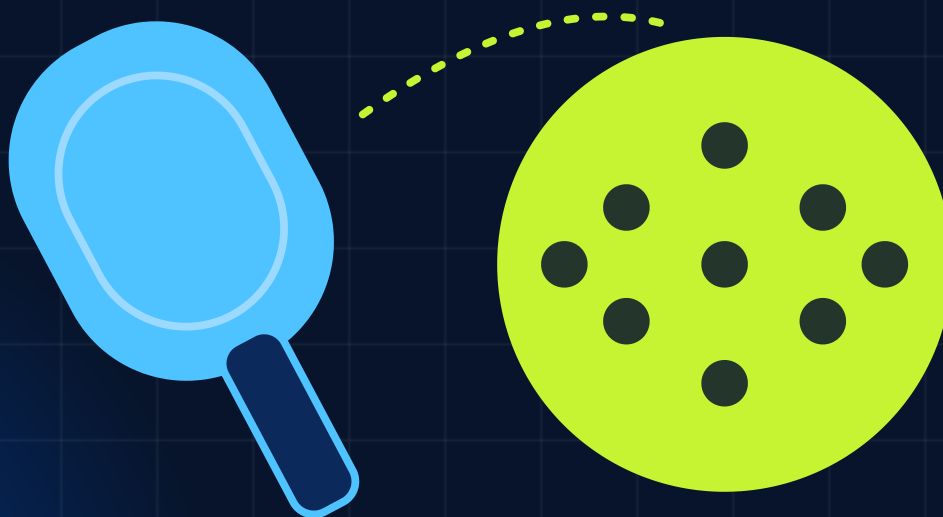


Pickleball from Zero

Rules, scoring, strategy and your first game, step by step. Follows the 2026 USA Pickleball rulebook.



16

short chapters

16

quiz questions, with
answers

24

printable drill cards

8

week practice plan



SkillNugget

● SKILLNUGGET BEGINNER'S GUIDE

Pickleball from Zero

Rules, scoring, strategy and your first game, step by step.

2026 edition · Large print · Printable

● THIS BOOK BELONGS TO

This book belongs to: _____

My home courts: _____

First game: _____



SkillNugget

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Rules are based on the 2026 USA Pickleball Official Rulebook, summarized in plain English; for tournaments, always check the current official rulebook. This book is independent and not endorsed by USA Pickleball. Physical activity carries some risk of injury: warm up, wear court shoes and eyewear, and check with your doctor before starting a new sport if you have a health condition.

FREE SAMPLE

Inside this free sample

The welcome and three full chapters.

This sample includes the Welcome, Chapter 1 (the court and how a point works), Chapter 3 (the rules in ten minutes) and Chapter 4 (scoring, finally explained). The full book has 16 chapters, two quizzes with answers, an 8-week practice plan and a printable toolkit with a court-side rules card, 24 drill cards and a surprise.

GET THE FULL BOOK

skillnugget.com/course/pickleball-from-zero

WELCOME

The easiest sport to start

How this book works, in five minutes.

You can learn to play pickleball in an afternoon, and you'll want to keep playing for years. This book takes you from "What's a kitchen?" to playing your first real game with confidence.

Pickleball is a paddle sport played on a small court with a plastic ball full of holes. It mixes a bit of tennis, a bit of badminton and a bit of table tennis, but it's easier to start than any of them. The court is small, the ball is slow, the serve is underhand and the rules are designed to stop big hitters from dominating. A complete beginner can have a fun rally within minutes.

That's a big part of why it has exploded. According to the Sports & Fitness Industry Association, about **24.3 million Americans played pickleball in 2025**, and it has been named the fastest-growing sport in the United States several years in a row. You'll find courts in parks, gyms, community centers and converted tennis courts, and players from 8 to 88.

How this book works

Part 1 • The basics

The court, the gear, the rules in ten minutes and scoring, explained so it finally makes sense. With two quizzes to check yourself.

Part 2 • The shots

Grip and ready position, then the six shots that matter: serve, return, dink, third-shot drop, volley and the lob, each with drills.

Part 3 • Play the game

Doubles strategy, singles basics, your first game step by step, etiquette, the most common mistakes, and an 8-week practice plan.

Your toolkit

A court-side rules and scoring card, 24 printable drill cards and a surprise for when you're ready to bring friends along.

RULES CHANGE (A LITTLE) EVERY YEAR

This book follows the **2026 USA Pickleball Official Rulebook**. Rules are reviewed every year, and some clubs and tournaments use their own variations. For tournaments, always check the current official rulebook.

