

Pickleball: Podcast Message

Rules, Tricks, Master Charlie's Wisdom, and Staying Fit Enough to Enjoy the Game

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Uncompressed Thinking

You know, pickleball is a strange game.

It has strange rules, strange strategy, and even strange terminology. Why is part of the court called the **kitchen**? Why is a soft little shot called a **dink**? Why do we announce the score like a secret code — three numbers instead of one? And why does a game that looks so friendly suddenly become fast, tactical, aggressive, and surprisingly exhausting?

That is part of the charm.

Pickleball looks simple from the outside. A smaller court, a paddle, a plastic ball with holes, friendly people, lots of laughter. But once you start playing, you quickly discover that this is not just “mini-tennis.” It has its own logic, its own rhythm, and its own little traps. The ball is slower than a tennis ball, but the decisions are fast. The court is smaller, but positioning matters even more. The game feels social, but if you stand in the wrong place, hesitate for one second, or move backward carelessly — the point may be gone.

And the best part? Whatever your age, you are probably the right age to start.

Are you in your 20s, 30s, or 40s? Perfect. Are you in your 50s, 60s, 70s, or even 80s? Also perfect. In fact, pickleball may be one of the rare sports where almost everyone can say: “This game was designed for my age group.”

And that brings us to **Master Charlie**.

Master Charlie is a professional pickleball trainer. I took a class with him, and I can tell you — he is amazing. He sees the game very clearly. He does not complicate things. He gives advice that is simple, practical, and immediately useful. And he fits the age window for pickleball exactly — somewhere between 20 and 80, which means he is perfectly qualified to teach all of us.

Master Charlie's main message is this: pickleball is not won by running around wildly. It is won by being in the right place, moving at the right time, and understanding which part of the court gives you power.

And very often, that place is near the kitchen.

The Kitchen: Strange Name, Serious Strategy

Let's begin with the kitchen.

The kitchen is the non-volley zone near the net. The name is funny, but the importance is serious. You cannot volley while standing inside the kitchen, which creates a special tactical area. It slows the game down, forces control, and makes pickleball different from tennis or badminton.

But here is the important part: although you cannot volley from inside the kitchen, you generally want to be **close to the kitchen line**.

Master Charlie says: **stay close to the kitchen**.

That sounds simple, but it changes everything.

When you are close to the kitchen line, you are in a position to control the point. You can dink. You can block. You can react quickly. You can pressure your opponents. You are closer to the net, which means your opponent has less time and less space. The court becomes smaller for them and easier for you.

Standing too far back gives the opponent room. Standing near the kitchen line takes that room away.

So one of the first winning habits is this: after the serve is returned, move forward. Do not admire your shot. Do not stand at the baseline watching the ball travel. Return the serve and move. In fact, Master Charlie's advice is very clear: **rush to the kitchen line after returning the serve**.

Not panic-rush. Not uncontrolled-rush. Smart-rush. Athletic-rush. Get there with balance.

Because in pickleball, the team that controls the kitchen line often controls the point.

The Dead Zone: Do Not Live There

Now we come to one of Master Charlie's most important warnings.

The area between the baseline and the kitchen line is often called the **transition zone**. But Charlie gives it a stronger name: the **dead zone**.

And his advice is simple: **avoid it by all means**.

Why? Because when you are stuck in that middle area, you are too far from the net to attack well and too far back to defend comfortably. The ball comes at your feet. You are forced into awkward half-volleys. You are moving, reaching, guessing, and often hitting upward — which gives your opponent the chance to attack.

The dead zone is where many points go to die.

So the idea is not to drift there casually. You may pass through it, but you should not live there. Move from the baseline toward the kitchen with intention. If you must stop, stop with balance. But your goal is to arrive at the kitchen line and establish position.

This is one of the biggest differences between beginners and experienced players. Beginners often stay back because it feels safer. Experienced players know that safety is usually at the kitchen line.

It feels counterintuitive at first. You think: “The ball is coming fast, maybe I should stay back.” But in pickleball, staying back often gives your opponent more time to attack you. Moving forward, when done correctly, gives you control.

Do Not Keep Retreating to the Baseline

Another Charlie rule: **do not go back to the baseline too often**.

The baseline has its place. You start there. You serve from there. You return serve from there. Sometimes a lob or deep shot forces you back there.

But the baseline is not your home.

In pickleball, especially doubles, your home is near the kitchen line. If you keep drifting back, your opponent will usually be happy. They will drop the ball short, angle it away, attack your feet, or simply keep you defensive.

