

Beginners - The Stars of the Future

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We were all beginners at one time! Many of us learned simply by watching others play and asking a few questions about scoring; where should I stand; etc. The game, relatively new to this country, was a fun way to get some exercise. Times have changed!

Pickleball is becoming a very popular sport with people not only of all ages but also with a variety of backgrounds in terms of sport skills. The retired housewife, who loves the game just as much as the former tennis star, WANTS to get better and will do whatever it takes for that to happen. How and when should you teach the various shots of the game? When should the strategies be introduced? How about the rules and scoring?

This is the first of a series of articles on a suggested progression to follow when teaching pickleball to beginners. This progression is merely a suggested "plan of action". The speed with which the progression should be followed is dependent on how quickly the beginning player is successful with that skill and/or strategy.

Day #1 -

A brief description of the game - might have it demonstrated

Show the paddle - the ball - the court

Use a paddle with weight that is comfortable - a grip that fits your hand

Grip the paddle as if shaking hands with it

Explain the importance of being able to control the ball coming off of the paddle

Ball-control drills for one person

Tapping ball into air off of paddle

Same but turn paddle over in hand between taps

Same but do it while walking forward

Have competition to see who can keep ball in air the longest

Ball-control drills for two people

Stand opposite partner - hit easily back and forth in the air or off of a bounce

Have competition to see which twosome can keep ball going the longest

Day #2 -

Review what was taught on Day 1

The grip

Importance of ball control -

Have them tap ball into the air

Have them alternate between tapping ball into air and bouncing ball to ground

Explain and demonstrate forehand ground stroke

Explain and demonstrate backhand ground stroke

Practice both in drill formation

If you have a ball-throwing machine, put it on one court throwing balls to the forehand side of player

If there is no machine, you or someone with good ball control hits balls to the forehand side of player.

One player hits 4 or 5 balls with a forehand ground stroke and then moves to the end of the line.

The next player then does the same, etc.

Following this plan, practice first the forehand ground stroke and then the backhand.

If players have good enough control of their ground strokes, let the rally on the court.

Position them in "no man's land" so that their hits don't have to travel so far. As they are able to hit from that distance, then move them back to the end line.

See how long they can keep a rally going.

Day #3 -

Review forehand and backhand ground strokes.

See how long the players can keep a rally going..

Explain and demonstrate the serve.

Explain the basic rules pertaining to the serve.

Upon contact, both feet must be behind the baseline.

The serve is made with an underhand stroke so that contact with the ball is below waist level.

The head of the paddle must be below the wrist at the time of contact with the ball.

The serve must clear the net and the non-volley zone line and land in the service court diagonally across the net from the server.

A serve that hits the net and lands in the proper service court is called a "let" and is re-served.

Practice the serve.

Four players on the court - two on each side of the net in

serving position. Players serve diagonally across the net. The serve receiver catches the ball and serves it back. After a period of time, have all players switch positions so that everyone has the opportunity to serve from both the right and the left sides.

If the majority of the beginners are able to keep a rally going, let them play a regular game using ground strokes and the serve.

Review the scoring and where to stand on the court.

Day #4 -

Review serving rules and discuss serving faults.

Practice the serve with 4 players - two balls (catch and serve).

Discuss the return of serve - where do you return the serve for best results (down the line to opponent's backhand and deep to the middle of the court).

Practice the serve and the return of the serve. Stop play after this two-shot sequence and start it again. After a period of time, rotate players around so that everyone has the opportunity to serve from both the right and left sides as well as return the serve from both the right and left sides.

Review the doubles game -

The object.

Where to stand.

Scoring.

Let them try to play a regular game. Review the scoring and the proper position on the court of the serving team and the serve receiving team. Even though the volley hasn't been taught and practiced, show them what it looks like and let them try it in the game.

Day #5 -

Explain and demonstrate the volley.

Practice the volley.

Two players in volleying position.

You, or someone with good ball control, hits balls to them for them to volley back. Be content first to just volley the ball across the net inbounds. Once they're able to

do that, have them volley to targets.

Practice a three-shot sequence - serve; return of the serve and follow-up to the net; and volley.

Review the game.

Let them play the game using the skills that they have been taught - ground strokes; serve and volley.

Emphasize where they should stand on the court; calling for the ball; and their correct movement as partners. In addition, be sure that the proper rules are being followed.

When teaching the skills of pickleball, the speed of your progress from skill to skill and day to day is completely dependent upon how quickly the beginning players grasp what is being taught. Other factors that influence the speed of your progress are: the number of beginning players that you're working with; the number of courts available; and the number of assistants that you have. The sooner that a regular game can be played, the better.

The remaining skills - the dink; lob; overhead smash and drop shot - can be introduced when it seems appropriate. When establishing your goals for each day, be realistic as to your expectations. Chances are that these beginning players are out there to not only learn the game of pickleball, but to have fun! Never lose sight of that!!