LOOK AFTER YOURSELF

Pickleball is gentle compared with many sports, but it's still a sport. Warm up, wear proper court shoes and protective eyewear, and never run backwards for a lob (Chapter 10 explains why). If you have a health condition, or haven't exercised for a while, check with your doctor before you start.

CHAPTER 1

Meet pickleball

A short history, the court and how a point works.

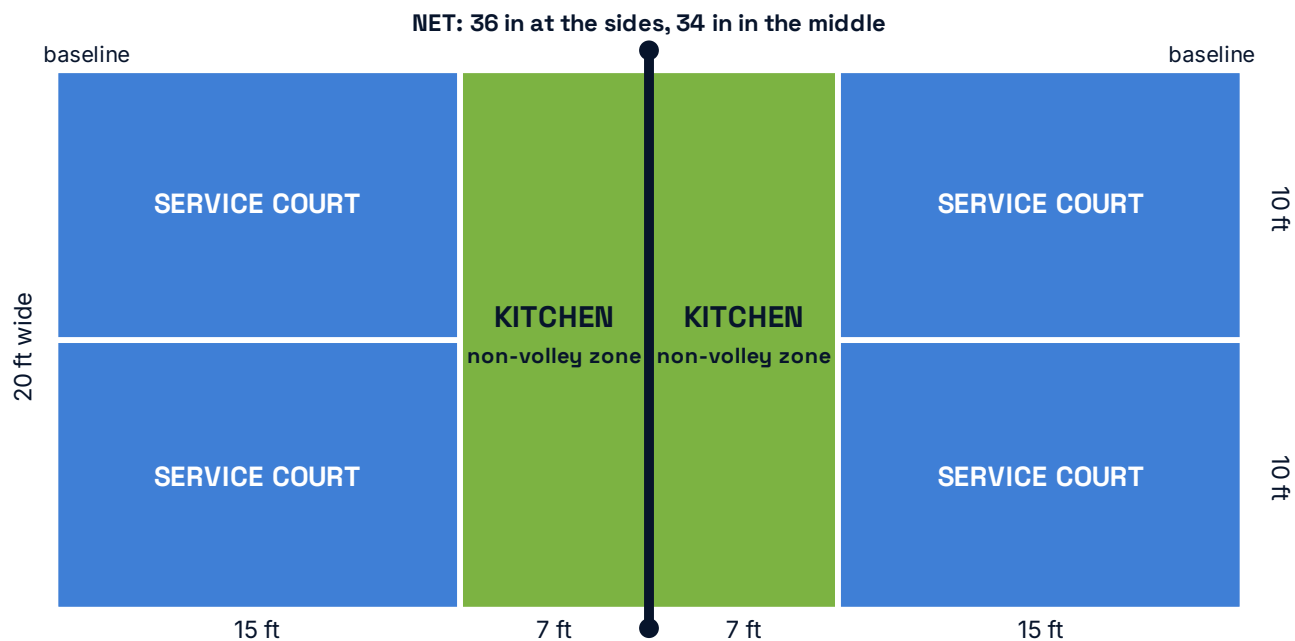
A summer afternoon in 1965, three dads, a bored family and a badminton court with no shuttlecock. That's how one of the world's fastest-growing sports began.

A very short history

Pickleball was invented in 1965 on Bainbridge Island, near Seattle, by Joel Pritchard, Bill Bell and Barney McCallum. They wanted a game the whole family could play, improvised with table-tennis-style paddles and a perforated plastic ball, and lowered the badminton net. Over the next few years they wrote rules to keep it fun for everyone, including the two rules that make pickleball unique: the **two-bounce rule** and the **kitchen**.

And the name? There are two stories. One says it was named after the Pritchards' dog, Pickles. The other says Joan Pritchard named it after the "pickle boat" in rowing, the crew made up of leftover rowers from other boats, just as the game was made up of leftovers from other sports. Joan always said it was the boat; other early players remembered the dog. Either way, the name stuck.

The court



The court is 20 feet wide and 44 feet long for both singles and doubles: the same size as a badminton doubles court. Measurements are to the outside of the lines.

PART OF THE COURT	WHAT IT IS
Baseline	The back line at each end. You serve from behind it.
Sidelines	The long lines on each side.
Kitchen (non-volley zone)	The 7-foot area on each side of the net. You can't hit the ball out of the air while standing in it (Chapter 3).
Kitchen line	The front edge of the kitchen. It counts as part of the kitchen.
Centerline	Divides each side into a right and left service court.
Service courts	The two boxes behind each kitchen, where the serve must land.