Going backward also creates another problem, especially for older players: balance.

Moving forward is usually easier to control. Moving sideways can be trained. But moving backward is dangerous. At a certain age, the sense of balance can become less sharp. People may lose balance while stepping backward, and falls can be serious. A backward fall can lead to

head injuries, wrist injuries, hip injuries, and other problems nobody wants from a friendly Sunday game.

So the wisdom is tactical and physical at the same time: avoid unnecessary retreat. If you must move back, do it carefully. Turn and move if needed. Do not backpedal blindly. Keep your feet under you. Pickleball should make us healthier, not send us to the orthopedist.

Warm Up Like You Actually Want to Keep Playing

Before we talk about tricks and winning shots, we need to talk about something less glamorous but more important: warming up.

Master Charlie emphasizes this strongly: **warm up thoroughly before the games.**

Not just two lazy arm circles and one practice serve.

Pickleball may look gentle, but it places sudden loads on the body. The starts and stops are sharp. The little side steps are quick. The calves, ankles, and feet work constantly. The knees bend, the hips rotate, the shoulders reach, the wrists react, and the upper body has to create controlled power.

Charlie specifically says to warm up the **upper body and legs**, and to pay special attention to the **feet and calves**, because they take a lot of load during sharp moves.

This is not a minor detail. The feet and calves are the hidden engine of pickleball movement. Every quick step, every lunge, every push toward the kitchen, every recovery after a dink — it all starts from the ground.

So a good warm-up should include:

gentle walking or light jogging, ankle circles, calf raises, small side steps, controlled lunges, shoulder circles, wrist movement, torso rotation, and a few easy paddle swings before full-speed play.

And for those of us who are no longer 25 — or who are 25 but want to still be playing at 75 — warm-up is not optional. It is part of the game.

The first point should not be your warm-up. The warm-up should happen before the first point.

Low Balls: Protect the Knees

Now here is one of my personal warnings.

When returning low balls, do not collapse into a sharp knee angle. Try not to bend the knees deeply below 90 degrees, especially suddenly and under pressure.

The instinct is understandable. The ball comes low, and you want to get under it. Many beginners respond by dropping the knees sharply. But that can put a lot of stress on the knee joint, especially when combined with twisting or reaching.

Orthopedists are seeing more pickleball-related injuries, and knees are part of that story. So we should take this seriously.

The safer idea is not “never bend.” Of course we bend. But bend intelligently. Keep the knees from collapsing inward. Use the hips. Hinge slightly. Widen your stance. Lower the paddle early. Prepare before the ball arrives instead of panicking at the last second.

A good phrase for this is:

Get low with your body, not by abusing your knees.

The goal is to reach the ball while staying stable. If your knees are screaming, your technique is not helping you.

And again, this connects to warm-up. Warm feet, warm calves, warm hips, and warm shoulders make low shots safer and easier.

The Upper Body: The Power Engine

Pickleball is not only legs and feet. Your upper body is the power engine.

The shoulder, chest, back, arms, wrists, and hands all work together. But the best players do not swing wildly. They generate controlled power. They accelerate when needed, soften when needed, and change from attack to touch in a fraction of a second.

This is why upper-body preparation matters.

You need shoulder mobility for reach. You need arm strength for control. You need wrist stability for soft shots and blocks. You need back and chest coordination for compact power. You need speed, but not stiffness. You need strength, but not tension.

This is where I personally like using IsoTone at home or before play — not as a separate subject, and not as a product pitch, but as a practical tool for the body side of the game.

IsoTone is useful because pickleball requires both **strength and speed**. It also requires smooth push-pull movement, controlled breathing, and fast but relaxed upper-body response. A short IsoTone session can wake up the shoulders, arms, chest, back, and grip before a game, or help build those qualities gradually at home.

The important point is not the device itself. The important point is this:

If you want to enjoy the game, prepare the body that plays the game.

And I will be happy to give practical advice to anyone who wants simple movements for strength, speed, warm-up, and safer play.

Defense Is Necessary — But Attack Wins

Now let's talk about winning.

Every game has defense. Of course. You have to block. You have to reset. You have to survive hard shots. You have to keep the ball in play.

But pure defense almost never wins.

In any game — pickleball, tennis, chess, business, even argument — the attacker has an advantage. The attacker chooses the moment. The attacker creates surprise. The attacker forces the other side to react. The attacker controls time and direction.

Defense responds. Attack decides.

So here is the big winning wisdom:

Attack wins. Always.

