

THE VOLLEY

BY ROBERT ELLIOTT

Volleying correctly is possibly the most important facet of pickleball for players at nearly every level. Many people tend to add too much movement to their volleys, so remember the phrase "Less is more." The simpler you keep your form, the stronger and better your volleys will be. Here are some pointers to help you improve your net play.



BODY STANCE (THE 'READY POSITION')

Similar to most sports, you want to have your center of gravity on the balls of your feet.

- Bend your knees (with your feet approximately shoulders width apart)
- Lean slightly forward (so your body weight and balance shifts to the balls of your feet)
- Keep your paddle out in front of you (with your elbows slightly bent)
- Maintain your shoulders square to the net (your chest should be facing the net)
- Your paddle face/head should be above your wrist (this ensures the ball trajectory is upward)

This body position will keep you nimble and quick.



THE FOCAL POINT

It is very important to know where to make contact with the ball. The 'focal point' (or point where you make contact with the ball) is in front of your body and slightly to the side. Note, the ideal volley contact point is not directly in front of you. The focal point is where your body is the strongest, ball contact will be more consistent and your volley will be the most solid.

The ball will very rarely (if ever) be hit directly to you where you don't have to move. Body movement is imperative so that you can reach your focal point and volley correctly. It is never ideal to hit a volley while lunging. You must move your feet.

Next, to maintain proper body positioning square to the net, step with your foot that's on the same side of your body as the side you are hitting the ball. This is unlike tennis. If you were to turn your shoulders perpendicular with the net it will be very easy for your opponent to hit the next ball behind you.

VOLLEYING

As noted above, always remember 'less is more.' Also, a volley is a "punch," not a swing.

- Your paddle should always start and finish in front of your body. Never take a back swing, which means bringing your paddle back so it is in line or behind your body.
- Aim your paddle face toward the intended target.
- Your paddle head should be above your wrist. If the ball is low, bend your knees more to ensure paddle face remains above wrist.
- Punch forward 1-3 inches – always ensuring your paddle face continues to point toward your intended target. There is NO swinging in the volley. Simply punch forward.

Note: If you were to swing the paddle, your timing would have to be perfect to hit the ball in. If you are late or early, your paddle face is pointing to the side of the court, and that's where the ball will go. By simply pointing your paddle face toward the target and punching forward, you will be close to your intended target regardless of whether you are late or early.

- Freeze for 1 second at the end of your volley (this ensures your paddle face remains/ends pointing toward the target).
- As you punch forward, keep your center of gravity on the balls of your feet. You should never be standing straight up or leaning backward.

Remember always to hit the ball at the focal points. If you lunge to make contact outside of your focal point, simply block the ball back by stiffening your wrist (to absorb the energy) and hold your paddle firm (freezing your paddle movement). Simply block the ball back (do not swing). 'Less is more.'



VOLLEY DRILLS

Improving your Ready Position to have a stronger stance. Get in your ready position. To test the strength of your stance, have a friend face you and push slightly on your shoulder. You should be able to stay on the balls of your feet.

Practicing the Focal Point.

When practicing volleying, start with the paddle in the focal point. Keep it there while you are practicing volleys (do not take it back to the ready position). This will create "muscle" memorization.

Body movement. Practice moving without hitting the ball. Get in ready position. Practice stepping sideways, ensuring that your shoulders stay mostly square with the net. If one shoulder is in front of the other or your back is facing the net, you know you have turned too much.

The Volley. At home, practice volleying to create muscle memorization and to dramatically improve your game. In front of a mirror, place paddle in the focal point. Ensure your paddle is facing an imaginary ball and target. Punch forward 1-3 inches. Freeze at the end of the punch for one second. This ensures the paddle will face your imaginary target. Repeat until you master this. •



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