

PICKLEBALL FOR BEGINNERS PART II

# HOW TO IMPROVE FROM A BEGINNER TO AN INTERMEDIATE IN PICKLEBALL

Take your pickleball game to the next level  
with this step-by-step guide

# Bob Savar



# **How to Improve from a Beginner to an Intermediate in Pickleball**

## **Pickleball for Beginners Part II**

*Level Up to Intermediate*

**Get Off the Beginner Treadmill  
Master the Skills of a Competitive Intermediate Player**

**Bob Savar**

**Certified Pickleball Instructor  
Author of *Pickleball for Beginners Part I***

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# FOREWORD

My first book, *Pickleball for Beginners*, was written for those who have never played pickleball but want to learn how to get started playing. I have written a revised and re-titled edition called *Pickleball for Beginners Part I*, with the subtitle “How to Get Started Playing Pickleball.” The paperback edition now includes QR codes that make it easy to find and watch the videos while reading (more on QR codes later). The eBook and PDF editions of the book have clickable links to all the videos and articles mentioned, so if you have either of these versions, you will be able to watch the videos right on your device just by tapping the link.

PDF and eBook  
versions are  
available on Bob's  
website



<https://bit.ly/3xW0Vlw>

This book, *Pickleball for Beginners Part II*, with the subtitle “Level Up to Intermediate: Get Off the Beginner Treadmill and Master the Skills to Become a Competitive Intermediate Player,” is written for the person who has already started playing pickleball, but who is still a beginner, and who is striving to improve to an intermediate level and perhaps beyond that. If this describes you, you will derive great benefit from reading the book and watching the videos.

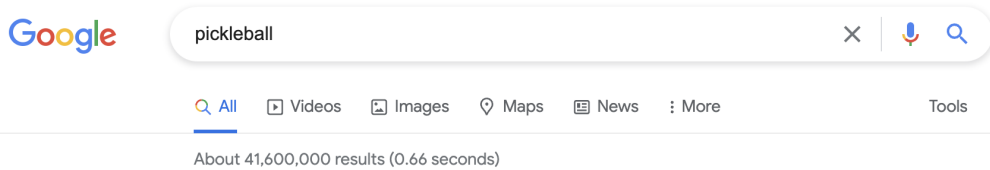
## CURATING THE RIGHT VIDEOS TO HELP YOU IMPROVE

When I began playing pickleball I sought out books and YouTube videos to teach me about the game, then I watched more videos to learn how to become a better player. Because the sport hadn't quite grown in popularity the way it has over the past few years, there wasn't a lot written about pickleball, and there weren't a lot of YouTube videos to watch.

Well, things have drastically changed since then. As I mentioned in my first book, *PICKLEBALL FOR BEGINNERS PART I*, there is so much written about pickleball, including articles in magazines, newspapers, and websites – and of course all the videos on YouTube – that it is virtually impossible to know how to navigate all the media hype and choose the best resources to learn how to improve your game once you have started playing.

As a beginner, you have probably played in parks, rec centers, or your local community, and perhaps you have taken a few private lessons or clinics. If you are like most of the beginner

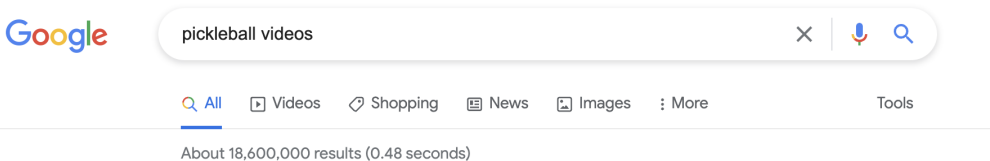
students that I teach, you have made your way to the Internet to see if there is anything there that can help you improve your game. You probably started by going on Google and typing in the word “pickleball.” If you did that, let’s say, in September of 2022, 41 million results would pop up (see screenshot below):



By the way, had you done the search one year before, in September of 2021, you would have pulled up a “mere” 684,000 results. So there are approximately 60 times more results at the time of writing than a year ago. Looking into the future, the number of results for the word “pickleball” will continue to grow exponentially, and the number of search results even now is not very helpful.