But we have to define attack correctly.

Attack does not mean smashing every ball like you are angry at it. That is not attack. That is donation. You are donating points to the other team.

Real attack means applying pressure intelligently.

A good dink can be an attack if it pulls the opponent wide. A deep return can be an attack if it keeps them back. A controlled third-shot drop can be an attack if it allows you to move to the kitchen. A fast volley can be an attack if it is aimed at the feet. Even patience can be an attack if it forces the other side to make the first mistake.

So the rule is:

Defend when you must. Reset when you need to. But always look for the moment to turn defense into attack.

That is the mental shift.

Beginners think: “Let me just get the ball back.”

Better players think: “How do I make the next ball harder for them?”

Attack and Defense: The Real Rhythm of Pickleball

Pickleball is a conversation between attack and defense.

Sometimes you are under pressure. The opponent drives the ball hard. You block. You reset. You soften the ball. You survive.

Then suddenly they hit one ball too high.

That is the moment.

You do not have to hit the ball harder than anyone in history. You simply have to recognize the opportunity. A high ball near the net is not a polite invitation. It is a command: attack.

On the other hand, if the ball is low, do not attack foolishly. Many errors come from attacking balls that should have been reset. If the ball is below the net, be careful. If you hit up aggressively, the opponent may punish you.

So one of the best pieces of pickleball wisdom is:

Attack high balls. Respect low balls.

High ball: pressure.

Low ball: control.

Ball at your feet: reset.

Opponent out of position: place, do not panic.
You are off balance: survive first, attack later.

This is where pickleball becomes fun. It is not only physical. It is tactical. Every shot asks a question: attack, defend, reset, or move?

The better you get, the earlier you recognize the answer.

The Serve and Return: Start the Point Correctly

The serve matters, but in pickleball the return may matter even more.

The serve starts the point, but because of the two-bounce rule, the serving team cannot immediately rush forward and volley. The receiving team returns the serve and then has the chance to move quickly toward the kitchen line.

That is why Master Charlie says: after returning serve, **rush to the kitchen line**.

The return should usually be deep enough to keep the serving team back. A short return invites trouble. A deep return gives you time to move forward and claim the kitchen.

So the return is not just “get it over.” It is a positioning shot. You are buying time and space.

Return deep. Move forward. Establish position. Then play the point from strength.

This is a simple pattern, but it wins many points.

The Dink: The Little Shot With Big Consequences

Now let us return to one of those strange words: the dink.

A dink sounds cute. It sounds harmless. It sounds like a little toy shot.

But the dink is one of the most powerful shots in pickleball.

A good dink is not weak. It is controlled. It lands softly in the kitchen and forces the opponent to hit upward. It can move them side to side. It can make them impatient. It can create the high ball you are waiting for.

In other words, the dink is often the beginning of the attack.

This is hard for new players to understand. They want to hit hard because hitting hard feels like attacking. But against better players, constant hard hitting becomes predictable. The dink changes the rhythm. It forces discipline. It says: “Let’s see who loses patience first.”

And many people do.

They dink twice, then suddenly decide to smash a ball from below the net. The ball flies out, or into the net, or directly into the opponent’s paddle.

The wisdom is:

Do not attack because you are bored. Attack because the ball allows it.

That single sentence may save many points.

Stay Light, Stay Ready, Stay Balanced

Another key trick: stay light on your feet.

Pickleball is full of small movements. You do not need giant running strides most of the time. You need quick adjustments: one step left, half step forward, reset, split step, recover.

Heavy feet make late paddles. Late paddles make desperate shots. Desperate shots make easy points for the opponent.

So between shots, do not stand like a statue. Stay ready. Knees soft, not collapsed. Paddle up. Weight balanced. Eyes forward. Expect the next ball.

A great ready position says: “I am not surprised.”

That is important because in pickleball, surprise is expensive.

Paddle Up, Ego Down

Here is a fun rule:

Keep the paddle up and the ego down.

The paddle should be ready in front of you, especially near the kitchen. If the paddle drops too low, fast balls become much harder to handle. You lose time lifting it. And pickleball does not give you much time.

The ego also has to stay down.

Do not try to win every point with a heroic shot. Do not smash from bad positions just to show power. Do not attack low balls because you feel brave. Bravery is good. Geometry is better.

The court does not care about your feelings. The ball does not care about your intention. The net is not impressed.

Smart pickleball is controlled pickleball.

The Safest Player Is Often the Most Dangerous Player

There is a funny paradox in pickleball: the player who looks calm and safe is often the most dangerous.

