

Humorous Pickleball Thoughts

Rich Hume
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Foreword

Hello Pickleballers,

This is a collection of the blog posts from the entire run of the blog. I wanted to collect just the ones I found funny, or my attempts at humor. We have the posts from the Monastery, poetry, songs, from the pickleball club, and Bob on the pickleball doctor's couch.

All the other, more technical and dry stuff is in the other files.

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Post 11, Paddle Up or Down? Yes!

"Master, this humble student wishes to know where to hold his paddle," said the student (S).

"You need to hold it low, middle and high," replied the master.

"Master, I cannot hold it in three places?" said the humble, confused student (HCS).

"It then, is not where to hold the paddle. You must notice when."

"Please enlighten me," said the humble student (HS).

"When the ball to the opponents is low, where must they hit the ball, Grasshopper?"

"Why, it has to come up to cross the net!" said the partially enlightened humble student (PEHS)

"And when the ball is hit high to your foes, where will the ball go?" queried the master.

"Ah, I begin to see the light. The ball must come down to avoid exceeding the back boundary line of shame," replied the almost fully enlightened humble student (AFEHS).

"And when you, Grasshopper, dink the ball too high, what will happen then?" asked the Master.

"The vengeful foes will seek to speed the point up!" said the fully enlightened humble student (FEHS)

"Yes, Grasshopper. So it is not where you should hold the paddle but when."

"If the opponents have a low ball to hit, raise your humble paddle, look for a chance to speed up the point, hit the winning downward dragon shot, or return a modest dink."

"If the ball has popped up, you must expect their downward dragon shot, and attempt to save the point, move back, lower your paddle, try to block."

"And if the ball is up a dangerous amount, watch for a fast ball from those who don't dink, be ready to provide them with an unexpected block, move your paddle to the holy middle position."

"But in all cases, position your paddle for the expected shot. Grasshopper, your lesson is complete... Would it be too much to ask for a cup of tea?" quoth the Master.

Post 17, The Master Helps Again

"Master, I bring you tea," said the acolyte.

"Thank you," said the Master.

"Master, I have a problem."

"Yes, usually you do. You are young and most things are problems for the young. With experience, one improves. Why this reminds me of a time when I was young..." said the Master.

The acolyte interrupts. He has heard these stories before and while they make for an interesting hour, he has more pressing needs. "Yes, Master, I do recall it too. But I have been getting strange stares from my partners and strange questions too."

"Ah," said the Master, "What questions are those?"

"One of my partners asked me how long it takes me to get to the kitchen line."

"And what did you tell him?"

"I said that I didn't know."

"And did he reply to that?"

"Yes, he said, 'why don't you run up to it a couple of times and find out.'"

The Master allowed himself a small chuckle. "Yes, a typical beginner error. Grasshopper, is it easier to score points or defend against them?"

"Defend, I guess. It can be a challenge to score."

"That is correct. And why is this a universal pickleball truth?"

"Well, defenders usually can reach the kitchen earlier than the serving side."

"Well said, Grasshopper. But to do that you must get to the kitchen line. Do you always seek the kitchen line?"

"I do, but sometimes I cannot get there quickly. I return the serve and it comes back before I can get to the line."

"Yes, there are three common problems with that. You stand too close to the baseline and lend the deep serve additional menace, or you admire your return and stand wreathed in pride losing time, or you see your return might be long and you stand in angst."

"Hmm, I can see that Master. Pride and fear and setup lead to dismal results."

"Yes. Be prepared for a deep serve. Strike your return with righteous force, believe in your return and stride, neh, leap forward to do battle."

"Is that all Master?"

"One more pickleball pro tip, Grasshopper. If you start deep in your court to return the serve, then as you move forward to hit it, run through the shot and use that speed to arrive at the kitchen line. You will easily get there and setup before the ball comes back. Very strong position, very early preparation, very happy partner."

"Thank you Master. I will try that."

"Do not try, do or do not. ...Er, the tea has cooled down, would you please fetch the Master another cup?"

Post 18, The Master Explains Another Secret

"Master, why did the ball go left?" asked Grasshopper.

"You were late hitting it," replied the Master. "Everything in its time. You must respect the ebb and flow of time around the paddle, you, the court, and the game."

"Master, there is no time limit in pickleball, what is this ebb and flow?"

"Time is the silver and gold of pickleball. You can earn it and spend it, wisely, or like the drunkard down in our village, foolishly."

"How can I control time? I don't understand," said Po, the student.

"It is simple and it is not. When you hit a ball hard, you compress time, when you dink, you expand it. When you poach, you take time from your opponents, as when you speed up during a dink. Fast, slow, long, short, are all time elements.

"When do you want more time, young one?"

"When I'm trying to get to the kitchen line."

"When else?"

"Hmm, when they dink well and the ball is almost past me, is that right Master?"

"Yes, being out of position is a time squeeze. It can be anywhere on the court or off it. If you are late, you are squeezed. If you are early, you have gained time. Gained time is valuable, owing time is like the sore on the foot, it will stop you walking on a long journey. With plenty of time you can setup for a hit, consider where your shot should go, evaluate the opponents' positions and greed, and execute with the seeming nonchalance that proclaims a mastery of your game."

"Thank you Master, once again I am awed at your knowledge."

"Grasshopper, let us reason together... When you are out of time, what should you do?"

"I could hit a high soft ball for a service return or when the opponents are back. That always gains time as the ball must be allowed to bounce."

"Very good. What else?"

"When I am trying to get to the kitchen, or am out of sorts, I could dink. Oh, or I could lob!"

"The dink is fine, elegant and approved, but lobbing upsets the digestion. Use it as a last resort, and never show glee if it succeeds, it is contrary to the nature of the game."

"Yes, Master, I will remember that."

"Now, if we are done, perhaps you might refill an old man's rice bowl?"

Post 21, It's a Poetic Game After All

My game was a bit in the sink
I thought it was due to my dink
So I loosen'd my grip,
and vowed not to flip
No good, I'm returnin' to drink

Thomas Sowell, a brilliant guy, heavy thinker, might play pickleball, don't know. He has spoken out on numerous topics, one of which is equality. The quote that caught my eye the other day was. "No man is equal to any other man. And no man is equal to himself on different days."

I'm sure we've all thought about how we played as we've driven away from the PB court. There is the day you won them all and the day you couldn't win any. None of which is a reflection of the state of your game. I've seen beatable opponents that suddenly could only hit it at your feet, their lobs landed in, and the cross court rollers hit all the lines. It's easy to feel clumsy and out of sorts if your opps are playing perfectly.

The answer? Remember the good days and forget the bad ones. I've heard Bjorn Borg was a master at it. Jack Nicklaus claimed he never missed a putt on the 18th hole when it mattered. When they showed him videos of his untimely misses, he still denied it. Maybe denial is a great way to play pickleball.

Always look to the next shot, it's the only one you can control!

Post 25, Scoring Points

"Master, I've been beaten up lately at the weekly temple tournament!" said the young disciple.

"Yes, I've seen the scores in the bulletin. You are not scoring many points," said the Master.

"Help me, Master, for I am lost."

"Grasshopper, when do you score points?" asked the Master.

"Only when we serve, Master. Is that not right?"

"It is close enough for now, Grasshopper. Tell me, when you serve, are you hitting good serves?"

"Oh yes, Master. My new triple spin, kick serve is working very well," said the disciple with touch of pride.

"Yes, and how many points did you win with this new 'super' serve? Did the opponents have trouble getting them back?"

"Er, no, they returned all of them."

"Did you miss any serves?"

"Only a few Master. I've found," talking rapidly with passion only the youth can muster, "that I need to get the serve close to the baseline to be effective."

"Yes, so it is. When we consider that, is it not true your opponents returned all the serves you hit in and didn't need to return the ones you missed?"

"Yes Master."

"So all in all, the fancy serve served only no purpose?" said the Master with sly chuckle. He was fond of a nice turn of phrase.

"Well, we didn't score any points and we lost several. I guess it wasn't worth the missed shots."

"Correct Grasshopper. But your errors lie not there entirely."

"Where else Master?"

"Let's talk of the points you won. How did they go?"

"We served in, hit the third back and if they didn't miss the third shot, we got to the net and played pretty well there."

"But you didn't get to the kitchen line very often, did you?"

"No Master, we couldn't get into the points."

"Let us be blunt, 'getting into the point' is way of saying that you couldn't get off the baseline, yes Grasshopper?"

"Now that I think of it, we made errors from there. We hit a lot into the net, some long and some that the opponents were able to put away."

"Ah, just so... What kind of third shots do you hit?"

"Mostly drives. Drops are so hard."

"And what kind of shots do your opponents like?"

"They were converted racquetball players. They liked to hit the ball hard and they didn't mind hard shots. Oh, and their backhands were pretty good."

"If you play them again, what should you do differently?"

"Well, against those kind of players, I need to hit third hand drops. Try not to get into a banging game."

"Excellent, Grasshopper. Practice your drops! Oh, and if you don't mind, give my feet a nice rub, would you? I spent the afternoon drilling the beginners and my toes are quite sore."

Post 31, Master, The Net!?

"Master, if it weren't for the net, I think I would be a very good player." said the young acolyte.

"Harrump," said the Master and stifled the smallest of burps.

"Think Grasshopper, if you don't have a net, then your feared opponents will not have one either. The yin and yang of the world would be in disarray."

The Master sipped his tea and nibbled a bit on a macaroon. "Who's side does the net help, Young one?"

"Hmm, well if I am hitting the ball, I guess it is against me."

"The net is a like a sword with two edges, it cuts both ways. Your answer is true, but not always. A master can use the net to alter time and space and create a drop or hop shot at will," said the Master. His lips smiled with hidden knowledge, albeit coarse with macaroon crumbs.

"But for normal players, you are correct. The net punishes the hitters and protects those who seek to return the next shot. As soon as a shot comes over the net, then the forces switch, as have the roles of the players. The ebb and flow of the point, as you learned in your early lessons," said the Master.

"You must embrace this relationship," the Master continued, with another slurp of rapidly cooling tea. "How can you help the net protect you and your partner?"

"Hmm, I don't understand that question Master, how can I help an object?"