Okay, so now what do you do? You try to narrow down your search to “pickleball videos,” hoping that this will yield a manageable number of videos for you to watch. No such luck. You end up with more than 18 million results (see screenshot below):



True, there aren’t that many videos on pickleball on the Internet, but how are you going to navigate all of these pages of results? Well, you can try to narrow the search even further by typing in ”pickleball for beginners,” which will still yield as many as 1.2 million results. One last attempt at arriving at a workable number of videos to

watch, you might think, would be to narrow down your search even further to “pickleball videos for beginners,” but unfortunately not even this works, as you will ultimately end up with more than 456,000 results (see screenshot below):



What a disappointment! I'm sorry to have taken you down this rabbit hole, but I wanted to make the point as clearly as possible that trying to find the right videos to help you improve your game is like searching for a needle in a haystack. Because there are so many videos on pickleball on YouTube, even if you limited your search to "pickleball for beginners videos," you still would have no clue which videos to watch and in what order to watch them.

Google search for  
"Pickleball for  
beginner videos"



<https://bit.ly/3qDmdqi>

That's where this book comes into play. As an experienced pickleball teacher, as well as someone who has a research background in the fields of academia and technology, I have been able to review and analyze hundreds of videos that appear on YouTube and choose the ones appropriate for you, as a beginning pickleball player. So I have done the hard work for you and saved you the inordinate amount of time that it would have taken you to choose the videos that are most helpful to you at this stage of your pickleball career.

On top of choosing the appropriate videos for you, I have put them in the right order so that one builds upon the other in a logical and sequential way. The orderly unfolding of the videos, along with my commentaries, provides a seamless experience akin to taking an advanced course in how to level up your game from beginner to intermediate. As you progress from one chapter to the next, you are able to learn and practice new skills, one at a time, each one building on the one before and laying the foundation for the one to follow.

At this point, you should have a good idea of how this book works. I am curating the right videos for you to watch to improve all the different aspects of your pickleball game. As we have seen, there are so many videos on YouTube that it would be impossible for you to pick out the right ones for your level of play.

Sure, if you play games and focus on one or two aspects of your game each time you play, you will improve. As you will see in a later video, one instructor advises "go out and hit a million balls." This is similar to the advice given by professional golfers like Arnold Palmer and Jack Nicklaus,

who in their youth would practice hitting golf balls until their fingers bled. Well, don't hit pickleballs and get bloody fingers – I don't advise that – but the lesson is clear, that the best way to improve is to practice.

If you don't practice, drill, and play, you won't improve. I have students who come to a clinic one week, then come back next week, and I ask them, "did you play this week?" And too often the answer is "no." This is not a good way to improve. Go out and play! But also go out and practice. Drill with a partner, hit against a wall if you don't have a partner, and make sure you are physically in good shape or, if not, get in shape, and of course, read this book.

## **WHAT YOU WILL LEARN FROM THIS BOOK**

The book starts out by acknowledging the various challenges that beginners face when trying to advance to an intermediate level. It defines the two levels, so you can determine for yourself where you rank in the spectrum that separates the beginner from the intermediate, and it establishes a framework for the journey that every beginner has to take to improve.

One important ingredient of getting better at pickleball that most people don't think about is being physically fit. On a high level, this includes a combination of qualities such as speed, strength, endurance, and agility. Let's be honest, some people are simply not athletic and never will be. As a pickleball instructor, in my clinics and private lessons, I have students who don't have the stamina to last one hour of pickleball instruction, and I have others who don't have good enough eye-hand coordination to hit the ball consistently. In the book, I discuss these issues and provide easy-to-follow ways to improve your athleticism.

