

A primary objective of the **Peak To Peak Pickleball Club** is for everyone to have the very best pickleball experience possible. The Salida Centennial courts open play schedule with designated skill level time slots is one way we achieve that objective. We all know that pickleball games are the most fun when all four players possess similar skill levels and ability. The Salida courts schedule designates 3 “*skills-and-goals*” groups with ample time slots allotted during the week for each group. To help players decide which group they will enjoy the most, we offer the following guidelines known affectionately as **The Three C’s**: Casual, Competitive, and Cut-Throat.

Group A: “Casual”

Players in this group include novice players who are new to the game, folks who have been playing for a while, but prefer a low-key, low-stress pickleball experience, and those whose physical and mobility constraints limit their ability to play at a higher level. For many players in this group, the social contact and group fun are as important, if not more so, than the quality of the pickleball games itself. Most players in this group will fit the play skills guidelines defined by **USA Pickleball** as level 2.0 – 2.5. (<https://usapickleball.org/tournaments/tournament-player-ratings/player-skill-rating-definitions/>)

Group B: “Competitive”

While fun and social interaction are still important in Group B, for many players in this group the emphasis has shifted a bit towards prioritizing **quality of play**. Players in this group have mastered the basics, and the number of shots into the net and out-of-bounds is significantly reduced compared to Group A. The majority of “recreational” players fall into this category of play. Most players in this group will fit the play skills guidelines defined by the **USA Pickleball** as level 3.0 – 3.5. (<https://usapickleball.org/tournaments/tournament-player-ratings/player-skill-rating-definitions/>)

Simple skill level guidelines for Group B

- Serves land in-bounds over 80% of the time.
- Serve returns land in-bounds 80% of the time, but lack depth, direction and consistency.
- Players are beginning to be able to aim and place forehand shots to a particular spot on the court.
- Players have fair control over their shots. Pop-ups, shots into the net and out of bounds happen, but much less so than in Group A.
- Players have good awareness of where to be on the court as the point develops, and can move accordingly to adjust for their opponents’ next shot.
- Players are beginning to be able to vary their shots from ground-stroke drives, drop-shots, and soft dinks, and shots stay in play at least 75% of the time.

Group C: “Cut-Throat”

In Group C, there are no friends, and the objective is to win at all costs. We’re kidding, of course. Truthfully though, while these players still have a great time and enjoy each other’s company, the emphasis and expectation is for high-level pickleball play. It is expected that players in this group have a solid skill set of all the important fundamentals of pickleball play. Long rallies and close competition are common. Sustained dink rallies, “ATP’s”, stacking, and rapid-fire volleys across the NVZ are common. Players in this group will fit the play skills guidelines defined by the USA Pickleball as level 3.5 and above.

[\(https://usapickleball.org/tournaments/tournament-player-ratings/player-skill-rating-definitions/\)](https://usapickleball.org/tournaments/tournament-player-ratings/player-skill-rating-definitions/)

Simple skill level guidelines for Group C

- Serves are firmly-struck, and almost always land in-bounds.
- Serve returns almost always land in-bounds with good depth, and directional intent.
- In addition to keeping shots in play a high percentage of the time, forehand and backhand strokes are well-controlled, and aimed.
- Players are able to change the pace of shots. Hard drives can be re-set and transitioned to soft shots from the kitchen line. Conversely, players in Group C can recognize an “attackable ball” and will take the opportunity to hit a zinger. The drop-shot is successfully used to change the pace and allow time to move forward from the baseline.
- Sustained dink rallies over 10 shots are common. Players understand the importance of patience during dink rallies to wait for an opportunity to speed up.
- Players in Group C have good defensive skills. Hand-volleys across the non-volley zone are common, and players are often able to return hard put-away shots.
- Players instinctively know where and when to move around the court as play develops, and can cover for each other.