The Beginner's Playbook

Your first steps into tennis and pickleball.

WELCOME

Why we made this guide

Every player starts somewhere. This guide exists to shortcut the confusing first weeks — the rules nobody explains clearly, the shots that feel awkward before they feel natural, and the mistakes almost every beginner makes.

It covers both tennis and pickleball, since a lot of players move between the two. Read the section for your sport, skim the crossover notes if you play both, and use the practice plan to structure your first month on court.

What's inside

01	**Tennis Basics**	Scoring, shots, mistakes, etiquette
02	**Pickleball Basics**	Scoring, the kitchen, shots, mistakes, etiquette
03	**Your First Month**	4-week practice plans for each sport
04	**FAQ**	Gear, finding partners, what to wear
05	**Your Next Step**	Getting started with Digital Coach

PART 1

Tennis Basics

Scoring, simply

Points go 0 (love), 15, 30, 40, game. Win by two points — if it's 40-40, that's deuce, and you need two clear points in a row to win the game. Six games wins a set (win by two), and most matches are best of three sets.

The four essential shots

Shot	What it's for
Serve	Starts every point. Focus on consistency before power.
Forehand	Your primary groundstroke — hit with your dominant-side palm facing the ball.
Backhand	One or two hands on the non-dominant side. Two hands is easier to start with.
Volley	Hit before the bounce, close to the net. Short punch, not a swing.

3 mistakes almost every beginner makes

- Swinging too hard, too soon — consistency beats power when you're learning.
- Standing flat-footed — stay light on your feet and split-step as your opponent hits.
- Watching the opponent instead of the ball — eyes on the ball through contact, every time.

On-court etiquette

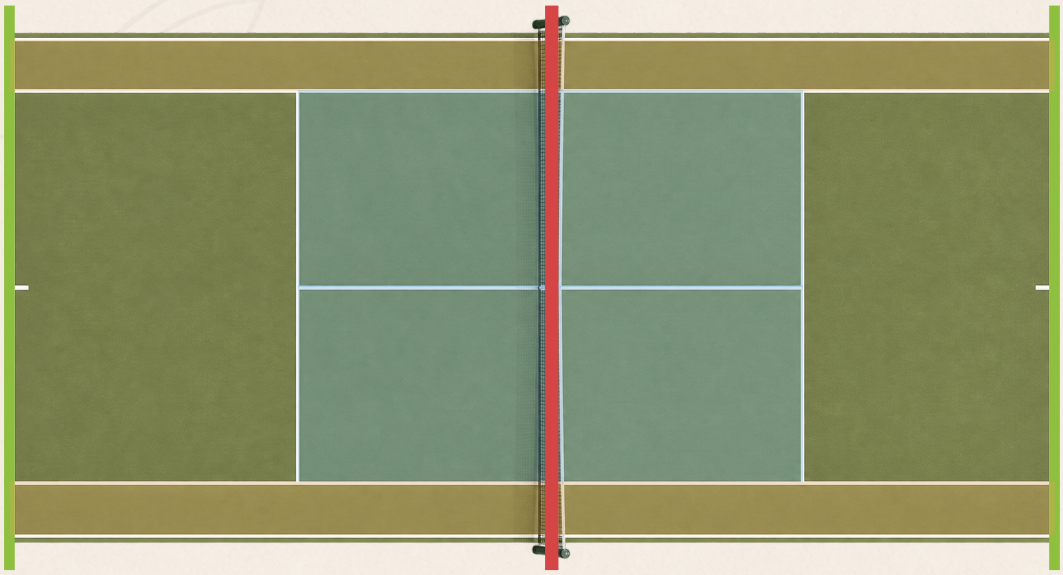
Call your own lines honestly, wait for a point to finish before crossing behind a court, and return stray balls promptly. Small habits, but they're how you get invited back.

DROPIT TIP
Consistency beats power at every level below advanced. A rally you can keep alive beats a winner you can only hit one time in ten.

PART 1

The Tennis Court

Baseline, service boxes, net, and doubles alley — the layout you'll hear called out constantly once you start playing. Colors on the diagram match the key below.



	Baseline	The back line at each end — shots landing beyond it are out.
	Doubles alley	The side strips outside the singles sideline, in play only in doubles.
	Service box	The area each serve must land in, split by the center service line.
	Net	42 inches at posts, 36 inches at center. Every point starts and ends here.

PART 2

Pickleball Basics

Scoring, simply

Traditional scoring: only the serving side scores, games go to 11 (win by two). You'll also see rally scoring, where every rally wins a point regardless of who served. Check which format you're playing before you start.