The next part of the book focuses on the major shots in pickleball:

1. Dink
2. Serve
3. Return of Serve
4. Third Shot Drop – including when not to hit a third shot drop
5. Forehand
6. Backhand
7. Volley
8. Lob
9. Return of Lob
10. Overhead Smash

In each section, there are two sub-sections, one on how to improve the shot, and one on how to practice the shot. These chapters are filled with instructional videos and commentary from the instructors and from myself. The underlying premise is that, as a beginner, you have already been taught how to hit these shots, but that you need further instruction on how to improve them so that you can play at an intermediate level.

Although the instructional part for each shot is valuable in and of itself, the addition of the sub-sections on how to practice improving them is just as important because, remember, you are being encouraged to practice independently of playing games. Most pickleball players you play with do not practice. Why? Because they don't want to. As a beginner, you need to practice and drill, and the parts of the book teaching you how to practice will come in handy when the lightbulb in your brain clicks on and tells you, "You want to get better? Find someone to practice with, or, if you can't find a partner, find a wall to hit against."

The last sub-section of Chapter 2 is about spin. I can't tell you how many times I hear in my advanced-beginner and intermediate clinics: "Are you going to teach us how to put spin on the ball?" It's something that you see the pros use, and it can be a very effective weapon, especially at the intermediate level, where most players will not be able to handle spin shots.

Coming from a tennis background, with the ability to use both underspin (slice) and topspin on my forehand and backhand shots, I know the effectiveness of using spin. Underhand slicing serves, for example, which move away from right handed opponents or into the body of left handed opponents, can be very effective and elicit a weak return. Topspin serves, too, although not as effective as underspin or slicing, when hit hard and deep, can drive returners back and slow their advance to the kitchen line.

Another slice that you see a lot at the pro level, that I teach advanced-beginners and intermediates, is an arcing underspin return of serve. It is a very effective defensive shot that gives the returner more time to get to the kitchen line before the server can hit the ball back.

There are other opportunities to use spin during a game that you will learn in this chapter. A little underspin on a dink will keep the ball low, for example, and make it harder to return. A cross-court topspin dink against right handed players will move the ball away from them and possibly put them out of position for your return shot. Learning how to use spin will make you a better player, for sure, but I advise you not to use spin in a game until you have mastered it and won't hit the ball into the net or off the court.

Chapter 3 is where you will find advice from instructors – with my commentary – on a host of topics designed to help you improve to the intermediate level. Just glance at the titles, and you will see that almost every aspect of the game is covered in this wide-ranging list of videos. Believe me, I watched hundreds of videos and chose the ones that I think are (a) best for beginners, (b) easy to understand, and (c) usable immediately without having to overthink them.

1. Tracking the Ball with Lee Whitwell and Mark Price
2. Covering the Middle with Zane Navratil
3. Tips to Improve your Game
4. 5 Tips to Improve your Pickleball Game with Glen Peterson
5. 9 Transformative Tips to Level Up your Game with Jordan Briones
6. The Top 5 Fastest Ways to Improve your Pickleball Game with Connor Hance
7. The Five Laws of Good Pickleball Strategy with Connor Hance
8. A Fun Pickleball Game to Improve your Consistency with CJ Johnson
9. How to Actually Improve at Pickleball with Connor Hance
10. Top 10 Pickleball Tips for Players of all Levels with Jordan Briones
11. The Five Golden Rules of Pickleball with Nicole Havlicek
12. 6 Common Pickleball Mistakes New Players Make (and How to Avoid them) with CJ Johnson
13. Top 10 Basic Technique Mistakes You Must Avoid and How to Fix them with Jordan Briones
14. Skinny Singles with Sarah Ansboury
15. 185 Biggest Tips for Beginners
16. Seven Simple Doubles Strategy Tips with Stacie Townsend

A few of these videos are controversial in the sense that they offer different, sometimes opposite, perspectives on how to play a shot or why one shot is better than another.” Covering the Middle” with Zane Navratil, for example, will surprise you because Navratil’s advice is contrary to the advice on the same topic offered by other instructors, but Navratil argues a convincing case for his strategy of how to cover the middle. You will have to decide for yourself if it makes sense to you.

