time and effort. Success in the academy is a collaborative effort. You'll work closely with the teaching pro to refine your skills and train with other members to push each other forward. The academy provides a supportive environment for intentional practice, mutual growth, and shared progress. Together we are stronger.

To get the most out of your academy experience, it's recommended that you participate in a variety of instructional services with the teaching pro and dedicate time to refining your skills through both drilling and gameplay. How much instruction you take, and the degree to which you drill and play, will vary based on your individual goals and preferences. At a minimum, it's suggested that members complete at least one assessment, take semi-regular lessons (1–4 per month), and attend the weekly training sessions. These services are bundled in the Plus and Pro memberships, while Standard members are encouraged to book an assessment early in their term to establish a clear baseline and training focus. Below is a suggested training schedule for a highly motivated player aiming to make significant improvements (frequency = sessions per week).

| Session | Frequency | Notes |
|----------------|------------|---|
| Private lesson | 1 | Limit to one per week to allow time to practice and integrate the specific skills and strategies covered during the session. |
| Workshop | 1 | A cost-effective way to explore new concepts and strategies in a structured group setting. |
| Drill session | 2-3 | Weekly training sessions are led by the teaching pro, but it's also recommended that you join private drilling sessions. If you don't have a partner/group, the teaching pro can help match you with similarly skilled players. |
| Gameplay | 2-4 | Playing with a mix of skill levels is essential. Games with lower-level players let you focus on specific skills. Playing with more advanced players will expose you to more difficult shots and a more calculated and often faster style of play. The academy Skill Share program, SCPC round robins, and club tournaments all provide great opportunities for diverse play. |
| Assessment | 2 / season | Start the season with an assessment to establish a baseline and identify key focus areas. A follow-up at the end of the season helps evaluate progress and shape future training goals. |

It's relatively easy to know how you should play but it's not so easy to incorporate new skills and strategies into your pickleball toolkit. Novice and intermediate level players can see marked improvements in their performance simply by making better decisions related to court positioning, movement, shot selection and shot placement. However, the process of learning these skills and strategies isn't straightforward. Care and focus are needed to make changes to your pickleball game. Unfortunately, most instructors, and players, don't pay much attention to how we improve our performance, that is to say, how we learn. The following section outlines the learning process, that is to say, the cycle of assessment, prioritization, and skill acquisition.

ASSESSMENT

In order to improve you first need to know what areas of your game require improvement. This is sometimes easier said than done, especially if you've been playing for years and have hit a performance plateau. In these cases, asking for feedback from peers can offer valuable insight. Just be sure to treat constructive feedback as an opportunity, not as criticism. Being closed to feedback is a guaranteed way to stall your progress.

The academy offers both gameplay and video assessments. Gameplay assessments provide quick, situational feedback while playing with and against the teaching pro - great for refining decision-making under pressure. In contrast, video assessments offer a much more detailed analysis, combining drilling and gameplay with a full video, observation log, and written report. For those looking to establish a baseline and build a focused training plan, the video assessment is the most comprehensive option. The video assessment will provide you with a long list of key skills, some related to technique and strategy, to focus on.

PRIORITIZATION

So, you've either created a list of skills to improve or received one through a formal assessment. Now what? Let's say your list looks like this.

1. Stay 1-2 steps behind the baseline after serving.
2. Be stopped and balanced while playing defence.
3. Follow through when serving.
4. Only attack balls that are above net height.
5. Never lob on the third-shot.
6. Hit drop shots with more arc.
7. Use less wrist action when dinking.
8. Keep paddle up while at the kitchen line.
9. Move to the kitchen line after every return.
10. Hit dinks with more margin of error.

This list includes ten potential focus areas, but trying to tackle all of them at once is counterproductive. You should focus on just one or two at a time. So how do you choose where to start? Prioritize which skills are critical to work on based on the following two key factors.

Performance: How much will this skill improve your overall game?

Learning: How easy will it be to adopt this skill in terms of time and effort?