"Think geometry, Grasshopper, the closer the ball is to the net, the less angle space the hitter has. Of course as the ball approaches the net the available angle space will diminish to nothing. Do you not remember the graceful curve of the sine wave, as the length of adjacent leg of the triangle approaches that of the hypotenuse, the sine of the angle approaches 1, an angle of 90 degrees or, in your rudimentary view, straight up, creating, as a non-master might say, 'a challenging shot.' Not impossible, mind you, for a master. But we were talking of you and ordinary players. So, yes, if you can hit your ball close to the net it is protective in nature as a dense woods protects from the wind and rain. What else is protected by the net?" asked the master.

"If I envision it correctly, the closer the opponent is to the net, the more my feet are protected from attack!"

"Yes, quite so. Your upper body is more of a target, so you will of course carry your paddle higher as the ball is low or close to the net. Your feet can only be hit with a soft drooping shot. Think of a noodle in hot broth too long. Such a shot can't be moving rapidly, so even if your paddle is held high, you will have time to respond. Is that all young one?"

"I think so Master. I should seek to use the net to help my side and avoid its energy when it opposes me."

"Yes, exactly. Hmm, I seem to be out of macaroons and this tea is cold. Would you be so kind?"

Many years ago I created a mnemonic aid to remember the definitions of the sine, tangent, and cos functions. It is strange how often that has been useful over the years since 1968. I have a horror story about the 23.3 degree latitudes of the tropics of Cancer and Capricorn, too. That, sadly, has been of little value. It's all my teacher's, Miss Zur's, fault who said in 5th grade while interrupting my very

precise oral report on the tropic of Capricorn, "You'll never remember that. Use 20 degrees." Of course that's a bad case of rounding; she might not have been hired for her math skills. It is strange, as the master might say, what stays in a man's mind for decades.

Post 32, Student Po Receives More Insight

Student Po was called to the Master's study.

"You wished to see me, Master?" he asked.

"Yes, Po, you watched the masters play this morning. As part of your training, we shall discuss what you observed. From your observations, hopefully we will derive knowledge, and from knowledge, comes skill. And as you know, skill will provide mastership."

"Yes, Master, I am ready to think."

"What are your first impressions, Po?"

"I was surprised how gently the masters hit most balls. They did not seek to win points, but still they did win them."

"Yes, thus as it is, thus shall it be."

"They also didn't move very quickly. They flowed to the net, they dinked, they dinked, they dinked, and then it was over. Then it began again. How is that possible, Master? I run all over and often lack for breath. They were not even sweating and we are having unseasonable heat."

"The ways of a master are profound. Did you notice that they knew where each shot was going?"

"Yes, they were always in place. It was magic."

"Heh, heh. No not magic. A true master can foresee the shots of the point, when master plays master. Lessor players do ill advised things and are thus less predicable. Points are like players, they follow patterns. Know the player, know the pattern, you then know the point. Let us talk shot selection then, Po," continued the Master, "were you not surprised by the shots the masters hit?"

"Yes, they simply moved the ball to allow them to dance the court and caress the point."

"Student Po, the essence of pickleball is control. It is not savage overheads or huge topspin shots that paint a line. Oh, those shots have their place, for example when you are leading ten to nothing, but have little place in a master's game. What then are the main shots that a master uses? You watched their game, what did you see?"

"Serves were nothing special, but they never missed one."

"Yes, the sign of someone in control."

"Then the returns of serve seemed to be nothing special either," said Po with a frown. "The shots were not hard, they were fairly deep, but nothing that would win a shot. And the servers had no trouble hitting them back. Even the deep returns were easily returned."

"So the servers stayed behind the baseline after they served?"

"Yes, I guess they did. They either returned from where they were, or just moved smoothly forward to return a shorter ball."

"What did their returns look like?"

"Hmm, well they didn't catch my attention, I confess."

"Let your attention capture everything, Po. Master the details to become the master. So, continue."

"The returns seemed soft, Master. They looked like marshmallows crossing the net. I often thought that their opponents would slap them back and win the point quickly, but that never happened."

"Of course, a master will not take on a small percentage shot. Sum up a typical point for me, Po."

"Ah, there is a soft or perhaps better called a smooth serve to the middle of the service area. Then a softish shot towards the baseline. Then the servers would hit a soft shot that crossed the net, usually dropping near the kitchen line. Then would come a soft shot to the middle of the court or a dink, depending if the servers were at the net or not. If the servers were not up and had to hit a shot from the middle kingdom of their court, then they would always dink or drop. There was no attempt to win the point then, just to get to the kitchen line."

"Yes, when master plays master, the play is completed over the kitchen."

"And Master, there was no hurry with any shots. It seemed like the points were in slow motion."

"The masters' path is like that of the tiger, waste no energy and yet enjoy the antelope. And so we could summarize, which sadly will destroy detail, but the goal is to move forward, capture the net, then bend the opponents like the north wind will bend the willow. All shots contribute to that end. They do not seek to hit a 'magic' shot from the middle kingdom to score a quick point, nor return a serve so severe in nature that Brother Ben Johns would struggle with it. No strive for a sudden victory. The flow of the game is of the highest import. Po, do you have a questions? Do you now see a hint of the game at its peak of pleasure?"

"Yes, Master. Strive to simplify and walk the jungle path with a soft foot."

"Ah, well said Po. Now, shall we adjourn for lunch? I think they are serving sand dabs today."

Ok, some background. The other day I had two games where the play went as described above. Smooth and efficient, little running, no attempt to over power a point by anyone. It was a game of chess rather than hand grenades. I highly enjoyed those games as the control/strategic aspects of PB are what draws me to it. (I claim no flowing robes, or mantle of the master. I cheerfully admit that all of this is my opinion, but that's what I like and allow me to proselytize in my small way.) :-)

I was also watching a game yesterday, where the whole game was resolved with "who could hit it harder, sooner, faster." The ball kept moving faster and faster until each point was over.

Interestingly enough there was only one player who was pushing a power game. And as soon as the ball came to him, bang it went. Even when it would have been a much, much better shot to drop it over the net, and keep moving up. Nope, it was whack, followed by whack and players frequently were hammering it back and forth from mid court.

I talked to one of the players afterwards and he mentioned that it was frustrating that all of the points were the same. He was playing with the "hitter" and win or lose, it just wasn't a pretty or satisfying game.

There are a lot of reasons to play any sport. I'd like to think that some of those reasons would lead to harmony with the heavens. But I can't claim that my reasons for playing are more valid than anyone else's. If someone gets their enjoyment from smacking the ball continuously, fine for them.

Maybe this boils down to being a perfect partner, one more question might be "what style of pickleball do you want to play?" Of course that would require you to play several styles on demand! Then there are the opponents, if they want to bang, then you have to be good at resets, or everything escalates...

Let me finish this overlong post with this: I don't want to be critical of anyone's reason to play, or style. It's all good. For me there are some styles that are more interesting and fun than others. And it seems I'm gentling proselytizing again, see you on the court!

Post 33, Holiday News 2021

The Master and acolyte, Po, are traveling to see family due to the holiday celebrating the victory of the temple over the monastery from Yangun Provence in the 1847 pickleball masters tournament.

They will spend time in meditation, as is traditional.

They send best wishes to all who celebrate this and all other international holidays. Normal communication will resume at the end of their journeys.

Post 38, The Master Talks Happiness

"Master, I am having problems," said Po.

The Master was writing a scroll detailing the proper way to polish a pickleball net cord.

"Eh, Po, what is it blocks your happiness?" asked the Master.

"I've been getting to the net properly, as is written in the temple's *Guide to Pickleball Greatness*, but once I am there, it seems to cause me problems."

"Are you dinking properly?"

"Yes, that is not a problem. I'm striving to lift and push and use hybrid shots as required."

"Excellent, the dink is not for the hurried or impatient. It is the Chi of the sport and transcends the heavens and the earth."

"Er, yes Master, but I'm having problems when I try to score points."

"How so then, Po? If you are dinking well, the points will arrive."

"I am waiting for an error from the opponents and when I see one, I try to pounce and exploit it," said Po.

"Are you sure the opportunities that you see are really there?" asked the Master.

"I think so, I'm able to speed the ball up and keep it in the court."

"And..."

"When I hit, the opponents seem to return it too often. And it comes back harder than I hit it," said Po.

"Are these good opponents?"

"Yes, they are."

"Perhaps the fast ball is less effective the better the player?"

"I understand Master, and that seems correct."

"But it works better with your level and below?"

"Yes."

"So you must change your game depending on whom you are playing? Is that not always true? If a player hits soft serves, then there is no need to play back. If a player will not poach, then more of the court is open to you and you select shots thusly."

"Ah, so speed up a ball only against certain players?" asked Po.

"No, you must punish all the mistakes of others. But what is a mistake with an average player is not a mistake with a good player. You must decide if your sped up ball will be suitable for the skill of your opponent. If not, then dink more. Wait for a better shot. Marginal shots will be punished by the opponents! Strive to hit no ball that can be attacked, for that is the path to be punished," elaborated the Master.

"Ah, so more patience?"

"Yes. As it takes time to properly make rice flour and tea, a pickleball point is an item to be properly constructed, coaxed along like an egg in a fry pan, and finally served when properly completed. Cut no corners, Po, for that is not the path to happiness.

"Alas, all this talk of tea and flour has made these old bones hungry. Is it not dim sum day at the cafeteria, Po?"

Here are some thoughts that are hinted a bit in the above:

- 1) A speed up has to be good, as the return shot will be coming faster
- 2) don't use marginal opportunities with good players
- 3) don't forget to expect a return shot
- 4) It might be better to look for a soft, low, well placed strategic shot than a hard one that will be returned. think "mate in five" not "stroke of death"
- 5) How good is your return of a hard shot? Gets back to #1, the ball tends to speed up with average players. If you are overwhelmed, then a reset shot is needed, do you have one of those? Mark of a master!
- 6) If you have a good return of the initial speed up, then you can tease opponents into speeding up. Hit a shot that is just high enough to tempt them, and be ready for the faster ball.

Post 51, The Master and Competition

"Master," said Po, "are you going to enter the Masters Tournament this year."

"Po, the Master has no need of competition, so to answer your question, no. Is there any more tea?" replied the Master.

"I will fetch more tea, master. Why do you no longer need competition? You won the Masters Cup five years in a row," said Po.

"Ah, yes, well even the Master learns things. I was younger and didn't understand pickleball. Winning was important then, but no longer."

"What is important now Master?" asked Po.

"Think Po, of the components of a ball hit. The path, the paddle position, the body position, weight shift, body rotation, perhaps some arm swing, wrist pronation and supination, yes?"

"Yes, I remember Master, the eight major parts to the hit. We studied it in our first year here."