Notice that there are three of Connor Hance’s videos in this section. Hance might not be familiar to many players, but he brings a fresh, no-nonsense approach to teaching how to develop the skills necessary to play at the intermediate level. Some of his advice, although similar to what you see in other instructors’ videos, is presented in a provocative, entertaining manner that not only holds your attention but is relatively easy to follow and incorporate into your game.

I have included three videos with Jordan Briones too. Briones’ videos cover a wide range of topics, and each one is filled with invaluable advice. He has a way of breaking down a shot to show you the right way to hit it, and, at the same time, how not to hit it. He provides many slow-motion clips, as does Nicole Havlicek, which enhance his videos and painstakingly show the technical aspects

of the shot, which should help you adjust the shots that you are not hitting correctly. Sometimes the difference between a good and a bad stroke is caused by something that you might not see in your own shot. It could be simply that you are hitting the ball before it reaches its apex, or your forehand backswing is too long, or you are not bending your knees. Briones' videos will help you detect your mechanical errors and fix them.

One of the sub-sections, "185 Biggest Tips for Beginners," is taken from a Facebook group called Pickleball Forum, where a participant asked the question: "What is your biggest tip for beginners?" I picked out 185 of the more than 250 responses. (Many of the ones I omitted were redundant or unintelligible.) I think it is interesting to read the advice that other players, most of whom seem to have recently advanced to the intermediate level or beyond, offer to beginners. Some of the advice is excellent and corroborates what we have heard from the instructors in the videos.

In Chapter 4, I talk about the basic equipment that you need to play pickleball: paddle, ball, and shoes. I understand that I discussed paddles and shoes in my first book, but the paddles and shoes that a beginner might wear are not necessarily the right ones for an intermediate. Having been around the game for a long time, and having attended pickleball tournaments and talked to pickleball and tennis shoe companies and paddle/racquet representatives, I have learned there is a big difference between the paddles and shoes beginners buy to the ones intermediates and higher level players buy.

This is understandable. Those just starting out playing the sport don't know whether or not they will like it and continue playing, so when purchasing their first paddle, for example, they might not want to spend more than \$50-\$60, whereas, a beginner who has already started playing and is motivated to improve might be looking to purchase a second paddle, better than the first one (I know from first-hand experience), and be willing to spend up to \$100-\$129 for a new paddle. Similarly, with shoes, the beginning player would probably be looking for tennis shoes priced under \$100, whereas, the aspiring intermediate might be willing to spend up to \$140-\$150 for a pair of new pickleball shoes.

The advice I offer in the sections on paddles, shoes, and balls is purely subjective and based on my knowledge and experience, so might not be in sync with the needs, criteria, and unique considerations that people in other parts of the country – or in the world, for that matter – use to determine what equipment they purchase for pickleball. However, I hope you find these chapters useful and at least appreciate the extensive descriptions and list of pros and cons of the various

paddles and shoes, and that this information will help inform you before your next purchase.

The final chapter of the book, called “Tips from the Pros,” is based mostly on interviews I conducted with professional pickleball players and teachers I met over the years, many of which are on my YouTube channel. One question I almost always asked during an interview was: “What advice do you have for a beginner who wants to get to the next level?” I hope you enjoy hearing from these folks, some of the wisest and best instructors in the game and learn from their advice.



## **THE BOOK’S SHOW-AND-TELL FORMAT**

As mentioned at the start of this Foreword, both “Pickleball for Beginners” books include a great number of video links, which are integral to the value of these books. If you are reading an electronic version of the book, it’s easy, simply tap the link to visit the video on your device.

However, if you are reading the paperback version, typing long links into a browser is tedious, and you would soon get tired of doing it. So the paperback editions of both this book and the revised first book contain QR codes, which means that you can scan the codes with your smartphone or tablet and watch the videos while reading the book. (The instructions for using QR codes are right after the contents page.) This is a giant step in improving the experience of the paperback book and gaining the maximum value from both the videos and commentary. Those who have read the initial copies of the paperback, using the QR codes to watch the videos, report that using this technology is a “genius” addition to the paperback version and are glad to see that I have also added the QR codes to the first book.

