



## Pickleball Skills Guide for Team Placement

### How to Use This Guide (Captains)

Use this guide as a quick, repeatable rubric: (1) observe 10–15 minutes of play (warm-up plus points), (2) rate each category using the descriptors below, and (3) place the player at the level where they meet the majority of category expectations.

- *If split across two levels, place at the lower level unless the player meets the higher level's Serve/Return and Dink expectations consistently.*
- *Red flags cap placement: cannot sustain a dink rally caps at High C; cannot reliably serve/return in play caps at Low C.*

### AA LEVEL

**Summary:** Executes all shots (forehand, backhand, serve, return) with high accuracy and consistent touch, spin, pace, and intent.

- **Dink:** Has mastered the dink and drop; moves opponents with placement; stays patient; creates offense.
- **3rd Shot:** Masters 3rd-shot choices; drops and drives from both sides with high consistency.
- **Volley:** Blocks hard volleys into the NVZ; places overheads; targets feet; comfortable with swinging volley.
- **Strategy:** Uses multiple competitive styles; converts defense to offense; excellent footwork and quickness.
- **Unforced Errors:** Infrequent (typically do not decide games).

### A LEVEL

**Summary:** High forehand consistency with pace/depth to force errors; effective backhand direction with varied pace and depth.

- **Serve:** Serves with power, accuracy, and depth; varies speed and spin.
- **Dink:** Places the ball consistently with offensive intent; recognizes attackable dinks.

- **3rd Shot:** Consistently executes effective 3rd-shot strategies; intentionally places the ball.
- **Volley:** Blocks hard volleys into the NVZ; comfortable with swinging volley; overheads are consistent put-aways.
- **Strategy:** Adapts game plan to opponents; very effective at the NVZ; communicates and moves well with partner; strong footwork in all directions.
- **Unforced Errors:** Infrequent (typically do not decide games).

## **HIGH B**

**Summary:** Consistent forehand depth/control; improving backhand mechanics; still refining shot selection, timing, and pressure consistency.

- **Serve/Return:** Places the majority of serves and returns in play with varying depth and speed.
- **Dink:** Increasing consistency with moderate height/depth control; may end rallies early; recognizes attackable vs. non-attackable dinks.
- **3rd Shot:** Mixes drives and drops to create advantage; outcomes can be inconsistent under pressure.
- **Volley:** Volleys a variety of speeds; developing control; beginning to reset/block into the NVZ.
- **Strategy:** Moves as a team; changes direction offensively; broad rules knowledge; solid understanding of stacking and when to use it.
- **Unforced Errors:** Moderate (noticeably impacts points in extended rallies).

## **LOW B LEVEL**

**Summary:** Improved forehand mechanics with moderate control; developing backhand consistency but may avoid it under pressure.

- **Serve/Return:** Consistently gets serve and return in play; limited depth control.
- **Dink:** Increasing consistency with limited height/depth control; beginning to vary pace.
- **3rd Shot:** Developing the drop shot to reach the NVZ.
- **Volley:** Can volley medium-paced shots with some control.
- **Strategy:** Moves quickly to the NVZ; tries to vary pace; sustains short rallies; basic stacking knowledge and where it can be effective.

## HIGH C LEVEL

**Summary:** Can hit a medium-paced forehand but lacks directional intent and consistency; backhand is very inconsistent and often avoided.

- **Serve/Return:** Medium pace but lacks depth, direction, and consistency.
- **Dink:** Cannot sustain a dink rally.
- **3rd Shot:** Generally hits a medium-paced ball with little direction.
- **Volley:** Medium pace but lacks direction and consistency.
- **Strategy:** Understands fundamentals; learning court positioning; basic rules knowledge and can keep score.

## LOW C LEVEL

**Summary:** New to pickleball; minimal rules knowledge; can sustain short rallies with similar players; basic ability to keep score.

- **Serve/Return:** Working to consistently get serves and returns in play.
- **Dink:** Learning soft control; dinks are often too high or into the net.
- **3rd Shot:** Typically hits a medium-paced ball back; limited ability to intentionally drop or drive.
- **Volley:** Limited control; often contacts late and pops it up.
- **Strategy:** Learning basic court positions and scoring; benefits from simple cues (get it in, hit to the middle, move together).
- **Unforced Errors:** Frequent (often decides points).