"Then what else comes before that? You've studied it, tell me Grasshopper."

"Prior to the hit," Po retreats to his teachings and begins to recite, "the player must arrive at the ball, he must steady his body, prepare to strike with weight properly placed. His mind must be cleared and ready for the moment to come, be unburdened by prior points, and be unburdened with the expectation, either false or true of the resultant hit. Nor must he expect to win the point with his strike. He must seek and believe in only the purity of the strike taking place in the now. There is no past, there is no future, there is only now. In the proper frame of mind, all time will slow, the ball will slow, its spin will creep around the ball, slowly. The player will begin the stroke with paddle and body as one. The ball will contact the paddle precisely in the center of the paddle."

"Ah, very good Po, you have recited your lessons, but have you learned them? Can you apply them when you play?" asked the Master.

"Not yet, Master, but I've come close a few times."

"Shall we journey deeper then Po? What comes before the arrival at the hit?"

Po returns to his lessons. "The player was balanced and no longer in motion as the ball reaches the opponent, he watches the swing and paddle and knows where the ball will go. As the ball leaves the paddle, the player has moved to the hitting position, once again stopping. The paddle will setup for the desired stroke, depending on the expected bounce of the ball and to produce the exact spin the shot requires."

"Yes, again have you learned this lesson?"

"It is difficult, Master, there is much to think about."

"Perhaps the answer is not to think? The answer is to do? You become one with the hit. It is an extension of yourself or perhaps you disappear and the hit becomes everything. Your Id vanishes, your self vanishes, the hit and the movements before the hit become the universe. You transcend time and place. You mentioned that time slows, it in reality becomes a slow river that you drift along. That is the essence of the hit."

"Master, I am humbled. What is it like to achieve this state?"

"It is beauty and grace and the embodiment of all we seek to know and understand at the temple. Along your journey as an acolyte, you will approach this understanding. When you become a grand master, you will know this. It will be part of you and it will free you.

"And when you achieve this state, there is no need of tournaments or competition. The purity of the art form is complete and there is no need strive for a medal or a trophy engraving. These things are markers on the path to enlightenment and at the journey's end, they are no longer required nor sought.

"But we were talking tea, yes? And see if there are any of the coconut cookies?"

Post 64 To Lob or Not to Lob...

Scott has promised a post on the glories of lobbing. I must confess I find them uninteresting and I usually am not interested in chasing them down. Which brings us to a new, third perspective. Pickleball is a lot older than you might imagine. Here is a short essay I found that lays out a position, no unlike my own. This is from a guy named Bill, who was quite the player in his day. Oh, things were different then, but here is some wisdom that has passed through ancient times and now to us. Behold mortals!

To lob, or not to lob, that is the question:
Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer
The slings and arrows of outrageous dinks,
Or to take arms against a sea of troubles
And by opposing, lob them. To poach—to push,
No more; and by a point to say we end
The heart-ache and the thousand natural shocks
That flesh is heir to: 'tis a consummation
Devoutly to be wish'd. To dink, to drop;
To chip, perchance to slam—ay, there's the rub:
For in that slap of death what nets may come,
When we have shuffled off this mortal court,
Must give us pause—there's the respect
That makes calamity of so long a rally.

Post 65 Down's Pickleball

Sung to the tune of "Yellow Submarine"

In Livermore where I was born
Lived a man who played at Downs
And he told us of his life
In the land of Pickleball

Go to the end of the Paseo,
Where you'll find the courts of blue
And we play beneath the trees
At our Down's Pickleball

We all play at Down's Pickleball
Down's Pickleball, Down's Pickleball

We all play at Down's Pickleball
Down's Pickleball, Down's Pickleball
And our friends all play there
Many more of them play indoors
And the ball begins to bounce,

We all play at Down's Pickleball
Down's Pickleball, Down's Pickleball

We all play at Down's Pickleball
Down's Pickleball, Down's Pickleball

As we play the game with ease (game of ease)
Everyone of us (everyone of us) has all we need (has all we need)

Bats of blue (bats of blue) and balls of green (balls of green)
In our Downs (in our Downs) Pickleball (Pickleball, ah-ha)

We all play at Down's Pickleball
Down's Pickleball, Down's Pickleball

We all play at Down's Pickleball
Down's Pickleball, Down's Pickleball

We all play at Down's Pickleball
Down's Pickleball, Down's Pickleball

We all play at Down's Pickleball
Down's Pickleball, Down's Pickleball

Post 71 Aggression

"Master, how can I be more aggressive?" asked Po, the young player.

"What does that mean, Grasshopper? To be aggressive?" asked the Master.

"Hmm, I've heard the word used a lot, I think it means hitting the ball harder or scoring more points or something?"

"If we think of the opposite of aggressive, perhaps we can understand this concept. What is the opposite, Young Po?"

"Passive, I guess."

"And what is that?"

"Hitting the ball to the opponents and waiting for them to make a mistake?"

"We can start with that. While it is not a bad way to play, the game is rumored to be about the mistakes and not the gems of wonderful hits. Let me suggest a more interesting way to play.

"Let us consider returning a ball to the opponents and if we do it well, they will have to do a couple of things. They will have to move their feet, and their paddle, and perhaps due to those things, produce a modestly awkward return.

"While that is going on, what are you doing, Po?"

"I'm waiting to see what they hit back."

"Precisely and now we want to think about that. If you hit a shot that requires the foe to move and stretch; to be aggressive, you must expect a less than perfect return, and move before the return comes back. Get into position to hit a winner, to attack, to force the foe to deal with a better shot than the last one. You deliver chances to fail to your opponents. There in lies "aggression." Bring trouble to your foe, don't just trust that errors will occur," said the Master as he reached for his cup of green tea.

"So aggression is not about hitting the ball harder, it's about anticipation," said Po.

"Well put Po. But always with movement to take advantage of your good shots, always! Do not stand and admire them, use them as stepping stones help you cross a creek, they are tools for stealing the opponents time and space. You can feel a good shot as it comes off the paddle. Trust this feeling and run like the wind.

"Think of the game of Go, or if you must Chess, where we build the middle kingdom position for control and a base from which to attack. Attack from the High Ground as the Kitchen Line used to be called, force weak shots from your opponents and be in a position to hit them to your advantage. Mark well, Po, if you move early you are also well prepared for miss-hits, net top hits, and other items that a desperate opponent might produce.

"Finally, Po, like things in the heavens, it will not always go according to plan. Sometimes your shots are not as good as you expected or the opponents find an excellent return and you will lose the point quickly. But do not give up. Your moving earlier than expected will make the play more complex for your foes. Even if they hit a few winners, you will get them back from the time and space pressures you create. Now, I fear the room is as cold as the tea, shall we find a fire for our feet and a warmer drink for my old bones?"

Post 74 Future Prediction Play Part 2

In the last (now prior) post I talked about my thoughts during service returns, now we swap sides of the court and we are going to serve.

Personalities come more into play here, names have been changed to protect the guilty innocent.

Let me see, to whom am I serving? Ah, yes, it's TopSpin Tommy. OK, while his forehand is very good, his back hand is not at the same level.

I'll serve to his backhand, and I want to hit a soft, high, and deep serve with some top spin. That should make him the most defensive.

Most importantly I need to get the serve in. I don't want to lose an opportunity to win a point by trying to be clever. I want a lot of room over the net and a lot of room inside the service court area. If I don't get it to the backhand I'm OK with that. Serves are not very important in doubles.

The serve is good enough and to Tommy's backhand and I'm hoping for a shortish return. If I get one, I'm going to expect to be at the net soon. Whether I drop the shot or place it up the middle with some pace depends on how high a bounce I get.

My dream is that the return is mid court and high, so I can hit a forehand down into the middle of the court. No, wait, my dream is that Tommy knocks it long. OK, I'm behind the service line and ready for anything.

Oops, the service return is deep and back to me, so I'm not going to get to the net quite yet. (If it looks like it might go long, I will simply play the shot and trust that partner will call the shot out if it's long.)

I'm still in back of the service line, so it's no problem to handle the deep shot. I don't have to back up to be well placed to hit the third shot. There are a lot of players who are happy to hit this shot off their back foot or leaning back or after three quick steps to get back behind the service line. I think it saves a lot of time to remain back of the service line after I or my partner serves and I can hit a better shot more easily.

Now, where to return the third ball? Tommy has followed his shot up to the kitchen line, so I can't just hit any old shot deep to his side of the court. Also if Tommy's partner likes to poach, then I would be more careful even if Tommy stayed back.

(If Tommy stays back, and a number of players do, it is worth deciding what to do in that case. We want to keep Tommy back so our shot choice is a deep shot to his side of the court. But wait, what will his partner do? The partner is already at the net and is probably aware that Tommy is back. If you're in that position, you've got to think about looking to poach. Because if you were not going to poach then the shot of choice is a high top spin shot somewhat over the middle of the net for safety. If there is a potential poach, then the ball has to be lower and closer to the sideline. If a poach is going to happen for sure, then hitting the ball behind the poacher is a good choice.)

So it's a classic situation, the ball will be hit from behind the baseline and there are two defenders at the net. There are three basic plays here, drop, drive, or lob. A lob is out as that would be easy to chase down and I don't practice those often and they are not my best shot.

Drives are OK, but lack an interesting element to me and I don't hit the ball very hard. I'll try the drop.

If it's good, partner and I can close to the net quickly. I should hit this to Tommy, he is probably still moving, which makes the shot more difficult for him.

It is in my interest to slow the point down. This is more important against good players as I might not be able to out hit them, especially since they are at the net already. Since I am serving, I'm starting behind in the point, so all my initial actions will be to achieve parity.

Back to the third shot... I let the ball drop a bit because I want to hit up on the ball producing an arcing shot that will fall to Tommy's backhand and I hope will land in the kitchen. Hitting a chop spin shot that skims the net is OK, but it won't be below the net when it's returned and it is easy to net that shot. Also if I over hit it, it will go long. But if the return shot is hard and low, it might be all I can manage.

If my drop is too deep we will be forced to stay close to the baseline if the opps are on their game, but more usually they will hit the ball back to mid court.

I can hit the fifth shot even softer as I'm closer to the net and then can continue to close. These are touch shots and there is no need to panic or hit the balls hard.

The third shot drop is pretty good. The opponents will not be able to attack, Tommy can't run around this shot, and we can move in a couple of steps and work on the fifth shot. I'll hit that shot short as well. If the fifth shot feels good off the paddle, then I move immediately; there is not wait and see. Our team running forward will add a little pressure to the opponents shot too.

