PREPARE TO PLAY

YOUR MENTAL WARMUP



Brought to you by The Better Pickleball Academy's No. 1 Podcast

Pickleball Therapy

A MENTAL WARMUP WILL IMPROVE YOUR PLAY (AND FEEL)

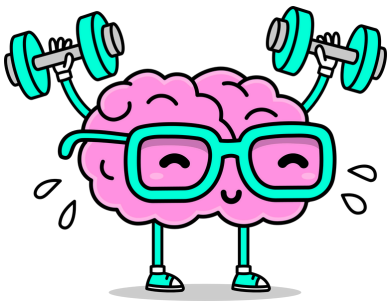
Is this familiar to you?

You're looking forward to seeing your friends today at the courts. You get ready to go. Paddle bag ✔ Water bottle ✔ Shoes ✔

Ready to play.

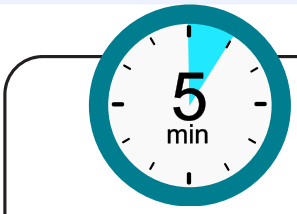
But ... wait a minute.

Are you missing something? Let's check to make sure.



What have you done to prepare yourself, **mentally**, for your day on the courts? Is it not reasonable to expect that you will play better and feel better if you took a few moments to "warm up" your mind before pickleball?

This Guide is designed to provide you with a clear approach to your pre-play preparation. The more you do it, the more your mind will be trained to be prepared to play the way you want. Use the Worksheet each time you play. A description of each step follows in this Guide. Refer back to your Guide as needed.



You can do this in as little as 5 minutes! Who doesn't have 5 minutes to optimize their pickleball day?



You are 100% in control over your pre-play mental preparation

Pre-Play Worksheet

Use this Worksheet before each playing session to get yourself ready. If you would like a separate download, you can get that here. The remainder of the Guide explains each Step in detail.

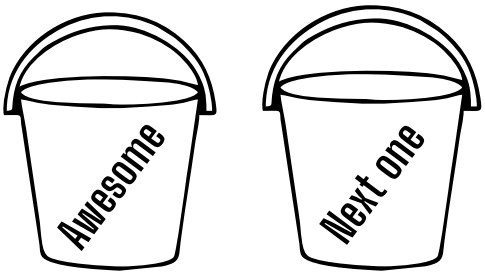
Step 1: My Reason for Playing

I am going to the courts today to: _____.

If I get this today when I play, I will have gotten what I came for. Wins and losses are irrelevant.

Step 2: Limiting In-Game Distraction

It is 100% sure that today I will make mistakes when I play. My mistakes are just a natural part of the overall play I expect. Each shot, "good" and "bad" goes into it's respective bucket.



Step 3: Gratitude

After Game 1 today, I will take a moment to pause and look around. What do I see? My friends, the lovely outdoors, perhaps a bird or tree that catches my eye. No matter what, I know I am playing pickleball with my friends and enjoying the sport I love.



Step 4: My Progress Metric



Today I will focus on only this one shot or area of my game: _____

More specifically, I am concentrating on this one aspect of the shot or area: _____

Enjoy your Pickleball today!

Step 1: My Reason for Playing





There may be 100 reasons you play pickleball. **Pick your top reason.** There is no right or wrong answer here.

Think about this question as the way you would describe your relationship with pickleball. **What keeps you coming back for more pickleball, day in day out?** Week in week out? Take a moment here.

Whatever you write is your quid pro quo of why you are going to the courts. It is what you are looking for. **Anything else is a distraction.**

The most common distractions comes from our results. Yet you (almost 99% certain) did not write that the reason you play pickleball is because you want to win games or because you expect to play "perfect" pickleball.

Don't let losing games or making errors when you play take away from your experience on the court. That is, after all, not the reason why you play pickleball.

Step 2: Limiting In-Game Distraction

It is normal to want to do well when you play. And there is nothing wrong with having this as a goal. We can always strive to be our best.

But even our best will include errors by us. ***We will miss shots.*** And we will make shot decisions that we wish had been different in hindsight.

Think of it this way – the total package of doing our best includes mistakes – some of them as silly as they get.

Knowing this, there is no sense in berating ourselves when we miss a shot or make a "dumb" decision. Instead, we are simply going to place the shot into its appropriate bucket and move on.

Before we go out to play, we are going to create two mental buckets.

Bucket 1 will be for our "positive" shots.



Feel good about a shot: it goes in the "yay!" bucket.

Bucket 2 will be for our "negative" shots.



Feel negative about a shot: it goes in the "oops!" bucket.



"The podcast always reflects a way to make pickleball fun, whether you're competitive or just a recreational player. Win or lose isn't the issue. How you deal with your play is a lifelong mental journey."

-RDL DMD MS

Some clarity on the terms “positive” and “negative.” These terms are not used to denote actual positivity or negativity with the shot. They are a shorthand to acknowledge how we generally react to them.