To make this clearer, assign each item two scores: a performance score (p-score, 1-10) and a learning score (l-score, 1-10). A higher p-score means greater impact on performance, and a higher l-score means easier to learn. The items with the highest combined score should be your first priority.

| Area of Improvement | P-Score | L-Score | Total | Priority |
|---|---------|---------|-------|----------|
| Stay 1-2 steps behind the baseline after serving. | 8 | 10 | 18 | 1 |
| Be stopped and balanced while playing defence. | 7 | 8 | 15 | 4 |
| Follow through when serving. | 6 | 4 | 10 | 8 |
| Only attack balls that are above net height. | 10 | 6 | 16 | 3 |
| Hit drop shots with more arc. | 8 | 5 | 13 | 6 |
| Never lob on the third-shot. | 5 | 10 | 15 | 4 |
| Use less wrist action when dinking. | 7 | 4 | 11 | 7 |
| Keep paddle up while at the kitchen line. | 8 | 9 | 17 | 2 |
| Move to the kitchen line after every return. | 10 | 8 | 18 | 1 |
| Hit dinks with more margin of error. | 8 | 6 | 14 | 5 |

Of course, there's some subjectivity in this exercise. The performance and learning scores may not carry equal weight for every player. Still, the key takeaway is to focus your efforts on skills that offer the greatest return, balancing how much they'll impact your game with how difficult they are to develop.

Based on the prioritization exercise above, the top priorities are (1) staying behind the baseline after serving and (2) moving to the kitchen line after every return. These skills are relatively easy to adopt and can significantly impact your performance.

To stay focused, it's helpful to organize your goals into two lists. Your long list should include ten or more skills you eventually want to improve. Your short list should contain the one or two skills you're actively working on right now - no more. For the example above, here's how those lists might look.

| | Long List | | Short List |
|----|---|---|---|
| 1 | Stay 1-2 steps behind the baseline after serving. | 1 | Stay 1-2 steps behind the baseline after serving. |
| 2 | Be stopped and balanced while playing defence. | 2 | Move to the kitchen line after every return. |
| 3 | Follow through when serving. | | |
| 4 | Only attack balls that are above net height. | | |
| 5 | Hit drop shots with more arc. | | |
| 6 | Never lob on the third-shot. | | |
| 7 | Use less wrist action when dinking. | | |
| 8 | Keep paddle up while at the kitchen line. | | |
| 9 | Move to the kitchen line after every return. | | |
| 10 | Hit dinks with more margin or error. | | |

ACQUISITION

Now that you've identified one or two critical skills, it's time to go to work. To acquire these skills, you'll need to train with clear intention, both while drilling and during gameplay.

Start by drilling intentionally. Don't spread your attention across too many areas - focus narrowly on the specific skill you're trying to improve. Technical skills, such as dinking with a firm wrist or hitting topspin drives with a low-to-high swing path, require repetitive, focused drilling to rebuild mechanics and gain confidence. Tactical or decision-based skills, like choosing when to drop versus attack from midcourt, or maintaining proper paddle positioning at the kitchen line, also benefit from intentional practice. But be warned, if you're practicing with the wrong technique or while making poor decisions, you're not improving, you're reinforcing bad habits. The 3S approach (see the Training Session section) and the drill manual can help guide your practice by offering targeted drills aligned with the skill you're working to improve.

Once you've gained confidence through intentional drilling, start applying your critical skills during focused gameplay. Begin with recreational games against lower-level players to reduce pressure, then gradually increase the challenge by playing with peers and eventually with stronger opponents. Keep the focus on your skill, not on the outcome. Winning and losing are distractions. What matters is whether you're executing your chosen skill consistently and correctly. Keep your focus tight. Work on no more than one or two skills at a time. Dividing your attention too broadly will cause you to play reactively, thinking about what you should have done instead of executing what you planned to do. Your attention is a limited resource so spend it wisely. One powerful strategy is to use a mental mantra to anchor your focus. For example, silently repeating "back, back, back" after serving can help reinforce deep court positioning. And don't get frustrated when you make mistakes outside your current focus. Improvement isn't about playing perfectly, it's about making progress on your critical skills. Ultimately, your goal is to perform those skills confidently, not just in drills or casual play, but under pressure in competitive matches and tournaments.