OK, now where will Tommy return the fifth shot? It should be short and "dink like" if they are good players. The less experienced they are, the more likely they will hit the ball hard.

If I had hit it to Tommy's forehand I would be expecting a hard roll shot to the middle. But he doesn't have that shot on the backhand side. So I'm expecting a soft to medium shot to the middle but tending to cross court. Everyone likes to hit the cross court shot, it's easier and if I was sure this was going to be a dink, I would be moving to cover the cross court shot, either moving to the sideline or towards the middle as partner will shift to the sideline.

It is rare to get the ball back at me. Though there are a couple of players who prefer that to a cross court shot. Know who they are!

Since my partner and I are not yet up to the kitchen line, we want to dink the shot back as we are still not favored to win the point. So hopefully we'll get a shot that can be easily dinked. Then we'll settle into a dink game, which at the Downs will only last a couple of hits before the inevitable speed up or lob. So note at this point, I've not seen the 4th shot yet, but I'm thinking about the next couple of shots. I'm close or at the kitchen line, so the points will have more time for me to move.

As you close to the kitchen line, it's vital that your paddle is up. The worst shot from a defensive point of view is the too hard shot. You have to judge whether to hit it, you might not be able to duck it, etc. But if your paddle is up, it will be easier to block. If you get a dink, you'll have time to drop your paddle and dink back.

As an added bonus, if they pop it up, your paddle will be nicely placed to hit down on the ball and maybe end the point.

So there is what I try to consider as I serve and seek the net. Most of this is just reactions and having played a bunch. More of it is a question of whom you are playing. Players get tired, get lazy if they

are behind or ahead, watch for those that will not run up as they return the serve. They deserve to be punished! I was playing with Dan today and I think I made a remark about being up at the net asap. The next point he was there and easily put away a high ball. "Is that why I'm here?" he asked with a grin. "Yup," I replied.

Post 77 How to Move Like a Master

"Master, with the hot weather my heart rate is climbing!" exclaimed Po, the acolyte.

"Harrumph," grunted the Master who was working on his next book with a working title of "Details of the Inside Out Backhand when a Tailwind is Blowing, Volume 3." He was well into the 43rd chapter and did not like the interruption.

"What are you saying, Po? You are out of breath?"

"Yes, Master, I seem to be working too hard or my condition is lacking."

Another grunt from the Master as he puts down his pen, straightens up and regards Po with a tiny bit of interest.

"Whom were you playing, Po, that brought you to the edge of exhaustion?"

"I was in a game with Do and Jo. As you know Do is a heavy hitter and I struggle with his game."

"Ah, yes, Do has the sad story of a childhood growing up in a tennis family. Even worse they played on clay and spent all their time at the baseline, hitting long shots, and sliding too and fro, like chickens scratching for a nice pebble to swallow. Well, the monastery's feelings on tennis are well known, but lack universal adoption. And we are all worse for it. Perhaps in another hundred years or so..." the Master leaned back and his face took a serene set as he imagined the future that might come to be. He shook himself and returned to the imperfect present.

"So you struggled with Do? In what way? We must understand what you were doing before we can find a solution."

"I was moving well, I thought, but I kept getting caught trying to hit Do's shots. He was hitting up my sideline or short to my cross court and I was lunging and running to try to catch up."

"Yes, Po, a classic problem. Fortunately there is a classic solution. You must run less."

"Less, Master? I can't get to the ball now. How will less running get me anywhere?" asked Po, as sweat seeped out on his brow.

"Po, you are still just learning and now it is time to learn more about court movement. Shall we start with a question or two?"

Po nodded and reached for his personal scroll and pen, ready to scribe the knowledge of the Master.

"As you know Po, there is a five volume set of books describing all the current theory on court movement. You as a student have not been tasked with learning them yet. Let us look into one facet of this topic for a moment.

"If you were at the baseline warming up with Do, would you get all of the balls back?"

"I think I would rarely miss, Master."

"And if you were drilling from the transition area, would you get all of the cross court shots hit to you?"

"Yes, almost all, though not as well as from the baseline."

"That is correct, Po. You have more time when practicing. Is it obvious now why that is true?"

A light went on in Po's face. "I understand Master, when I'm practicing, I'm at rest when the ball is hit to me!"

"Exactly Po. You are ready, in a good setup position, paddle properly placed and looking for all the possible shots. Sadly in a point, those fundamentals are tossed aside like last night's melon skins.

"The non-master is likely to be running, or trying to stop when the ball is hit to him. All motion creates momentum. And a momentum burden needs to be shed for the next shot. Oh, yes, of course if your momentum carries you to the right and that's where the next ball comes, then you look like you know what you are doing. But if the ball goes to the other side, it frequently cannot be returned. It's very sad to watch a returnable ball vanish past a player.

"Po, we do not want to the game to one of guessing. The elegance of pickleball is to pressure your opponent to eventually give you the scoring opportunity you want. To do that you must also return his shots. Do favors two shots due to his tennis background. Which will he hit? If Do is playing well, we will not know until we see him hit it. And while he hits the ball, we need to be ready for either shot, or even a rare shot up the middle.

"To maximize the ability to reach all shots, we need to run less than you are used to. You must stop and compose yourself earlier. Place the paddle where it needs to be and empty your mind. Relaxation will let you move your fastest and let you move in any direction. Let your calmness flow around you like the circles of a pond which has accepted a pebble tossed into it.

"Here is your homework Po. In the next few games you play, make sure you are fully stopped before the ball gets to your opponent. Be conscious of this. You cannot be unconscious until you've done it deliberately. So start with deliberate action and let it modify your game. Take no more than two steps before stopping and waiting for the next shot.

"Learn this Po and take one more step towards the Master's podium."

"Yes, Master, I will. Thank you for sharing your knowledge."

"It is I who thank you, Po. This conversation reminds me of when I was like you, young, and needing of direction. How many years was that? More than leaves on a tree. Now, be off with you, I have more writing to do." The Master redipped his pen and bent back over his papers.

Post 83 Stages of Understanding

"Master, when will I understand the game?" asked Po, the acolyte.

The Master was busy with pumice stones and assorted sandpapers. Not only did his favorite paddle need some maintenance, but the callus on his right foot was getting too advanced. An advanced callus will slow even a Master.

"What did you say, Po, as you can see I'm a bit busy here?" replied the Master.

"I'm wondering about understanding the game, Master. Sometimes it seems simple and then it seems complex. What is it?"

"Oh, Po, I thought you knew this. The game is both simple and complex. As a player you must make the complex become simple. Hand me that nail file please."

The warm air in the Master's study and beams of light from the narrow window were awash with the callus' and paddle's airborne sandings.

"But Master, that seems to be little help? How can I make a difficult thing simple?"

"Oh, that. Of course you simplify the game by movement."

"Could you provide an example Master?"

"What? I'm very busy, but oh well. It is my destiny to provide enlightenment, I suppose.

"Remember back when you started to play Po? You just stood there and were surprised when the ball came to you?"

"Yes, those were scary times."

"Harrumph, and then later you expected some balls to come to you. And you became better at returning them. Then you expected that any ball might come to you and were even better at returning them as you more ready to move or block.

"Now Po we seek the final chapter of this short book. What is next?"

"Hmm, nothing comes to mind Master."

"Yes, I know. How sad, but the next step is to understand where the ball will go and to go there before the ball does. Understand, move, and strike like they teach at the Cobra Kai, down in the village."

"Master, I've never heard you say anything good about the Cobra Kai?"

"Yes, and you will not. Recognizing that they do something well is not high praise, it is what any capable player must do, even the 'Leg Sweepers.'

"So let me finish the progression of a proper player. One is that they are surprised at the location of the ball, then two they are ready if it comes to them and finally, three you move to where the ball will be. Thus the complex becomes simple.

"So Po, recognize the flow of the game, and the mental flow of your opponents, then move to interrupt the flow and create time and space pressure to defeat the enemy. The blessed Erne is such a move as is the proper poach. Do both when they are right. And further Po, since your partner is doing this as well, when they Erne or Poach, you must also move as the court coverage for your side has been

disturbed. If/when the ball comes back, you must be in position.

"Only trees should grow roots, keep you feet and mind moving at all times. Now where is my foot lotion? I got some new Henua lotion around here. Po, it provides twelve important healing ingredients. So I'll have that going for me..."

Editor's note. If you watch the YouTube video that Angel put up you will see him move to where the ball is going on a number of points. This is usually in a poaching situation. He moves well and he moves early.

Post 85 Dinking Song

We're coming, we're coming, our brave little band.
On the right side of dinking we now take our stand.

We like to hit high lobs because we do think
That the people who chase them aren't able to Dink!

Away, away with dinks, by gum, with dinks, by gum, with dinks, by gum,
Away, away with dinks, by gum, the song of the Non-Dinking Army.

We never eat granola because we do think.
That gals with oats in their teeth are liable to dink!

Away, away with dinks, by gum.....

We never hit soft thirds because we do think,
that soft shots will often lead people to dink.

Away, away with dinks, by gum.....

We never eat cookies because they have yeast,
And one little crumb makes a man dink like a beast.
Now can you imagine a greater disgrace
Than a man at the kitchen with crumbs on his face?

Away, away with dinks, by gum.....

I remember this song from long ago. It was about the demon alcohol as I remembered it, but it lent itself to a bit of a brush up. The source where I found it, stated that the author is unknown. It became popular with Teton Tea Parties in the 1960s. There are other verses, but I think what we have here ought to be enough! Dink on!

Post 92 Winning by Not

"Master, I am having trouble winning points," said Po after entering the Master's room.

The smell of incense filled the room, or maybe it was Louisiana Hot Links, the Master was partial to both. The carpets were rich, soft and lent the room a quiet that the slap of a court shoe would not disturb.

The Master was busy with a small cotton ball and some cleaner, making sure the grip of his paddle was perfect. A cup of tea and a saucer of almond cookies lay at his elbow.

"What is that Po? I did not hear you come in," the Master replied.

"I'm not winning a lot of points. Points that I think I should win," said Po. He looked dejected and any glow of a long day's play had faded his features. His tan couldn't break through his lack of winning.

"Remember Po, the movie that was shown last week. The one with the little green creature, who suggested that doing and trying were different things? What was his name?"

"It think you are thinking of the Star Wars movie and that was Yoda, who was training the last Jedi."

