

Coach Jeff

Lifelong tennis teaching professional ·
Division I player and coach · now playing
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**BEGINNER
GUIDE**



PICKLEBALL, WITHOUT THE CONFUSION

How to Keep Score: The Basic Rules of Pickleball

New to the game? You only need a few ideas to play your first game with confidence. Learn the court, call the score out loud, and let the bounce do the rest. This guide keeps it plain, friendly, and fast.

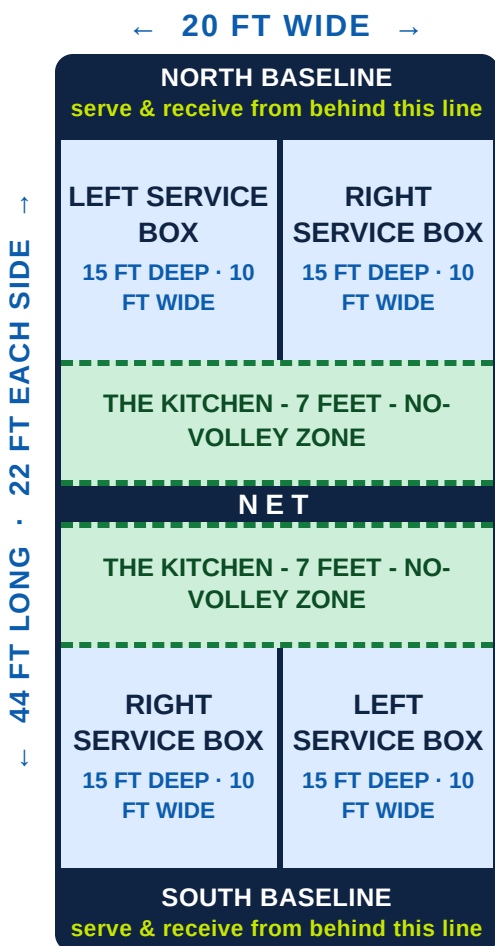
Made for your first games

Keep this on your phone or print a copy for the court. In five minutes you will know where to stand, how to serve, when you can volley, and exactly what those three numbers mean.

THE COURT

The court in one simple picture

A pickleball court is 20 feet wide and 44 feet long - the same box for singles and doubles. The net stretches across the middle. Each side is split into a left and a right service box, with a short area by the net called the kitchen.



Drawn to true size, north to south: read the court from one baseline to the other - a deep 15-foot service area, a short 7-foot kitchen, the net, then the same again. Each half is 22 feet. The center line splits each service area into left and right boxes, 10 feet wide each.



What is the kitchen?

No volleying while you touch the zone or its line.

The Non-Volley Zone — everybody calls it the kitchen — is the 7-foot zone on each side of the net.

If the ball bounces in the kitchen, step right in and hit it. Standing in the kitchen is fine — as long as the ball bounces first.

But a ball hit out of the air — a volley — must be hit with your feet outside the kitchen, behind the line. And after you step in for a bounced ball, get both feet back out and set before you volley again.

Only the serving side scores

Win a rally when you are serving and you earn a point. Win a rally when you are receiving and you do not earn a point - you earn the serve back. That one idea explains almost all of pickleball scoring.

Games go to 11, win by 2

First side to 11 points wins, but you must lead by 2. At 10-10, play continues until one side leads by two points, such as 12-10.

The three-number call in doubles

Before every serve, the server calls three numbers out loud. Say them in this order, every single time:

4 - 2 - 1

Your score

Their score

**Server 1 or
Server 2**

Example one: 4 - 2 - 1

Your team has 4, the other team has 2, and the first server on your team is serving. If you win the rally, the score becomes 5-2-1 and you serve again from the other box. If you lose the rally, the serve passes to your partner.

Example two: 4 - 2 - 2

Same score, now your partner is the second server. If your partner loses this rally, that is a side out. The other team gets the ball and their first server starts, calling 2-4-1.

Where do you stand?

Three of the four players start back. Only one starts up.

The server stands behind the baseline. The player returning serve is behind the baseline too — and so is the server's partner.

The returner's partner is the exception: they start right up at the kitchen line, already in position at the net.

Here's why. The first two shots of every rally must bounce: the serve must bounce before it can be returned, and the return must bounce before it can be hit back. After those two bounces, everything is live — both teams work forward together toward the kitchen line, where most points at every level are won.

1 Start of a game is the one exception.

To keep things fair, the team serving first only gets one server to start. So the very first call of a game is **0 - 0 - 2**. After that first side out, both teams get two servers each turn.

2 Switch boxes after you score.

The server moves to the other service box after each point won. Your partner stays put on your scoring plays. If your score is even, the server should be in the right box. If your score is odd, the server should be in the left box - a handy check if you lose track.

Coach Jeff says: call it loud, every time

If everyone hears the score before the serve, most arguments never happen. Forgot the score? Replay the rally or ask your partner - keep it friendly and keep playing.

- 3 Singles is even simpler.** Call just two numbers: your score, then their score. Win the rally on serve to score. Lose it and the serve changes hands.