They do not rush. They do not panic. They do not hit every ball hard. They stay near the kitchen, keep the paddle ready, move the opponent around, and wait.

Then the moment comes.

A ball floats a little too high. The opponent leans the wrong way. One player is caught in the dead zone. A gap opens between partners.

Suddenly — attack.

This is why defense and attack are not separate things. Good defense creates attack. Good positioning creates attack. Good patience creates attack.

The attacker always has an advantage, but the best attackers are not always loud. Sometimes they are quiet. They are just waiting for the right ball.

Pickleball Is Social — But the Ball Is Not Sentimental

One reason we love pickleball is that it is social. People laugh. They talk. They encourage each other. A group can form quickly, and that is exactly what we want.

But once the ball is in play, the ball becomes very honest.

If you stand in the dead zone, it will find your feet.

If you stay at the baseline too long, it will pull you forward.

If you move backward carelessly, it will test your balance.

If you attack a low ball, it will punish your optimism.

If you forget to warm up, your calves may remind you tomorrow.

So we should enjoy the social side, but respect the game.

The game is friendly. The movement is real.

A Simple Charlie-and-Lev Formula

Here is a simple formula combining Master Charlie's playing advice with my physical caution:

Charlie says: get to the kitchen.

Lev says: get there safely.

Charlie says: avoid the dead zone.

Lev says: avoid dead knees too.

Charlie says: do not retreat to the baseline too often.

Lev says: and when you do move backward, be careful.

Charlie says: warm up thoroughly.

Lev says: especially feet, calves, knees, shoulders, and upper body.

Charlie says: positioning wins points.

Lev says: body preparation lets you keep playing.

Together, that becomes the spirit of this group:

Play smarter. Move better. Stay healthy. Have fun.

The Home Advantage: Training Away From the Court

One more point. Pickleball improvement does not happen only during games.

In fact, if we only play and never prepare, we may repeat the same mistakes and overload the same joints. A little home preparation can make the game easier and safer.

You do not need a complicated gym routine. You need practical movements that match the game:

small side steps, calf strengthening, shoulder warm-up, grip control, torso rotation, balance practice, controlled push-pull motion, breathing under effort, and quick reaction drills.

This is where IsoTone can naturally fit for those who want it. It allows controlled resistance in both directions, which is useful for the upper body. It can train strength, speed, and smooth transitions — all important for paddle control, volleys, blocks, and quick reactions.

But the principle is larger than IsoTone:

Train the movement you want to use in the game.

If you want soft hands, train relaxed control.

If you want stronger volleys, train compact upper-body power.

If you want safer low shots, train hips and balance.

If you want quicker movement, train feet and calves.

If you want to play longer, train recovery and breathing.

The goal is not bodybuilding. The goal is better pickleball and a happier body.

Winning Wisdoms: Short, Sharp, and Useful

Here are some simple lines the podcasters can repeat throughout the episode:

The kitchen has a funny name, but serious power.

The dead zone is not a place to visit casually.

Return deep, then move forward.

Do not admire your shot — follow it to the kitchen.

Attack high balls. Respect low balls.

Do not attack because you are bored. Attack because the ball allows it.

Pure defense survives points; smart attack wins them.

Paddle up, ego down.

Move forward with purpose, backward with caution.

Get low with your body, not by destroying your knees.

Warm calves today, fewer complaints tomorrow.

The attacker owns the question; the defender must answer.

A dink is not weak. A good dink is a quiet attack.

The safest player may be the most dangerous player.

Pickleball is social, but the ball is brutally honest.

Closing Message

So this group is not only about scheduling games. It is about learning the game together.

We will talk about rules, because the rules are strange and important. We will talk about terminology, because words like kitchen and dink deserve explanation. We will listen to Master Charlie's advice, because good positioning and smart habits can change the game quickly. And we will also talk about the body — because the body is the instrument that plays the game.

We want to play well, but we also want to keep playing.

That means warming up. Moving safely. Staying close to the kitchen. Avoiding the dead zone. Protecting the knees. Being careful when moving backward. Developing the upper body. Learning when to defend and when to attack.

And above all, enjoying the game.

Pickleball is funny, strange, tactical, social, and sometimes surprisingly serious. It gives us exercise, competition, friendship, and laughter. And if we learn it the right way, it can give us many good years of movement and joy.

So welcome to the group.

Bring your paddle. Bring your curiosity. Bring your sense of humor.

And please — stay out of the dead zone.