"Yes, well, whatever. The issue of trying is one that must be understood. Trying is a measure of impatience, Po. Doing requires patience and waiting. Effort must be used only when appropriate." The Master reached for a cookie and took a nibble. The cookie made a soft sound as it was replaced on the plate. The tea was slurped and the Master put down his paddle to concentrate on Po's lesson.

"But Master, I wait for an opportunity, but I can't seem to finish the points."

"Of course. I suspect like all young players, you see the path to win the point."

"Yes, I get a pop up or loose shot and I strike, like the cobra."

"Of course. And how many times does the cobra eat for each strike?"

"Well that is the problem Master, my strikes are not wonderful."

"So we have opportunity. Errant ever are opponents given time and teasing. The game is one of waiting for the gifts of the gods. Or lessor opponents, heh, heh," said the Master. A gleam shown in his eyes as his memory skated back over decades of matches.

"But Po, what happens then?"

"Then I strive for victory!" replied Po.

"Ah and in doing so, you miss on occasion?"

"Yes, but I have the chance, should I not take it?"

"Po, we are back to doing and trying. The little green man knew something of the truth in this, but not all. I guess it was made that way to satisfy the base understanding of the masses. Sad that, but Po, you are not of the masses. You need to know more and do more and do better. When opportunity arises, you must do several things, you must recognize it, which is not as simple as you might suspect. Some opportunities are easy and some are traps for the unknowing.

"It is often better to be conservative in your cobra strikes, Po. If you seek to accrue more advantage

rather than end the point, you will find more success. Stretch the opponent, make them run, of course hit it past them if you can, but only when you can do it without error.

"Po, the final phase of all players to become the player that cannot be beaten. To do that, remove errors. Never miss easy shots by over hitting. Better to dink back than to miss long or try to overpower the net tape. Patience is supreme, wait and then wait some more. If an opportunity shows up, take it but do not over take it. Play the ball back firstly, then winners will come. Let the opponents err, you just strive to be serene and patient and accurately and thus deadly. Does that help Po?"

"Yes Master. I see your wisdom. I will strive to the wall that misses no returns."

"Excellent Po. Would you like an almond cookie? The chef seems to have given me an extra today. I need to watch my figure, heh, heh."

Post 140 Po Learns to Control Bangers

The weather was turning cool in the valley where the monastery has existed for hundreds of years. The leaves had turned to various colors and the river was low due to the summer's heat.

Po and his fellow acolytes had finished another year in their quest to master the sport, game, and life of pickleball. Of course there were always problems, as the game is difficult and how much can anyone learn in a mere few years?

"Master, I am playing well, but some games are not in the style that you and the other masters teach," said Po.

"What elements of the divine style are lacking in these points, Po?" replied the Master.

"I find that many of the players from the village only want to hit the ball and hit it hard. I struggle to play as I have been taught, to caress and guide the ball, without excess speed or effort."

"Ah, you've finally realized that bangers are detrimental to the game?"

"I think that now. I used to like hitting the ball hard, but now it seems just wrong."

"Po, I am pleased with your progress. In only seven years, you have seen the light. Many don't see this until the tenth year.

"Let me pass on some thoughts and we will find some wisdom there, hopefully. Firstly, let's talk about the serve. What is it for?" asked the Master.

"Well, to start the rally and to try to move an opponent around a small amount. The emphasis is to get the serve in, with a modest bonus of pressuring the opponents if possible," replied Po.

"That is good Po and this was an early lesson, but fundamental to the play. A rally where the serve is out, is not a rally, it is a cry for help and perhaps, a symptom of a wounded psyche or deep set problems. Fortunately Po, you are not affected with sick spirits.

"Now, we move to more detail. The serve also sets the initial path of a point. If the serve is spinney, we expect a spinney shot back. If it's hard, low to the net, and deep, we might expect the point to be framed around such shots. But Po, what kind of point do we expect if the serve is a modest lob? One where the ball is fairly deep, coming deep into the court with some top spin and a nice high bounce? We don't teach that serve to our beginners, but the time is right for you. What will the return be like?"

"Hmm, a high shot near the baseline can be quite awkward to return. The fence can get in the way and it's impossible to hit top spin with this kind of ball. And very difficult to hit the ball hard and flat. So the ball hit back might be fairly soft with a lot of height to it? Would that be correct Master?"

"Yes Po, it is very difficult to hit a hard shot from deep in the court. A "banger" to use the crude term, would much rather have a low shot that they can hit up on a bit and put some top spin on it. So with just a soft, high serve we have pruned the weed of the banger just a bit.

"Now Po, let's look at a service return. We turn to the other side of the court and we are receiving the ball. How do you normally return it?"

"I will hit a deep shot that is close to someone's backhand, usually up the middle of the court," answered Po.

"Very good, and if the players are bangers? What do they do with that ball?"

"They usually drive the ball and we try to block."

"Try to block?"

"Often I can't get all the way to the kitchen line and It can be difficult to hit a hard shot from off the kitchen line."

"Po, let me suggest a new service return. Try hitting a lob back. It doesn't have to be very high, but like the soft serve, hit it deep, with a nice high trajectory, into the middle of the court. How would that change things?"

"Well, we discussed that it's difficult to hit a high shot hard, so I would expect less third shot drives," said Po.

"You also get one more thing from this type of return, Po, what is that?"

"Umm, oh, I see, the shot is slower, so I will have more time to get to the kitchen line!"

"Excellent Po. Not only have we blocked the bangers from their favorite shot, but we've made it easier for our side to get in position to defend against the third shot. A third shot that should be easier to hit rather than block. Also bangers might easily hit a lot of balls long from being pressed into the fence, so watch for those."

"Thank you Master, your words of wisdom are always shrewd and useful."

"You are welcome Po. Go fourth and teach all bangers you come across the error of their ways. Heh, heh. Now, as it is getting a bit chilly in here, would you mind fetching a pot of tea for these old bones?"

The lobby serve and the lobby second shot are obviously nothing new to me and I'm sure to all of you. However I was playing with Melissa this week and she is using the lobby serve and it's been effective in my judgment. Since she can hit the ball with anyone, I was surprised by this choice of shot. If I had her reflexes I would seek to play as many "bangy" points as I could.

But I'm slow and old and when I realized the usefulness of the soft serve, I thought about the second shot too. One of the cardinal sins (from where does that phrase come?*) is to hit a serve return into the net. And like Po and the Master, I'd rather not play a banging game, so it occurred to me that with the serve and return being anti-bang, that I could control the early tempo and style of a point.

I trotted this out the last couple of days on court and I found that I could get much easier second shots back with a lobby serve, which made my third shots easier. And if I used a lobby second shot, I could easily get all the way to the kitchen line and would never net a service return. The third shots that were "forced" with a lobby second were much easier to return as well.

So there were a lot of points where my side got easy to handle third shots. Oh, we didn't win them all, but we were better off with the shots that were not being banged at us.

(OK, you will get a full lob back on occasion. There are people who hit them, but it's not the end of the world and with the point being a bit a slower in pace, you have more time. We are talking of disrupting bangers a bit, we will deal with lobbers another day!)

If you like to bang or not, there are ways to bend the opponents to your preference for the point style.

This is worth playing with I think, so give it a go!

* (Cardinal sins are a common phrase referring to the seven deadly sins which are not quite in the bible. Sadly missing a service return in the net is not one of those, but it could be...)

Post 139 The Master Runs Around



Fall had come to the province and the play had moved to the interior courts. The stone walls were cold to the touch, and if the wind was wrong, would be covered with dew in the morning. The outdoor courts would see rain and frost and the colored leaves from the stately trees that surrounded the courts. The apple crop was good this year and the monks and masters enjoyed them, the pies, the sauces, and looked forward to some cider later in the season.

The Master was taking a morning walk. He was working on a small, four volume book of instruction about the bend of the right knee while hitting the inside out backhand. He had some additional research that he was planning.

His stroll took him past the upper level courts where the students were sparring. After a casual glance...

"Stop!" cried the Master. And all of the students, in their seventh year of training, stopped and remained motionless on the court. After years of instruction, holding position to allow a Master to instruct was automatic. The ball rattled through the court to fetch up against the back wall.

"Po, by the scales of the Fire Serpent, what are you doing?" asked the Master.

"I've just returned a serve and I am heading to the kitchen line," answered Po, a bright student, but with still a few rough edges. Oh, he could hold his own against the other students, but was not able to perform near a master's level.

"Then why have you not reached the kitchen line? Are you slow of foot today, would you like to run some laps around the monastery?" asked the Master.

"I was heading there, but you called for us to stop."

"Had you made a good service return, you would already be at the kitchen line. Where was your error Po?"

"Hmm, I thought I hit a good ball and then moved up. I don't see the error Master."

"You were a step late and half a step left, Po. And why was that? Because you returned the serve with your forehand!"

"Yes, I did, but..."

"No, but!" interrupted the Master, "By running around to hit the forehand, you surrendered a full step to your opponents! You also distorted your position on the court, so that the path to the kitchen line was longer than had you hit the proper backhand shot. Is that not clear Po?"

"I see that now, Master. While it seems harmless to run around the shot, it warps the play."

"Yes and your partner should move to cover the gap you've created by being in the run around position and also not being at the kitchen line in time. He must move a quarter step over to correct for this. That creates an alley for the opponents to attack. You can get away with this sloppy play, Po, with sloppy opponents, but against good players you've given up several percent points of advantage. As a lesson, Po, got to the library and report to us tomorrow on Master Yan's book, *The Lack of a Backhand Shot and the Inevitable Fall of Civilization*. Look at volume six, chapters 34, 35, and 40, for the pertinent information."

"Yes Master, I look forward to enlightenment." Po returned to his game and Master was off for an afternoon tea. The students again admired the knowledge of the Master and hoped to one day share it. Alas the library, devoted to pickleball theory, housed thousands of volumes. Not all students would have the opportunity to read them. Each year some students were released from the monastery to play on tour. These were the students who lacked the vital essence that was a Master. While they had was enough to play professional pickleball, but not enough to extend the world's understanding of the game. The truly great players stayed at the monastery, studied, thought, played, and wrote.

(With only kind thoughts to those who like the run around, Editor of the Monastery.)

Post 155 The Story of Jim and Lucinda

Chapter 1

(Editor's note, there is only one chapter and it's not too long.)

It was a normal Tuesday at the courts, kind of slow, not too many players. But suddenly it wasn't normal. There was a strange player on court three.