> *By properly assigning a mistake into a bucket that accurately captures what the mistake was – just human nature – you avoid going down the usual “I can’t believe I missed that shot” path to despair. Instead, it becomes* ***“I can actually believe I missed that shot because I expected it and I know where to put it.”***

Using the buckets when you play:

1. When you (invariably) make a mistake, put it in the **“Oops!”** bucket. Doing so will reduce, or perhaps even remove for you, the negative energy associated with the shot. **This time the word negative does hot have quotes because in these situations there is an actual negative in how you feel.**
2. You are also free to use the “Yay!” bucket for your great shots – because you will have these too. Experience tells us that we generally dwell more on our errors than our amazing shots. That is why our emphasis in this step is on using the Oops Bucket. **Do not let errors dwell in your mind. Drop them in the Oops! Bucket and move on.**



“We did not realize how important the mental game was until we started listening to the **Pickleball Therapy** podcast. We have incorporated many of the ideas into our game and it has made a BIG difference.” ~HuntAmaFW

Step 3: Gratitude

After your first game, take a moment to look around you. Disengage from the specifics and step back. If you are outdoors, look at the trees. The sky. If you are indoors, look around the facility.

No matter where you are, take a moment to look around at your friends. The other courts where players are playing.



I Spy...

Take a deep breath. What are you lucky enough to be doing right now? You are playing pickleball.

What? That's amazing. In and of itself, with no other information about points or how well you are hitting your serve. You are playing pickleball with your friends. And that is amazing.

Do not skip this step. If you need to put a 20-minute timer on your phone, do it.

Take that moment to remind yourself what an amazing thing it is that you get to play the sport you love.

If you are working on improving as a player (on an "Improvement Journey" as we like to frame it), then read on. Otherwise have a great day on the courts!



"Thanks for the information you provide. It helps me to get my head straight. I like to listen to Pickleball Therapy right before I play; it helps me to have a better game."
~Dca5101

Step 4: My Progress Metric

Shot or area _____

Specific area of focus _____

_____

To get the most out of today in your improvement, **focus on one thing**. Make it **singular and specific.**



There are two parts to this. **First, pick the one thing that is most important to you right now on your improvement path.** It may be your serve, footwork, a specific concept, or other area of the game.

Second, take your one thing down at least one more degree of specificity. For example, if you are focusing on your punch, what is it, specifically, that you want to focus on right now about the volley: height over net, depth, sideline error, other?

Use the spaces above to write each part. Here are some examples:



A. **Shot**: Serve. **Specific aspect for focus**: Reducing the number of serves I hit into the net

B. **Area**: Lateral footwork. **Specific aspect for focus:** Watch for cross-stepping

C. **Area**: Foundation. **Specific aspect for focus**: Am I moving or set when I block volley

This focus on one thing will allow you to get the most out of your play experience. **Remember that most improvement work is done outside of regular play.** There is just too much going on when you play to allow you to focus on your progress as well.

If you do not know how to adjust your shots in real time, The Pickleball System can help you learn how to do it. If you opt not to join the System as a student, then apply the methodology you have learned elsewhere to detect and correct the errors in this one shot.

No matter what, remember that the errors are natural. You cannot eliminate them completely. What you can do is reduce them as much as possible within the constraints of remaining a human being.



Hope you have an amazing day on the pickleball court – you will be playing pickleball after all.

Afterward, when you have a moment, you can check out the additional resources and other actions you can take to continue strengthening your relationship with the game **by visiting us at BetterPickleball.com.**

Tony & Your Better Pickleball Coaching Team

ABOUT YOUR BETTER PICKLEBALL COACHING TEAM

You've taken the first step—now let's keep that momentum going. At Better Pickleball, you'll learn from a team that's helped thousands of players just like you improve with clarity, confidence, and a proven path forward. Our team has over 30 years of combined pickleball coaching experience and is the only group with not one, but two Master Teaching Professionals certified by the most trusted coaching certification program in pickleball, the IPTPA.

MEET HEAD COACH TONY ROIG

Tony Roig is a Senior Professional Player as well as a certified Pickleball Master Teaching Professional–the highest accreditation in our sport. Tony has spent the past decade developing many of the most cutting edge and well-known pickleball strategies, including Respect the X. Tony emphasizes the need for players to focus on what really matters to their games and avoid distraction.





MEET HEAD COACH CJ JOHNSON

CJ Johnson has spent her professional career as a top-level athlete (including PGA professional) and top-rated multi-sports coach, helping thousands of athletes achieve their goals. Since 2016, CJ has been providing actionable pickleball content dedicated to helping players improve their games on and off the court. CJ emphasizes a holistic approach to pickleball development and growth.

NEXT STEPS

Keep Your Mind Strong - Get your Pickleball Therapy

Your mental warm-up is complete—now continue conditioning your mind with weekly episodes of the Pickleball Therapy Podcast, available anywhere you get your podcasts.

Ready to Go Deeper?

Explore the Academy (self-paced learning)

Perfect for players who want to improve on their own schedule, the Academy gives you flexible, self-paced training you can access anytime. Build consistency, sharpen your strategy, and solve real on-court problems with a library of expert videos and monthly live coaching sessions.

Learn more at BetterPickleball.com/Academy

The Pickleball System (structured transformation)

When you're ready for a full transformation, TPS gives you a step-by-step coaching framework to guide your entire game. With live sessions, community support, and a clear path to progress, you'll never wonder what to work on again. It's our most structured, high-touch training experience.

Visit ThePickleballSystem.com to join.

Additional Resources

🖥️ **BetterPickleball.com**

Your go-to resource for training, coaching, and next steps in your pickleball journey.

🎧 **Pickleball Therapy Podcast**

Mental coaching, confidence building, and game strategy—right in your earbuds.

💬 **Better Pickleball Facebook Group**

Ask questions, get support, and connect with fellow players in a free, supportive community.