

Pickleball: Indoor vs Outdoor

Pickleball can be played indoors or outdoors. Typically the game is played outdoors in warmer climates and when the weather permits in cooler climates. The rules don't change between inside and out, but it sure "feels" different, and it's not obvious why that is the case. Let's start with the courts themselves.

All pickleball courts are the same size, 20 feet by 44 feet. The rectangles you serve into are 10 feet wide and 15 feet long and the no-volley zone we all call the kitchen is 7 feet back from the net on each side. Inside courts are usually added to basketball and sometimes volleyball surfaces, several per gym. Since there is no standard size for a gymnasium, this means that the number of pickleball courts and the space between them as well as the space between the courts and the walls varies all over the place, as does the number of windows and the lighting in general. We will get to it later, but, unless the courts are dedicated to pickleball, which I have never seen indoors, there will be lines in addition to those for pickleball, and that in itself can give rise to confusion.

Outdoor pickleball courts often replace in-line skating rinks or are added to tennis courts. In the former case this is good because the courts are now dedicated to pickleball, i.e., only one set of lines. However, in-line rinks, being outdoors, are pitched for drainage, so they are slightly higher at the nets. The nets themselves can be permanent or portable. I've seen both.

Courts placed on tennis courts ideally have a smooth, blue, concrete surface with permanent tennis nets and tennis lining. It is possible to fit four pickleball courts per tennis court, but now the lines for pickleball share the surface with the tennis lines. And sharing courts between pickleball and tennis adds its own issues, which I am not going to address here.

Court Lines

Unless the court, indoor or outdoor, is dedicated to pickleball, expect to see lines other than those for pickleball. Each sport should use its own color and there seems to be no standard here. Worse, the lining is not consistent. Sometimes the outermost pickleball courts have at least some lines in a different color from the other pickleball lines. What a mess.

What I do to at least partially alleviate the problems with lines is to spend a little time before every game, maybe 20 seconds, figuring out the pickleball lines, often conferring with regular players. This helps, but the other players have always been understanding. Heck, they are pickleball players and we shouldn't expect anything less.

Just remember the color(s) of the pickleball lines and try to ignore all other lines. It can be confusing, but it isn't impossible. And, of course, if you are playing on dedicated courts, there

should be only one color for the lines and you can spend your energy concentrating on the game itself.