Jim watched her play and decided that he was interested. Besides her grace, there was a tasty backhand to admire. The stranger was playing with three other women and they soon finished their game and surrendered the court.

There was only one gate on the courts and Jim hung near by. Jim was a regular and one of the better players. He knew almost all of the other regulars.

The ladies exited the gate and went to look for water and phones. Jim sidled over to Janet. "Who's your friend, Janet?"

"Hi Jim, and good morning to you. Her name is Lucinda and she's new to the area."

"Really. She has a nice overhead and seems to be able to dink."

"Yah, she's pretty good. I've only played with her one game, but she didn't do much wrong. So Jim, can we get a game?" Janet wasn't interested in talking about Lucinda, but was ready to go back on the courts.

"Sure, and see if Lucinda wants to join us." Nudge, nudge.

"Ah, you are interested... Naughty boy! Okay, let me get something setup."

And she did and introduced Jim and Lucinda. The play went well and Jim was, in a word, smitten.

She had the grace thing already mentioned, and played around the court as if she were dancing. Never a foot wrong and a strong serve to boot.

She glided about as if on roller skates. Not the ones that were in line, but the real ones with four wheels and a toe stop, those skates, where corners could always be taken at high speed. She could slap a ball like an angry child after a fly. Or gently lift a dink over the net as if neatly placing a scoop of ice cream into a crumbly cone. In fact, she seemed to have all the needed parts for excellent pickleball and then some.

Jim was in love and vowed to follow her from podium to podium, as he could see tournament play with Lucinda, or Lu as she preferred to be called. They played all morning only stopping for water breaks.

"Lu, we must play tomorrow! Can you add me to your play card? Maybe play the day away and then all the others to follow? Please tell me yes?" asked Jim.

"Why, Jim, that's quite the invitation. I'm available tomorrow. As for all the days thereafter, well, we'll just have to see." Lu smiled and Jim's heart throbbed a bit more. His smart watch beeped a warning that his pulse was a bit high. But he cared not.

My God even her eyes matched her paddle and her paddle matched her top and that the skirt, and so on down her legs to cute socks and dainty court shoes.

Yes, Lu was the full package and Jim, too long alone, had shifted his tired sports car of a life into a new

gear and vowed to drive this road until it ended or he crashed.

They played the next day and the day after. They met for coffee before, and lunch afterwards. Soon they were an item.

They began to drill and then to play local tournaments. They won and played again. They played so well together that they soon moved from 3.5 to 4.0. They had oodles of plastic medals and splinters from climbing on so many podia.

All summer long they played and won. Skills rose and happiness rose with it.

"Jim," said Lu one day.

"Yes, my dear," terms of endearment trickled from Jim's lips all summer. He was, as we have already noted, very smitten and a smitten partner is apt to say endearment type things.

"I, I'm, I..." said Lu.

"Is there a problem, Lu dearest?" Jim was suddenly alert and stressed. His smart watch beeped a bit as his heart rate climbed.

"I, er, we can't play anymore," Lu said in a small whisper.

"My, dear, what is wrong? Are you ill?"

"I'm well, thank you. But we can't play. It's difficult and these months have been wonderful, but we must part. I'm sorry but I can't say more. It's intensely personal and private."

"Lu, it must be my fault! I've erred in some manner, please let me make it up to you. Our bond on the court and off, is too important to let die. Please, tell me my dear."

"Oh Jim, it's horrible, but, but, if you must know. You've become a lobber. There, I've said it, a lobber and I can't go on like this."

"I don't think I'm an over lobber? Sure I hit a couple every game, but I..."

"Jim, a lobber is the last to know. You were a fine player once, great with drops, and you could dink softly like stroking a small kitten. My heart melted to see your deep knee bends and soft sure strokes. Oh, I remember those days so well. The sun glistening off your forearm as you produced slice after slice. But now, you rush a couple of dinks, not treating them like fine china, but more like a plastic cup to be tossed in the sink for a bit of a scrub. Two dinks and then you lob. I tear inside to see it."

Jim died inside. Yes he lobbed, but not too much, one would think. All players lobbed, it was really part of the game and well, sure he liked it, but he could give it up any time.

"I'll never lob again!" he cried. "I love you too much and if that means no more lobs than I shall go and lob no more."

"Oh, Jim, I couldn't ask that of you. It would tear your soul apart. It would be impossible to stop and I can't make you change yourself. We must part. I will miss you every day and with every game, but go I must."

Lu was in tears and Jim pretty close. He was a guy after all and sobbing on the courts was frowned upon, though there were often squeegees about.

They parted. They were sundered. They were split like an accident from a bad diamond cutter.

Lu as mentioned was from out of town and she went home for the rest of the summer.

Jim struggled from then on. Before he was often invited to the most skilled games at the club. But soon the invitations dried up.

He was playing 4.0, then 3.5, and then 3.0. His skill had fled like a tide on a super moon.

He tried to return to tournament play, but partners were soon impossible to find. The tournament hosts quietly lowered his DUPR score to allow him to try to be competitive again.

He played the Southeast Open. He was tempted to toss out his paddles and do something frowned upon by pickleball players, namely golf. He could see striding the fairways along, beaten and taking out his sorrow on a small white ball. But he would play this last tournament and then decide.

It was bad. Very bad. He lost all his matches and by the end of his play, he was going to be happy to take up golf or shuffleboard or something else.

As he walked off the court after his last match, a hand came out and touched his arm.

"Jim," said Lu.

"Lu," said Jim, with a startled expression on his face.

"I watched all your matches," said Lu.

"I'm sorry, we hardly scored seven points a game."

"Jim, you didn't score four points."

"How could you stand it?"

"Your game has changed," she reached out for his paddle. He allowed her to take it,

Lu ran her hand over the edge guard. She noted the scrapes and scars. The entire face was weathered and worn. In the old days the face of Jim's paddle had a small worn area right in the sweet spot. The edge guard would be pristine as a good player will never scrape the court.

Lu raised her eyes and looked into Jim's. "I could not stay away."

"I've, I've, been having troubles," Jim said.

"I want us back," said Lu.

"Why? I'm no longer the player I was. I'm about to take up golf."

"No, anything but golf!"

"Well, I was thinking of shuffleboard too."

"NO, NO, Jim, we can rebuild our partnership! You've been cured!"

"Cured?"

"Jim in all of your games, you never lobbed. I thought it couldn't be done that a man would change so much. You've re-won my heart. Jim, I am yours if you will have me."

"Lu, I want nothing more." They embraced and held each other. The pain of separation evaporated like a sunny court after a modest rain, where towels and squeegees were industrially applied.

"But, Lu, I played so badly, I've won nothing for months."

"Yes, but you didn't lob. It's not whether you win or lose, but how you play the game! I love my non-lobber!"

They returned to their former happiness. Jim's play improved and soon they returned to the podia of tournaments.

They married and had two children, just enough to fill a court. Jim taught the kids to play and honed their games, but he never taught them to lob, for he had learned his lesson.

Well, I hope this was entertaining and also a bit instructional too. No resemblance to anyone living or dead. I've wanted to write something in the style of P. G. Wodehouse, who wrote a bunch of stories with golf as the back drop. This was a nice exercise for me. Little additional details have been running through my head for a couple of days. Not all of them made it into the story. Perhaps there will be more.

Post 157 The Man Who Couldn't Dink

Bernie Untertopf was a newish pickleball player. Or at least he wanted to be. He had come from another sport, far, far away and he lacked a lot of the needed skills to move up in the PB world.

He managed to master most of them as he played regularly, but the skill that eluded him the most was dinking. He tried and tried. Read "An Idiot's Guide to Dinking," watched YouTube videos, "If you Don't Do This, You'll Never Dink Properly," until his eyes required glasses. But still he couldn't do it. He was athletic enough and young enough that the game shouldn't have been that hard. It seemed to have become a mental issue. He tended to tense up when playing and when it came time to hit a soft shot, he would freeze and dump the ball in the net, or slap at it and hit it out. While he might be deadly at mosquitoes, hitting the hanging drop shot was not his best.

He played at the local club and was there frequently. He had time off in the mornings and could usually play three times a week.

He found a group of advanced beginners and did well. At the beginning level, the need to dink was not a hindrance to social play and acceptance. And there he stayed. Without the dink he wasn't going anywhere. Interestingly, he hardly noticed. He had good days and bad and played and had a reasonably good time.

Nancy Machtbesser was a lady if a certain age. Too young to be a cat lady, old enough to be comfortable in who she was, she owned three pickleball paddles all of different colors, for example, and didn't care who knew about it.

She cared about stuff, too much, it must be said, about all sorts of other things. The environment, her Corvette, organic food, beef jerky, proper recycling categories, and good plastic wrap, for example.

A free spirit as it were and after having traded away her last flat of rescued succulents, was looking for a project. The soup kitchen was fully staffed and fully souped. The veterans' dining hall was fully decorated. All her friends were healthy. Her library books were all returned. Her favorite authors had nothing new for her to read. In short she was bored and ready for something new.

Nancy set her eyes on Bernie. She liked what she saw, except for the dinking of course. His other strokes were reasonable, he wasn't enamored with any strange shots, he didn't lob much, for example. He looked like broken in shoes, that would be a comfortable fit and ready for a lively walk. But not too old, nor too worn, he looked just right, with a bit of moderation. Well there was the dinking hole in the sole that needed patching...

She decided that Bernie was her next project. She could "fix" him, she was sure, er, not like fixing a stray dog, of course, but could still help set him up for a better future.

Nancy had come from tennis and in spite of that, had developed a good pickleball short game. The only reason she noticed Bernie is that she had friends in the beginners' group.

Nancy cut Bernie out of the heard. No cowboy would have done it better with a rope and pony. One day he was in one corral and the next day another. They started to play together, then the old, "let's go for out for coffee" thingy happened. Who can resist that siren song, hmm? And resist he didn't.

"Bernie, we have something to talk about," Nancy said, while slurping at her Americano.

"OK, what's on your mind?" a rich, dark roast in his cup. This was a nice coffee shop, where coffee

came in cups and was not in permeable cardboard with ill fitting lids.

"I was thinking, Bernie, that I can help you with your problem."

"Well, my car is due for a wash, but I don't think it's anything I need help with..."

"No, I was thinking about pickleball."

"Oh. Oh. And what problem is it?"

"Well, Bernie, you don't dink much. I need you to dink. It's frankly a bit embarrassing. You don't do it when you should and mess it up when you shouldn't."