The net

The net is **36 inches high at the sidelines** and **34 inches in the middle**: a little lower than a tennis net. That small dip in the middle matters: it's why hitting across the middle is often safer.

How a point works, in one paragraph

One player serves diagonally, underhand, into the opposite service court. The ball must bounce once on each side before anyone can hit it in the air. After that, players hit back and forth (volleying is allowed, but not from inside the kitchen) until someone makes a mistake: hitting the ball out, into the net, or breaking a rule. Only the serving side can win a point. Games usually go to **11 points, and you must win by 2**.

Singles or doubles?

Most people play **doubles** (two against two). It's more social, covers less ground and is how most recreational games and clubs are organized. This book focuses on doubles, with a chapter on singles in Part 3.

CHAPTER 3

The rules in ten minutes

Serving, the two-bounce rule, the kitchen and faults.

Pickleball has an official rulebook of more than 70 pages, but you only need about ten rules to play a real game. Here they are, in the order you'll meet them.

1. The serve is underhand

There are two legal ways to serve. Most beginners start with the drop serve.

The volley serve

You hit the ball out of the air. Three things must clearly be true when your paddle hits the ball:

- 1 Your arm moves in an **upward arc**.
- 2 The **paddle head is below your wrist**.
- 3 You hit the ball **below your waist**.

The drop serve

You drop the ball from a natural height (not tossed up, not thrown down) and hit it after it bounces. The ball can bounce any number of times, anywhere, before you hit it. The upward-arc and below-the-waist rules don't apply to the drop serve.

For both kinds: release the ball with one hand (or let it roll off the paddle), don't add spin with your fingers, and make sure the receiver can see the release.

2. Where you stand to serve

At least one foot must be on the ground behind the baseline, between the imaginary extensions of the centerline and the sideline. Neither foot may touch the court (including the baseline) until you've hit the ball.

3. Serve diagonally, past the kitchen

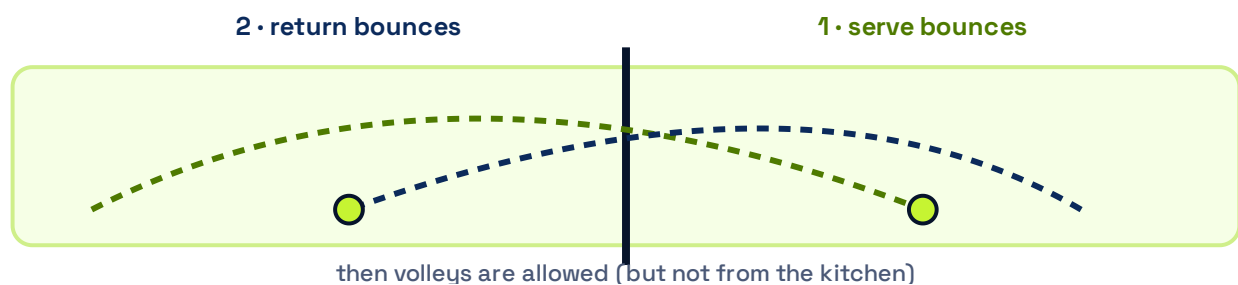
The serve goes **diagonally** to the opposite service court and must land **beyond the kitchen line**. A serve that lands on the kitchen line, or in the kitchen, is a fault. A serve landing on the centerline, sideline or baseline of the correct service court is **in**.

4. The net is fine on the serve

If your serve clips the net and still lands in the correct service court, it's **in**, and play continues. (There are no "lets" in pickleball.) You get only **one** serve attempt, not two as in tennis.

5. The two-bounce rule

The serve must bounce before the receiver hits it, and the return must bounce before the serving team hits it. After those two bounces, anyone can hit the ball in the air (a volley) or after a bounce.



This is why, at the start of a point, the serving team stays back near the baseline: they have to let the return bounce.

6. The kitchen rule

You may **not volley** (hit the ball out of the air) while touching the kitchen, including the kitchen line. That includes:

- Standing in the kitchen when you volley.
- Your momentum carrying you into the kitchen after a volley, **even after the ball is dead**.
- Anything you're wearing or carrying (like a dropped paddle or hat) touching the kitchen as you volley.

But you **can** stand in the kitchen at any other time, and you can go in to hit a ball **after it bounces**. If you've been in the kitchen, both feet must be back outside before you volley.