The combination of watching a video, then reading an explanation – or vice versa – is a powerfully effective teaching technique. I used it in the first book, and I use it in this book. You might call it “show and tell.” It’s one thing to write a description of how to hit an overhead smash or a block volley, for example, but it is so much better for you to actually see how it is done by watching a video of a top pro doing it. The same could be said for any aspect of pickleball, including shots, or where to move while playing doubles. I could write a long explanation of where to stand and where to move on the court in various scenarios, but my more concise explanations, coupled with the videos, bring the point home in not just an intellectual or hypothetical way, but in a visceral way

that is profoundly easier for you to understand and incorporate into your game than if I were merely to explain them to you. Including the videos the way I do is a breakthrough teaching style that I pioneer in these books.

I chose this format because it truly mimics how good pickleball instructors teach on the court. They don't just tell you how to do something. They tell you how to do it, then they show you how to do it (or vice versa). Telling without showing, especially for a sport like pickleball, is a waste of time – it is very hard for students to grasp what you say without seeing how it is done.

Finally, as I mentioned in the first book, being a beginner at any sport, especially pickleball, is challenging. As the saying goes, about pickleball, in particular, “It’s an easy game to learn how to play, but not such an easy game to learn how to play well.”

Once you develop the skills and mindset of an intermediate-level player, you will enjoy the game more. As you become a better player, you will have more opportunities to play with higher-level players, which will help you improve even more. You won't feel self-conscious, and because pickleball is such a social and welcoming sport, when you go to any venue with pickleball courts, such as a public park or rec center, you will be able to get in a game – even if people don't know you – and enjoy playing the game of pickleball, which has garnered the reputation, rightly so, as “the fastest growing sport in America.”

# DINKS

## HOW TO IMPROVE YOUR DINKS

As we discussed, there are thousands of videos and articles on dinking on the Internet. It's not easy to find the ones that will help you upgrade your game from a beginner to an intermediate level. Most are for more advanced players, and many are for those who have never played before. There are a few, though, that are perfect for you. Let's get started.

"Dinking Strategy – 3 steps to Dominate with Dinks and the #1 Dink you must Avoid"  
Jordan Briones



<https://bit.ly/3RKzMAa>

As a beginner, you should be able to hit many dinks in a row. In this video, Jordan Briones talks about what he calls “dead dinks,” predictable dinks with no spin and no directional variation that often sit up too high. You should be able to hit these types of dinks consistently, but they put no pressure on your opponent. The gist of the video is threefold: (1) vary the depth, mix up hitting it deep and short; (2) move your opponent side to side; and (3) add spin – topspin, underspin, and/or sidespin.



The way most pickleball instructors, including myself, teach dinking is to have students first hit “flat” dinks that land in the kitchen. This is good practice to develop consistency. Some of my beginners, after one or two lessons, can keep a dinking rally going for 100 or more hits. It's good to learn to be consistent, even if the dinks might not be all that effective. To advance from beginner



## HOW TO USE SPIN

There is a good article about spin in a blog post entitled “Groundstroke and Return of Serve Skills,” on the “Pickleball Life” website. The article begins by questioning the value of beginners learning how to put spin on a pickleball. “One of the phases most players go through,” says the article, “is spinning the ball. It goes on to say that the reality is that spin might be effective against lower-level players, but is less effective against better players. This is very true. It is good for beginners to learn how to spin the ball as they improve to the intermediate level because spin can fool other players at this level, but if you play against much better players, you will find that these players can handle spin fairly easily. I know this from my personal experience.