"I know, I know," he said wearily, "I struggle with it. It seems against my nature. I can hit and serve and stuff, but that dinking is tough for me," Bernie's thoughts returned to the five dinks he had netted, hit off of ordinary dinks. Not the difficult dinks where anyone, and on occasion everyone, misses, but the biscuits and gravy type of dinks, where the pressure is minimal and even someone with very slow, large feet could get to them and get them back.

"Oh, Bernie, I sense your pain and it's a deep fester I'm sure. Maybe a sign of a difficult childhood?" Nancy, was used to reading psychological self help books. Perhaps the self help library could actually help someone besides the authors and publishers?

"I don't know about that, my mom and I get along well..."

"Maybe you just need to relax more. Maybe it's stress?" That was another book on Nancy's shelf, "Live a Stress Free Life and Live Long and Prosper." That book had many unusual fans.

"Well, my job is pretty stressful. No one appreciates how much accountants struggle to get every penny correct. So many folks just say 'close enough!' but that doesn't work in my business. When I play in the mornings, I often am thinking about work later in the day. A lost penny here, and then one there and pretty soon you are up to a dollar," Bernie chuckled at the accountants' joke. It was an old one, but a good one.

"Ah, I thought so. Work has its purpose, I suppose, but helping with dinks seems not to be it. Tell you what, come over for dinner on Friday and I'll fix you something nice and we'll work on relaxation exercises."

"I'd like that. I don't get a homemade meal all that often. I'll bring some wine. Red or white?"

"Don't be silly, of course red. We won't be having fish or pasta! Red meat is the answer to stress," she said it as if it were obvious, commonly known, and fundamental, like refraction and nuclear resonance.

The meal on Friday was lamb shanks in a thick rich gravy, with a bottle of wine and that was just what was in the gravy. Bernie and Nancy drank the other two bottles. After they had eaten and all were fed and full, Nancy stood and took Bernie's hand.

"Come with me and I'll relax you."

He did and she did. Nancy believed in complete stress relief, she had read many books and was willing to share all of them. The details are not important and we will draw a curtain across them. Our story resumes some thirty six hours later...

On Sunday, they returned to the pickleball court. A careful observer might have noticed a weakness in Bernie's knees, and a tremor in his hand, his non-paddle hand thankfully, and the hint of smile and some lassitude in his demeanor. Yes, Bernie had been truly relaxed. He had never been this relaxed.

His stress vanquished, his fear of a missing penny or two gone, and his play was a revelation. His baseline shots were deep and throbbed with cut spin, except for the ones with top spin. His angles were acute when his opponents were obtuse and vice versa when required.

His drops were the drops of the Gods. And as he drew close to the kitchen line, lo, his hands remained steady, his eyes keen and shoulders ready to gently lift the ball and place it just so. Bernie became a dinker. He embraced it, he succeeded, he fell in love with the soft and short game. Where he used to slap the ball, he now caressed, instead of an infinite variety of netted balls, he now could drip one after the other over the net, like dropping doughnut dough into a fryer, and hitting his corners were as nonchalant as 5.0 at a 3.0 picnic game.

The fear of the net vanished and the yippy slap shots were gone forever. Bernie was a changed player.

Nancy and Bernie romped, if that is the word, through their normal opponents. Mistakes were so seldom that it seemed a practice session. Nancy observed this with a satisfied feeling that it was a project gone well, but wistful in that Bernie was done in one, like the inside out shot down the line to a center leaning poacher wannabe. Bernie was on his way and he didn't need her anymore.

The only task left, was to gently send Bernie on his way.

Between games she had gotten a text. The animal welfare group she worked with, "Felines for Friends," had an entire litter of kittens that needed someone to raise them. Feedings every four hours for a month. Yes, Nancy was on call and ready to take them on.

They finished playing that morning. Bernie glowed with victory and new skills. His hands were the calm of a large rock well placed in a sluggish stream, his knees had recovered from their earlier weakness. He was ready to climb the pickleball ladder. Who knew how high it went?

"Nancy, that was great play today," he said. His eyes sparkling and his confidence on the top shelf where one finds all the best bottles.

"Bernie, I'm so proud. You dinked like a fiend and played like a young devil!"

"Shall we celebrate our play this evening? I've got some more wine," he waggled his eyebrows in a suggestive fashion, with the confidence of a man who knows more than his share about, say, a high backhand roll shot, or extended means of stress relief.

"Oh, Bernie, I'm sorry, but our time is up. We've worked wonders with your game and you are now ready to move on. Go find the 4.0 game and impress them. I'll never forget this weekend, but we can't do it again. You are cured and I've got kittens to raise. I'll be up all night and not fit for company for a long while."

Bernie pondered this. It was not what he had expected to hear. The weekend and now the play this morning seemed a dream. And now, the dream was over, it seemed. But it was one of those dreams that you remember and cherish, he supposed, not the ones you barely remember and you lose yourself trying to recall them.

His world was upended again it seems. He found ultimate relaxation and a short game all in one weekend. Now part of that was going away.

"I understand, Nancy. I'll not stand between you and the kittens. Send me a picture, please."

"I will Bernie," she said wistfully.

They took their leave. They never played again. Nancy was not on the courts for a couple of months.

Bernie moved up to the 4.0 group and then a bit beyond. He played in other cities and was much in demand as a partner. He truly had been fixed. He played, improved and moved on.

Nancy raised her kittens and found them homes. The smallest kitten, whom needed the most help, grew strong, became a little tiger, and was the last adopted, she named Bernie.

Post 163 That Which Makes the World Go Around

The club's Oldest Member was leaning on the fence and watching play. His thermos of coffee was at hand. His faded eyes had seen it all, but he still liked to watch the play.

The Downs had twenty courts and a few players could remember back when it was only four and no club house, or earlier still when there was no Pickleball in Livermore.

Most of the courts were busy. The play was divided roughly by skill level. And The Oldest Member was watching the good players, but not the best. The good players had more fun and the points were more interesting. Entertainment is not always about competency.

A game finished and the players came off. Joe walked over to the Oldest Member and said hello.

Joe: Good morning. Were you watching the play?

Oldest Member: Yes, but I didn't see all of it. I was watching some of the match on court four, too.

J: Ah, Jill was playing there.

OM: Yes, she was. Her game is coming along. Do you two play together at all?

J: Well, I'd like to. I like her a lot.

OM: Mmm, forehand or backhand?

J: What?

OM: Do you like her for her forehand or backhand? Maybe dinks...?

J: Oh, I get it. Nah, she has a nice game, but if I'm honest...

OM: 'To thine own self be true'... (His eye glazed a bit as old memories wandered through his memory.)

J: I like her ankles.

OM: Excuse me? (His eyes cleared, he shook his head a bit. Maybe due to tremors, maybe just reconnection to the current world.) Ankles?

J: Ankles.

OM: Really?

J: Yes, really. I like her ankles.

OM: Her overheads are nice, what about those?

J: No, I love her for her ankles.

OM: Where did that come from?

J: Who knows? Where does anything come from? Blondes versus gingers? I don't know. I just know what I like.

OM: Hmmph.

J: I'd really like to date her.

OM: Have to talked to her?

J: Yes, well no, but about pickleball I mean, not love or dating.

OM: Hmm.

J: The club championship is coming up. I should ask her to play.

OM: Sounds like a good idea. Gets you close to the ankles and all that. Heh, heh.

J: <dreamily> Yes, it does... But...

OM: A small but or a big one?

J: She is a most sought after partner. She might be committed already.

OM: Then you should ask her promptly.

J: Well, she is still playing.

OM: She has to come off the court at some point. Like pickleball defense, being in the right place is what the game is all about. Your pickleball game is good, apply it to your love life.

J: <dreamily> Love life,... Ankles...

OM: I've got to go, good luck with your quest.

J: Thanks. I'll let you know.

The OM left the park and headed home. He drove to avoid the outlet mall that drew crowds all day, every day. The driving of the customers around the mall had not gotten better as the mall had grown. The crazy driving had amused him 15 years ago. Now it was a constant annoyance and he avoided the area as a matter of happiness.

He thought briefly about Joe and Jill. They were both good players, sound of mind and all that. Did they belong together? Who knew? But, ankles? What was that really all about? Joe seemed pretty normal. Considering the sportswear found on pickleball courts, it seemed that focusing on ankles left a lot of other elements neglected.

The OM didn't return to the courts until after the club championship. And Joe had not gotten back to him. It mattered not and the OM had forgotten Joe's problem.

When the OM next dropped by the clubhouse and ordered a pint, a couple of weeks had gone by.

He sat at his usual table and looked forward to a nice drink with the sound of well struck pickleballs coming in the window.

Joe came into the club house, stopped by the OM's table and pulled a water bottle from his PB bag.

They nodded agreeably as each worked on their drinks.

"How are you and Jill doing?" asked the Oldest Member.

"What? Oh, Jill, well we are not together."

"Did you summon the courage to ask her to play in the club championship?"

"Oh yes. That was fine. It seemed she was between partners and was willing to give me a game."

"But...?"

"Well, the story is, if you want the long version, we had a pre-game lunch, which I had hoped might lead to talk of life and children and all. But all she wanted to talk about was pickleball."

"So, the age old dichotomy of life..."

"Yes, I wanted life, she wanted pickleball."

"Was that the end of it?"

"No, I saw how the wind was blowing and we talked PB for a long while. The usual conversation of who, what, where, and how much. She and I were on the same page for most of it and all was well."

"Then was the championship play a problem?" asked the OM.

"No, we won all the games in our pool and then romped undefeated through the medal games. We won and if you look on the plaque by the door, our names are there. So all in all the play was fine."

"Surely, a good run like that would lay the foundation for a future together?"

"You'd think so and I pressed her for dinner that night. And she was willing."

"But it didn't go well?"

"No, the conversation was still all about pickleball. This woman has a problem, I think. Every time I mentioned something else, she steered it back to wrist angles and the proper number of cross court dinks that are reasonable before trying something new."

"Yes, I can see your problem. Err, not to be indelicate, but you didn't mention the ankles thing did you?"

"Oh, no, no. I don't talk to many about that. And if you are talking to a girl, you can't mention that kind of thing."

"Maybe after marriage?"

"Exactly, and not during the honeymoon either, of course."

"Of course."

"I did mention her beautiful eyes however. And they are nice, but not as nice as her ankles. And she steered that comment back to the color scheme on her pickleball gear bag! And, well, there were other problems in all of this."

