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New! Skill Level Guidelines

Are you sure you're playing on the correct court?

Hi Members!

As you know, at Tustin Pickleball, we have an "open play" format where players rotate in and out of games, often with people of mixed skill levels. While open play encourages inclusivity and social interaction, it also comes with potential issues.

As our membership continues to grow and more drop-in players mix in, playing on the wrong court is becoming an issue that impacts the quality of play. Having the best game possible usually requires that all players (or both teams) on the court are roughly the same level. If just one player on the court is at a very different level, advanced players may get bored or frustrated, and novice/intermediate players may feel intimidated, embarrassed or discouraged. Furthermore, a mismatched game could be over in an instant resulting in a waste of time for everyone when wait times are long.

Since our club does not use player ratings (e.g., DUPR), we often get asked "how do I know which court I should play on?" To answer this question, we have created a set of guidelines to assess your skills and help you determine where to go. These guidelines, which will become effective Monday, September 1, 2025, list observable skills that are needed to play on a particular level court.

To support this effort, we have created a team of "Court Monitors" consisting of Board members Terry Wong, Chiko Wong, Bonnie Goodman, Barbara Gerovac, Carl Cheng, Julie Cho, Jimmy Ogata and Members-at-Large Greg Goodman and JoAnn Spiegel. This team will use their discretion to redirect players as needed based on the skill level guidelines, overall wait times, and/or final scores of games.

* Please note that if you are not sure, or are unable to determine your skill level from the guidelines, feel free to reach out to one of our Court Monitors who can watch you play and help you determine which court to play on.

We also want to encourage peer moderation and ask everyone who is comfortable doing so, to politely speak up when someone stays too long on the wrong court. We could all use a simple innocuous statement such as "Hey, just a heads up...you might have better games and more fun on a different level court today". Confrontations can be avoided if we keep comments polite and respectful and if things aren't taken too personally if you are asked to move.

Unfortunately there is no perfect solution for this issue. In addition to skill set, game partner, strategy, tactics, competitiveness, athleticism, and age all contribute to a player's performance. However we believe that if all members make a concerted effort to ensure everyone plays on the right courts, we can maintain our high standard of play and create the best overall experience for everyone.

Thank you for your support and for helping make Tustin Pickleball even better.

Your 2025 Board of Directors
Tustin Pickleball

Are you sure you're playing on the correct court?

Are you?

For fair, fun, and safe competition, these are the minimum skills required for each court level. Based on these guidelines, overall wait times, and/or the scores of your games, you may be asked by a Tustin Pickleball Director (or fellow member) to move down or up a level.

6	5	4
7		8
9		10

Tustin Pickleball Courts

Novice (Court 1)

☐ Understands basic rules and scoring, how to serve, where to stand, double bounce rule, kitchen rules

☐ Has reliable serves and returns, but lacks depth and consistency

☐ Has basic control of forehands and backhands

☐ Hits medium paced volleys but lacks consistency

☐ Moves forward after serve/return but may hesitate or get caught in the transition zone

☐ Occasionally attempts a 3rd shot drop, but is more comfortable with a 2nd shot drive

☐ Can occasionally block or reset a hard shot from the transition zone

☐ Dinks occasionally but lacks consistency

Intermediate (Courts 2, 3, 4, 5)

☐ Serves with depth and consistency

☐ Returns deep to push opponents back to maintain control of the kitchen line

☐ Executes 3rd shot drops with moderate consistency to move to the kitchen line successfully

☐ Hits forehands and backhands both cross court and down the line with topspin or slice

☐ Displays quick reactions, paddle positioning, and footwork to hit punch and block volleys

☐ Able to hit a reset shot from the transition zone to turn a fast or difficult shot into a soft neutralizing shot

☐ Engages opponents in short dink rallies (3+ shots) but lacks consistency on height and depth of shots

☐ Starting to develop a soft game to create advantage

Adv Intermediate/Advanced (Courts 6, 7, 8)

☐ Serves and returns with accuracy, depth, and spin

☐ Hits to specific targets- feet, sidelines, gaps to force poor positioning or to set up attack opportunities

☐ Moves from the baseline to the kitchen line smoothly using a 2nd shot drop, or drive and 3rd shot drop approach

☐ Engages opponents in extended dink rallies (5+ shots) with varying spin, height, and depth of shots

☐ Chooses the right shot based on opponent score, momentum, and court position (e.g., when to attack, speed up)

☐ Neutralizes aggressive attacks by resetting pace and hitting drop shots into the kitchen under pressure

☐ Displays fast hands and reflex control to win hands battles at the kitchen line

☐ Makes few unforced errors

Advanced/Expert (Challenge Courts 9, 10)

☐ Serves with variety of depth, spin, pace, and placement

☐ Hits shots with pinpoint control and accuracy- 3rd shot drops, dinks to the sidelines, deep corner drives, etc.

☐ Uses advanced spin manipulation- topspin, backspin, and sidespin to add deception and force errors

☐ Engages opponents in extended dink rallies with accuracy, depth, and spin with offensive intent

☐ Can adjust pace/tempo, and exploit opponent tendencies

☐ Hits controlled reset shots under pressure from multiple court locations to regain position

☐ Executes attacks and counter attacks at the kitchen line out of the air or off the bounce, often with topspin rolls or flicks to force errors or create offensive opportunities

☐ Displays explosive hand speed and anticipation to dominate fast exchanges at the net

☐ Rarely makes unforced errors

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