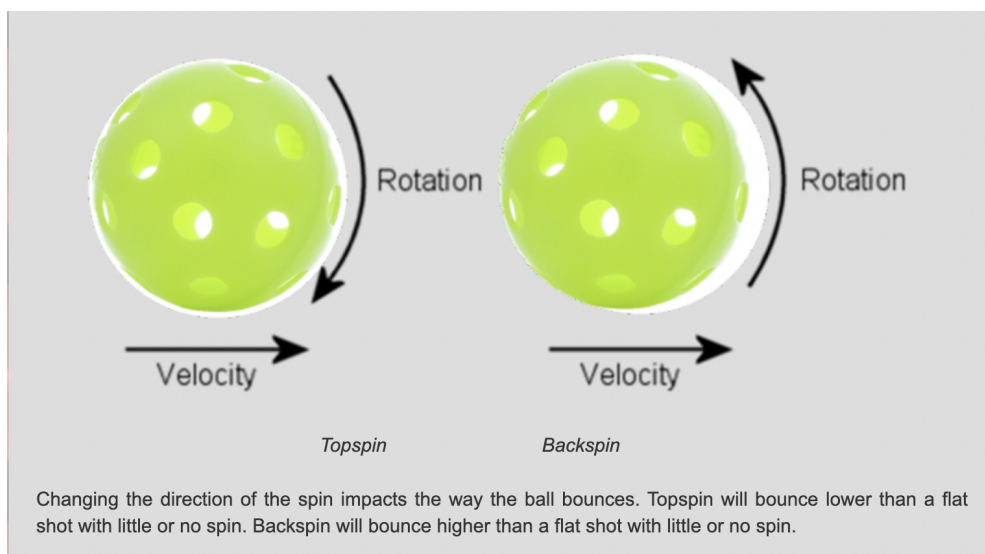
“Groundstroke and  
Return of Serve  
Skills”  
Pickleball Life