"Yes, go on."

"Well the day of the championship was quite cold and damp and windy. So Jill wore these legging that went down to her shoes and then socks that went up her calves, and so you see, or not see, I guess, but the ankles were not there. Kind of threw me off my game actually."

"How so, how much time could you be looking for ankles during play?"

"Good question, but I was thinking about it and I was a bit sad. A sad man can't play his best I've found."

"Agreed. The mind needs to be clear as the paddle needs to be clean."

"Yes, of course. So there was that. As I said we won all the games, but I had to, ah, had to, oh, I'll just come out and say it, I had to lob a couple of times as I got caught out of position and I was in an

awkward spot."

"Oops. I see. Did Jill react to the lobs?"

"There might have been some eye rolling, I'm not sure. My blush of annoyance and shame was burning my face and I didn't want to face anyone."

"How many lobs did you hit?"

"A lot, I think three. Those points did not end well as one could expect."

"Yes, usually true. Awkwardly positioned and forced to lob... So the play was OK, as you won. But those lapses were, ah, destructive to the future life scenario?"

"I guess. It seemed to just collapse and the dinner ended early and we went our separate ways."

"Too bad, it looked promising for a bit."

"Yes, well..." They both went back to their drinks and a manly silence descended over the table. The plonk, plonk of the pickleball hits wafted in the window. The OM worked on his Stout and Joe on his water. Sip, gurgle, and repeat.

Joe suddenly came alert and sat up straight. He tossed back the last of his water and stared out the window. "I say, who is that?"

The OM swiveled around and peered through the window. Due to the elevation of the courts and the location of the club house, most players could only be seen from the waist up.

"I'm not sure," said the OM.

"Doesn't matter, very fine ankles there. I think I need a closer look." With that Joe leaped up, grabbed his bag and headed for the courts.

The OM sat back, his pint nearly gone. It was too early for another. Perhaps he would watch a game or two before his afternoon nap.

He wandered out to the courts. There was Joe, with someone new. The OM watched a bit and had to admit that whoever this woman was, she had nice ankles.

Post 168 The Pickleball Doctor saves Bob

"Do you know why you are here?" asked Dr. Fixemup?

"I was told that I had to come in," said Bob, eager pickleball player.

"Yes, well sometimes it's difficult for us to realize that we need help. Your regular partners petitioned the pickleball court to have you come in."

"Can I leave at any time?"

"Let's not worry about that now, let's see if we can make some progress. We are here to help you."

"Well, OK, I guess. Though I don't know that I have any problems..."

"The reports I have read seem to suggest there are some rough edges, which we call 'areas of improvement.' Shall we get started?"

"OK," Bob said, in a tone that suggested he was tired of the whole thing already, would much rather be playing, and also had a touch of surrender in it. Clearly the first steps towards healing and noted by the good doctor.

"Let's start with net play, Bob. Your partners hint that you are not comfortable with dinking. How would you respond to that 'suggestion'?"

"Hey, I dink. It's not as fun as banging an overhead, but I do it."

"Bob, we are not here to judge, but to understand. How many dinks in a row would you say is a healthy number?"

"Maybe one or two? It's not really important how many, is it?"

"Well, Bob, there is a difference of opinion on that in the literature. How would you feel if your partner only dinked and never sped the ball up?"

"That's just wrong! You want to hit the ball and win the point."

"Bob, we don't say right or wrong here. We just present alternatives for life skills. You mentioned that you don't dink a lot, how does that make your partners feel?"

"I never thought of their feelings, I was just trying to win the point. But maybe they would be unhappy if a speed up or aggressive shot went out?"

"Why, Bob, do your partners play pickleball, do you think?"

"To win, Right?"

"Perhaps, Bob, but can you think of other reasons?"

"Some seem to be more than interested in talking, than playing. What's that all about, Doc?"

"Again, we don't judge here, Bob. Many reasons are valid and can be incorporated in balanced life outlook. Social, physical, mental reasons are all valid. Are you happy to dink say, five times in a row?"

"I guess that's OK Am I fine with it? Nah, that's poor play I think. In just a few shots, there are opportunities for aggression."

"Is aggression a good way to go through life, Bob? Could you miss opportunities when being aggressive?"

"Hmm, well, if the ball I speed up is not quite high enough, I could end the point early and not in my favor. It's a skill like any other... I owe it to my partners to play the best game I can."

"What should the play be if your partner and you disagree on what play style is the better? Have you talked to your partners about this?"

"No, we drill and play, there is not much talking."

"What kind of drills do you do?"

"Mostly dinking, I guess. I don't really know, I kind of go along with what my partners want to do."

"If they want to do dink drills, maybe they are trying to tell you something?"

"What? No, it's just a drill."

"Is it Bob? Maybe it's an attempt to bring you over to a more gentle style?"

"Gosh, Doc. I don't know. Sure dinking is low key compared to hitting the ball. I guess my partners like it. Maybe. I like my partners. I could try dinking more. Or maybe hitting some lobs? I like to lob."

"Bob, our time is about up here. I'd like you to think about your style of play and what your partners might like to see from you."

"Are we done, doctor?"

"No, Bob, I've scheduled you for weekly sessions for the rest of the season. Your comment about liking lobs, will require some deep therapy. We'll have to get you on the couch next time and see what we can resolve. There is no shame in getting help."

"Now, to improve, I suggest that you try to dink at least three times in all points. Hopefully consecutively. Try to be soft. Points can be won by being gentle."

"Thank you Doc. I'll give it a try. I didn't realize how I was stressing my partners."

The doctor noted signs of improvement in his notepad.

Bob came in for weekly sessions for the rest of the year. He learned to like to dink and drop. His speed ups dwindled until he became known for never hitting a hard ball. His partners were not happy about that. They seemed to have destroyed the vibrant side of Bob. But that is another session in the Bob Saga.

Doctor's Note: This is a fictionalized case study from my best selling book, "Pickleball Therapy and the Right Minded Player," and it does not represent any individual player. However the play and therapy techniques are quite real and can be safely applied to the general public. Good play and mental health.

-- Dr. Fixemup.

Post 169 Bob is Back on the Couch - Part II

We return to Dr. Fixemup for another session with Bob. Bob as you will remember was a banger and his partners had sent him in for treatment. His initial problem was excessive aggression, now we delve more into other topics...

"Bob, are you ready to begin? Please lie on the couch and we'll get started. What I wanted to explore today for the next several sessions is the phrase you used in our first session. You said that you 'liked to lob.' Do you remember that?"

Bob is on the couch, but not relaxed as yet. Sessions are draining as some needed medical procedures must necessarily be.

"No, I don't remember saying that, but I do like to lob."

The doctor makes a note that Bob didn't remember the lob-love statement.

"Why do you like to lob, Bob? Let me remind you that there are no wrong answers here and I'm here to help."

"I've never really thought about it. I don't think it's any different than any other shot, is it? Do I really need help with this?"

"Opinions differ on the lob shot view, Bob. We are here to explore your feelings." The definitive authority, a book, *A Pickleball Player's Mental Health*, eighth edition, contains several chapters on the psychosis of excessive lobbing.

"OK, I guess... "

"Bob, let's start out more simply. When do you lob?"

"Uh, OK, let me see. I guess if I am in a highly defensive position, then a lob seems like the best way to reset the point."

"What defensive positions are those?"

"If I get a service return that is really hard and deep, then I might lob."

"Does this happen often?"

"It varies. The better players hit better service returns. I guess that's where it happens the most..."

"Do you have trouble with ground strokes as a rule?"

"No, I'm OK there. It's just some of them are really deep in the court."

"Does your partner lob from that situation?"

"Hmm, I guess not. They would tend to drop the ball or drive it back, rather than lob."

"Are your partners better at ground strokes than you are?"

"No, probably about the same."

"Yet you are lobbing and they are not. How does that make you feel?"

"I know there are people that don't like lobs. So when I do it, I think that I'm not doing as well as I could..."

"Tell me about your court positions for serving."

"I am probably closer to the center line than a side line. My aim is pretty much the center of the service area."

"And of course behind the baseline. After you serve, where are you?"

"Yeah, behind the baseline, of course! I'll usually hit and let my momentum move me into the court a step or so."

"Do you always step in?"

"Hmm, usually, I guess. It seems to be the better play," Bob shrugs a bit.

"What else could you do besides moving into the court?"

"Oh, hit and stay back, or even move back a step. And, for sure, get into a ready position."

"If you moved back a step or two, would you better placed to hit a drive or drop shot, or even a lob?"

"Yes, I guess so. But if I get a short return, it could be a problem."

"Who returns short returns?"

"Beginners and intermediate players tend to return short. Also mishits are usually short."

"Do good players hit a lot of short balls?"

"They are less likely to, but everyone does it."

"Suppose after serving, you step back. If the shot is short, you move up and drive or drop. If it's deep, you are well placed to return it. Would that work?"

"Yes, that's probably a better strategy."

"When you watch a service return, what clues tell you the ball might be short? It seems the short ball is the only problem if you stay back."

"I'll watch the wind up and shoulder turn of the player. Big windups will go deep. If the ball comes off the paddle at a crazy angle, that is probably a mishit, and those are short too and usually have a lot of spin. Finally, I like to listen to the contact of the ball on the paddle. If it's muted, then the ball is short. Loud and crisp and the ball is coming deep."

"Excellent analysis on the short shot detection, Bob. I think we made some progress today. If you stay back more when on the serving side you can drive and drop more and will not be a position where you have to lob. While we've not gotten into the lobbing as much as needed, we've identified a plan to move forward. How do you feel about that?"

"Yes, doctor, I see your point. While moving in on serves works against some players, staying back a bit will work against all of them. I'll see if I can get better at that. I feel pretty good about this and I'm excited to try this. I can see that I'll be able to play more sedately as I'll never be moving backwards for the third shot."

"Bob, pickleball is like life, we want to be on a forward path at all times. I'll see you next week."

End Word

Well, there you have all the interesting bits that I pulled out of the two years of blog posts. And, of course, interesting to me! As I've gone through all the posts for the last two years I'm struck by the sheer amount of repetition that has shown up in the posts.

Perhaps I've said it all? I'm not sure I've said it all, and it also might be that I can't keep it all in mind at any one time. Perhaps if I were a better player. But a better player probably has no need to think about it, just does it. Sadly, not my role in life.

I hope I've provided a grin or two and perhaps a touch of instruction along the way.

Cheers, Rich Hume January 2023