

Dear S.T.,

The chatter is real. Keep listening. You can learn a lot from courtside conversations. I haven't seen tiktok posts, but the the pocket warning is real! A couple of weeks ago, a fellow player's friend went for a shot, fell, and broke his hip because of the way he landed on a pickleball that was in his pocket. Who would have thought? Having a small basket (which can be found at Dollar Tree) next to your court will eliminate that concern.

As with any sport, the best way to stay in the game is to play with the right equipment and stay informed by seeking out resources such as this column, educational pro player videos, websites, etc. The number of resources is growing as fast as the sport! I recommend checking out PTC-Fayettepickleball.com and selkirk.com for a variety of player resources.

So let's talk equipment...

Court shoes and protective eyewear are strongly recommended. Pickleball has a lot of side to side motion and the right shoes can be the difference between being on the courts or at urgent care. Same with glasses ... the net games are at close range, and there's a good chance you will get hit at some point. Getting hit in the body is usually no big deal. The eyes are a different story. Give yourself the confidence to blast away by wearing protective eyewear. Even a pair of readers or sunglasses without lenses will help protect you.

Gameplay Tips, from players who who have the scars....

- If you see a pickleball going onto a neighboring court, call out the court number and "Ball on Court". At the start of your game, introduce yourself and learn the names of the other players on your court. If a ball is coming onto the court, you can specifically call out their name and warn them when a ball from another court is coming over. When you are running, stepping on a pickleball can lead to a fall. Though photos say it all, I'll spare you the photo of an incident that happened last weekend. Unfortunately, my friend's sister stepped on a pickleball, lost her balance, and will be off the courts for awhile recovering from an ankle surgery.
- Do not lean back to take an overhead shot out of the air. Let the ball drop — it gives you more time and more return options. A good rule of thumb is to play lobs diagonally. For instance, if you are playing on the left, and a lob is coming over your head, the player on the right would run back diagonally and get the lob, as you switch sides of the court.
- Never run backwards. It's too easy to lose your balance.
- Try to move laterally at the net (side shuffle) instead of crossing one leg over the other.
- Stand with feet shoulder width apart, but not wider, to help keep your balance.

If you are a new player, don't let the following information inhibit play. Just use it to play smarter!