SERVING, BOUNCING, AND FAULTS

The serve and the two-bounce rule

- 1 Serve underhand, cross-court.** Swing in an upward arc, contact below your waist, and keep the paddle top below your wrist. Stand behind the baseline, both feet outside the court lines, then serve diagonally into the opposite service box, past the kitchen line - or bounce it first for a drop serve.
- 2 Let the serve bounce.** That is bounce one. The returner must let it bounce before hitting it back.
- 3 Let the return bounce too.** That is bounce two. The serving side must let the return bounce once before hitting it.

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After those two bounces, play it live.

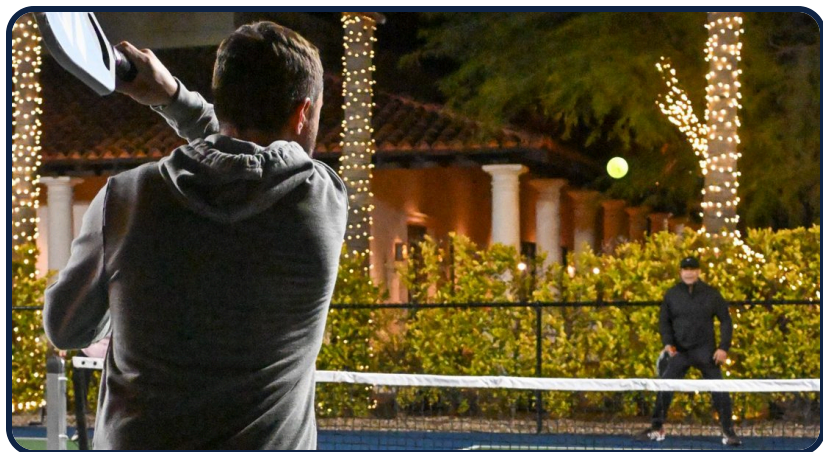
From the third shot on, you may volley the ball in the air or let it bounce - as long as you respect the kitchen rules below.

SERVING, BOUNCING, AND FAULTS

The Non-Volley Zone, without the headache

No volleying while you touch the zone or its line - that is the whole rule.

Situation	What to do
Ball is in the air	Hit a volley with your feet outside the kitchen, behind the line. Never volley while touching the zone or its line.
Ball bounces in the kitchen	Step right in and hit it. Standing in the kitchen is fine — as long as the ball bounces first.



Situation

What to do

Stepped in for a bounced ball

Get BOTH feet back out and set outside the zone. Volley the next ball only once you are fully re-established outside.

You volley at the line

Momentum counts too. If your follow-through carries you into the kitchen or onto its line after a volley, that is a fault.

A ball that lands on a line is in - except a serve that lands on the kitchen line, which is a fault because the serve must land fully past the kitchen.

Faults: the short list to remember

It is a fault when you

- Serve into the net, out, or the kitchen
- Step on the baseline while serving
- Hit the ball into the net or out of bounds
- Let the ball bounce twice on your side

It is also a fault when you

- Volley while touching the zone or line
- Volley before both feet are out and set
- Touch the net or post, or cross over
- Hit the ball before it crosses the net
- Carry or catch the ball on your paddle

Double hits: Legal in one continuous swing - two quick pops in one motion, play on. A fault only if the second hit is separate, or your partner also touches it.

Your first game in five minutes

- ✓ **Grab four players and two paddles per side.** Partners stand across from each other diagonally to start.
- ✓ **Pick who serves first.** Any fair method works. That team starts with the 0 - 0 - 2 call.
- ✓ **Server stands behind the baseline** in the right box and serves cross-court, past the kitchen.



- ✓ **Let it bounce, let the return bounce,** then play the rally out. Call the score loud before every serve.
- ✓ **Win on serve to score.** Lose as Server 1, your partner serves. Lose as Server 2, the ball changes sides.
- ✓ **First to 11, win by 2, wins.** Tap paddles at the net, switch sides if you like, and run it back.

READY TO PLAY

Four habits that help beginners right away

1. Keep your paddle up

Hold your paddle up in front of you, ready position, between shots. Pickleball is fast up close, and a low paddle is a late paddle.

2. Move up together

After the return, move forward with your partner toward the kitchen line. Stay side by side. One player up and one player back leaves a big hole in the middle.



3. Aim low and in the middle

You do not need power to win points. Keep the ball low over the net and aim down the middle. It cuts down confusion and forces a tougher return.

4. Be patient at the kitchen

Soft, low shots back and forth are called dinks. Wait for a ball that sits up high before you speed it up. Patience wins more beginner points than power does.

Playing at Pickle Me Timber?

Guests at Pickle Me Timber in Hochatown, Oklahoma can put this guide straight to work on the cabin's private, lighted pickleball court - with a basketball hoop on the same court for a shoot-around between matches. Save this guide to your phone, head outside, and call that first score loud: 0 - 0 - 2. Game on.

About Coach Jeff



Coach Jeff is a lifelong tennis teaching professional who played and coached Division I tennis. These days he plays pickleball too — still working on his own game, and helping others learn the right way to play and have fun doing it.

Play hard, keep it friendly, and have fun out there.