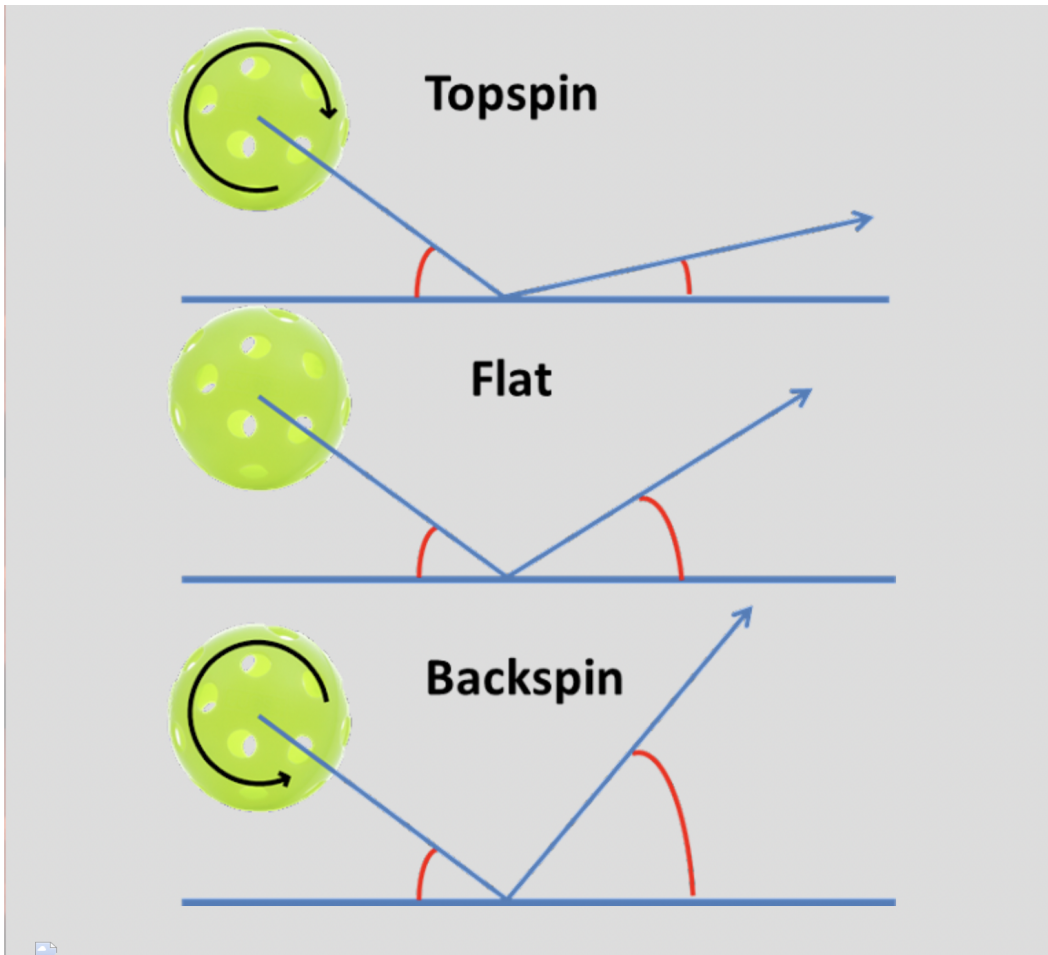


<https://bit.ly/3QG4CsA>

“Players with experience can predict the bounce through visual clues like the arc of the paddle swing and the spin on the ball. A spinning pickleball is easy to read...” says the article, and this is true. But it goes on to say, “However, there is always an exception to every rule. Adding topspin or backspin (also known as a slice or cut shot) to a groundstroke hit behind the mid-court area can be an effective variation to the basic flat groundstroke.”

So in my opinion it is worth learning how to put spin on the ball because it will help you against other beginner and intermediate opponents. Let’s take a look at the two diagrams in the article. Keep in mind that with topspin the ball is rotating forward as it moves through the air, whereas with backspin the ball is rotating backward through the air.





The topspin shot bounces lower, so is obviously more difficult to return than a flat shot. The backspin shot, although it has a higher bounce, can be difficult to hit because its forward motion slows as if the brakes have been applied to the speed of the shot, thus possibly fooling the returner, who is expecting the ball to move forward after the bounce at the normal speed of a flat shot.

Mark Renneson of Third Shot Sports has a short video about topspin, sponsored by Selkirk Sport.

“Pickleball | How to Hit Topspin”  
Mark Renneson



<https://bit.ly/3daqSgk>

**HOW TO IMPROVE FROM A BEGINNER TO AN INTERMEDIATE IN PICKLEBALL: PICKLEBALL FOR BEGINNERS PART II** is a sequel to my first book, **HOW TO GET STARTED PLAYING PICKLEBALL: PICKLEBALL FOR BEGINNERS PART I**, now available in a revised edition with new and edited content and QR codes.

**Learn how to master these skills and level up from beginner to intermediate:**

- The difference between ready positions at the NVZ and baseline
- Tracking the ball
- Making contact with the sweet spot of your paddle
- How to improve on all your shots
- Hitting the ball back the way it came: avoiding unforced errors
- Patience at the NVZ: keeping the rally going with your soft game
- Attacking only shots in your green zone when at the NVZ
- A variety of serves: being conservative, striving for 100% accuracy
- **DON'T EVER MAKE A MISTAKE DURING THE FIRST FOUR SHOTS!**
- The 3 rules of pickleball: don't hit the net, don't hit the net, don't hit the net!
- How to hit topspin and backspin, and how to return them
- Doubles strategy: where to stand and where to move

**This book will teach you all of these skills and techniques, and contains these features to help you level up to intermediate:**

- Links to over 150 videos and articles by the best pickleball teachers in the world
- Written commentary from them and me
- How to improve and how to practice every shot
- Interviews with the best-known teachers in the game
- Their advice on how to improve to the next level

All the videos have a QR code so you can easily watch them on your laptop or cell phone while you read the book. This is by far the best way to learn all the nuances of the game and level up to intermediate.



Bob Savar is a Certified Pickleball Instructor & Author of *Pickleball for Beginners Part I*. He has taught hundreds of people in southeast FL how to play pickleball in his clinics and private lessons. Bob has taken his knowledge & experience and poured it into this book so you can learn to become a better player.