It's recommended that you evaluate your progress every time you drill or play. Your critical skills can be categorized as either tactics (decision making) or technique (movement patterns). Below are two self-assessment scales that can be used to evaluate your progress. Aim to consistently score a five before shifting your focus to a new skill.

| Tactic Self-Assessment Scale | |
|------------------------------|--|
| 1 | <i>Hesitant and reactive:</i> Decision-making is slow, hesitant, or reactive. Poor decisions are common, and the correct choice rarely comes naturally. |
| 2 | <i>Conscious effort needed:</i> The correct decision is made occasionally but requires significant thought and is often too slow to be effective during play. |
| 3 | <i>Improving but inconsistent:</i> The right decisions are made more frequently, especially in familiar scenarios, but inconsistencies remain, particularly in complex or fast-paced situations. |
| 4 | <i>Reliable but thoughtful:</i> Decisions are generally correct and timely but still require some degree of conscious processing to ensure accuracy. |

| | |
|---|---|
| 5 | <i>Intuitive and automatic:</i> Decision-making is quick, instinctive, and accurate. The correct choices feel effortless and are consistently made, even in challenging situations. |
|---|---|

| Technique Self-Assessment Scale | |
|---------------------------------|---|
| 1 | <i>Inconsistent and unnatural:</i> The technique feels awkward and is rarely used without conscious effort. Mistakes are frequent, and it requires significant focus to attempt correctly. |
| 2 | <i>Emerging awareness:</i> The technique is understood conceptually but applied inconsistently. It still requires constant conscious effort and feels unnatural in most scenarios. |
| 3 | <i>Developing consistency:</i> The technique is becoming more reliable in controlled situations. Mistakes are decreasing, and it occasionally feels natural during gameplay or drills. |
| 4 | <i>Proficient but still conscious:</i> The technique is consistent and often correct but still requires some level of conscious thought to execute properly. It feels natural most of the time. |
| 5 | Fully habitual: The technique is automatic and second nature. It is executed consistently and accurately, even in high-pressure situations, without requiring conscious thought. |

To stay organized, consider tracking your progress using the worksheet provided. Sample entries are included for demonstrative purposes.

| Critical Skills Tracking Worksheet | | | | | |
|------------------------------------|---------|-----------|---|-------|---------------------------------------|
| Date | Session | Type | Skill | Score | Notes |
| Jan 8 | Drills | Tactic | Stay two steps behind baseline after serve. | 2 | Repeated mental mantra, helped. |
| Jan 8 | Drills | Technique | Lock wrist while dinking. | 2 | Pretty inconsistent, frustrating! |
| Jan 9 | Games | Tactic | Stay two steps behind baseline after serve. | 3 | Positive feedback from Jerry. 😊 |
| Jan 9 | Games | Technique | Lock wrist while dinking. | 2 | Still difficult! 😞 |
| Jan 11 | Drills | Tactic | Stay two steps behind baseline after serve. | 4 | Much better! |
| Jan 11 | Drills | Technique | Lock wrist while dinking. | 2 | Nothing of note. |
| Jan 11 | Games | Tactic | Stay two steps behind baseline after serve. | 3 | Arghh, wasn't focused! |
| Jan 11 | Games | Technique | Lock wrist while dinking. | 3 | More consistent, progress! |
| Jan 12 | Games | Tactic | Stay two steps behind baseline after serve. | 4 | Less thought required. |
| Jan 12 | Games | Technique | Lock wrist while dinking. | 3 | Check with instructor for new drills. |

Self-assessment can be challenging, especially when you're deep in the learning process. Don't hesitate to ask for feedback from peers, or book a follow-up lesson with the teaching pro for a more objective evaluation. If you're on the Pro plan, weekly progress check-ins are a built-in opportunity to review your development and stay accountable.

CONTINUAL LEARNING

Eventually, with a sufficient amount of intentional drilling and focused play, you'll no longer have to devote attention to your critical skills. The new technique or tactic will improve and become second

nature, it will become a habit. That's when it's time to revise your short list, update your training plan, and begin the next phase of development.

Pickleball is a game you can enjoy for a lifetime, and one of its greatest rewards is the ongoing journey of improvement. Whether you're refining foundational skills or chasing advanced tactics, there's always something new to learn and explore.