7. Faults that end the point

A **fault** is any mistake that ends the rally. The most common:

- ✗ Hitting the ball out of bounds
- ✗ Hitting the ball into the net (on any shot except a serve that clips the net and lands in)
- ✗ Volleying from the kitchen, or before the two bounces
- ✗ Letting the ball bounce twice on your side
- ✗ The ball hitting you or your clothes (your paddle hand below the wrist is fine)
- ✗ Touching the net, or the net post, with your body or paddle while the ball is in play

8. Lines are in

A ball that touches any line during a rally is **in** (the only exception: a serve touching the kitchen line is a fault). In casual games, players call the lines on their own side of the court. If you're not sure a ball was out, treat it as in, and

call "out" straight away, not after your partner has hit it.

9. Switching sides

Players don't rotate around the court like in volleyball. You only change sides (right and left) when your team **wins a point on your serve**: the server and partner swap sides, and the server serves from the other side. Chapter 4 explains this step by step.

10. Winning a game

Games are usually played to **11 points, win by 2** (so 11–9 wins, but 11–10 keeps going). Tournaments sometimes play to 15 or 21. In traditional scoring, **only the serving team can score**.

CHAPTER 4

Scoring, finally explained

Three numbers, two servers and a game played out rally by rally.

Pickleball scoring confuses almost everyone at first. Three numbers? Why does the game start at "zero, zero, two"? Here's the whole system, step by step, with a real game played out rally by rally.

The big idea: only the server scores

In traditional pickleball scoring (called **side-out scoring**), you can only win a point when **your team is serving**. If the receiving team wins the rally, they don't get a point; they just win the right to serve (or move the serve along).

The three numbers

In doubles, the server calls the score before every serve, as three numbers:

The score call

First number: the serving team's score. **Second number:** the receiving team's score. **Third number:** which server it is: **1** (the first partner to serve this turn) or **2** (the second).

So "4-2-1" means: the serving team has 4, the other team has 2, and this is their first server.

How the serve moves

- 1 **Each team gets two servers per turn.** The first server serves until their team loses a rally. Then their partner (server 2) serves until their team loses a rally.
- 2 **Then it's a side out:** the serve passes to the other team, whose player on the **right** serves first.
- 3 **The exception: the very start of a game.** The first team to serve only gets **one** server. That's why the game starts at "**0-0-2**": the first server is treated as the second server.

Where to stand

- **The server switches sides only when they win a point.** After each point won, the server and their partner swap sides, and the server serves again from the other side.
- **When a rally is lost, nobody moves.** The next server serves from wherever they're standing.
- **A handy check:** when your team's score is **even** (0, 2, 4...), the player who served first for your team at the start of the game should be on the **right**. When it's **odd**, they should be on the **left**.

A game, rally by rally

Team A (Ann and Al) serves first against Team B (Bea and Bo). Here are the first ten rallies:

SCORE CALLED	SERVER	SERVES FROM	RALLY WON BY	WHAT HAPPENS NEXT
0-0-2	Ann (A)	Right	A	A scores. Ann and Al swap sides.
1-0-2	Ann (A)	Left	B	Side out. (At the start of a game, only one server serves.)
0-1-1	Bea (B)	Right	B	B scores. Bea and Bo swap sides.
1-1-1	Bea (B)	Left	A	Bea's turn ends. Her partner serves next.
1-1-2	Bo (B)	Right	B	B scores. Bea and Bo swap sides.
2-1-2	Bo (B)	Left	A	Side out. Team A serves.
1-2-1	Al (A)	Right	A	A scores. Al and Ann swap sides.
2-2-1	Al (A)	Left	B	Al's turn ends. His partner serves next.
2-2-2	Ann (A)	Right	B	Side out. Team B serves.
2-2-1	Bea (B)	Right	...	And so on, until one team reaches 11 and is 2 points ahead.

Read it slowly once, and you'll understand pickleball scoring better than many people who've played for months.

Singles scoring

In singles there's only one server per side, so the score is just **two numbers**: server's score, then receiver's score. Serve from the **right** when your score is even and from the **left** when it's odd. Win the rally: you score and switch sides. Lose it: side out.

Rally scoring (a newer option)

Some clubs and events now use **rally scoring**, which USA Pickleball's 2026 rulebook includes as a provisional option. A point is scored on **every rally**, by whichever team wins it, and the score is called as **two numbers** (serving team, then receiving team). In doubles, only one player serves per turn. Games are faster and easier to follow. Ask which system a group uses before you start.

CALL THE SCORE LOUDLY

It's the server's job to call the score before every serve, clearly enough for all four players to hear. If everyone hears it, everyone can catch mistakes, and arguments become rare.