The kitchen, in one line

The non-volley zone ("the kitchen") is the 7-foot area on each side of the net. You can't volley (hit the ball out of the air) while standing in it — you have to let the ball bounce first.

The essential shots

Shot	What it's for
Serve	Underhand, must clear the kitchen. Aim for consistency first.
Dink	A soft shot into the opponent's kitchen — the core skill of pickleball.
Drive	A firm, flat shot used to push opponents back or win a fast point.
Third-shot drop	A soft shot after the serve/return that lets your team move to the net.

Common beginner mistakes

- Standing back near the baseline — pickleball is won and lost at the kitchen line.
- Trying to smash every ball — most points are built with soft shots, not power.
- Volleying from inside the kitchen — an easy, avoidable fault once you know the rule.

On-court etiquette

Tap paddles after the game, call the score before you serve, and make line calls in your opponent's favor when genuinely unsure.

DROPIT TIP
Most points are won at the kitchen line, not the baseline. Get there early and stay patient — the soft game wins more than the hard one.

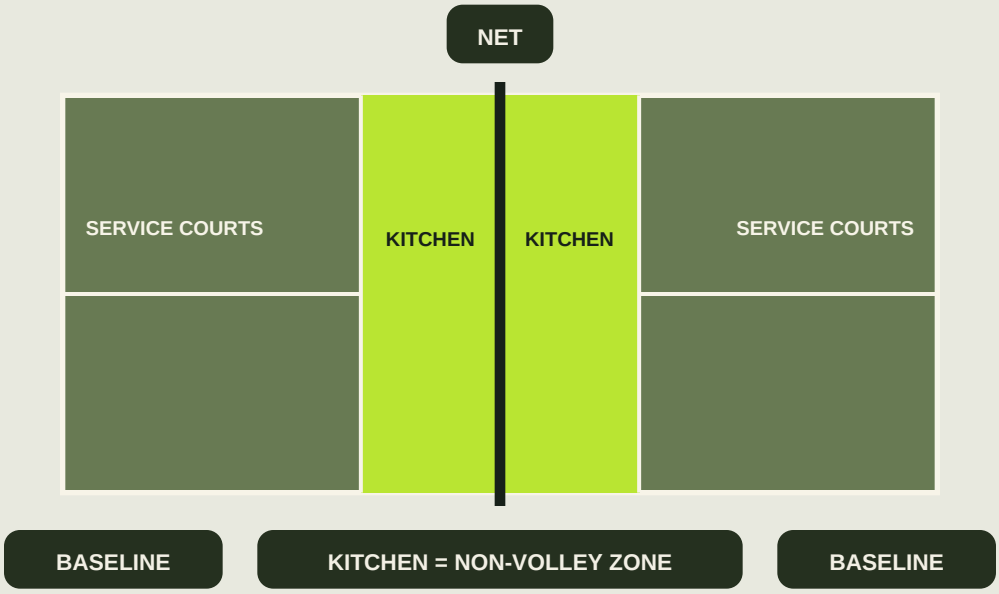
PART 2

The Pickleball Court

The kitchen, the baseline, and the net — smaller than a tennis court, but where you stand matters even more.

THE PICKLEBALL COURT AT A GLANCE

20 x 44 feet for both singles and doubles



Kitchen

7 feet on each side of the net.
Do not volley while touching it or its lines.

Serve

Serve underhand and diagonally.
The ball must clear the kitchen.

Start with the court lines, then learn where each shot belongs.

PART 3

Your First Month: Practice Plans

Two separate 4-week starter plans — pick the one for your sport, or run both if you're splitting time between the two.

Coming from one sport to the other? Quick differences

	Tennis	Pickleball
Grip / footwork	Larger grip, more running	Smaller paddle, compact quick steps
Mentality	Build the point, generate power	Patience, soft hands, wait for the opening
Net play	Optional, situational	Central — you live at the kitchen line

Tennis — 4-week plan

Week 1	Grip, ready position, forehand and backhand basics against a wall or with a partner feeding balls.
Week 2	Add the serve. Focus on a consistent toss and getting the ball in, not power.
Week 3	Introduce the volley. Play short points starting from the service line.
Week 4	Play full points and keep score. Focus on consistency over winners.

Pickleball — 4-week plan

Week 1	Learn the serve, return, and basic rally shots. Get comfortable with the kitchen rule.
Week 2	Practice dinking with a partner — soft, controlled exchanges at the kitchen line.
Week 3	Add the third-shot drop. Practice moving from the baseline up to the kitchen line as a team.
Week 4	Play full games. Focus on patience — let the point develop before going for a winner.

Ready to practice?
Scan to open Dropit and start today's session with Digital Coach.
Left: iOS Right: Android

PART 4

Frequently Asked Questions

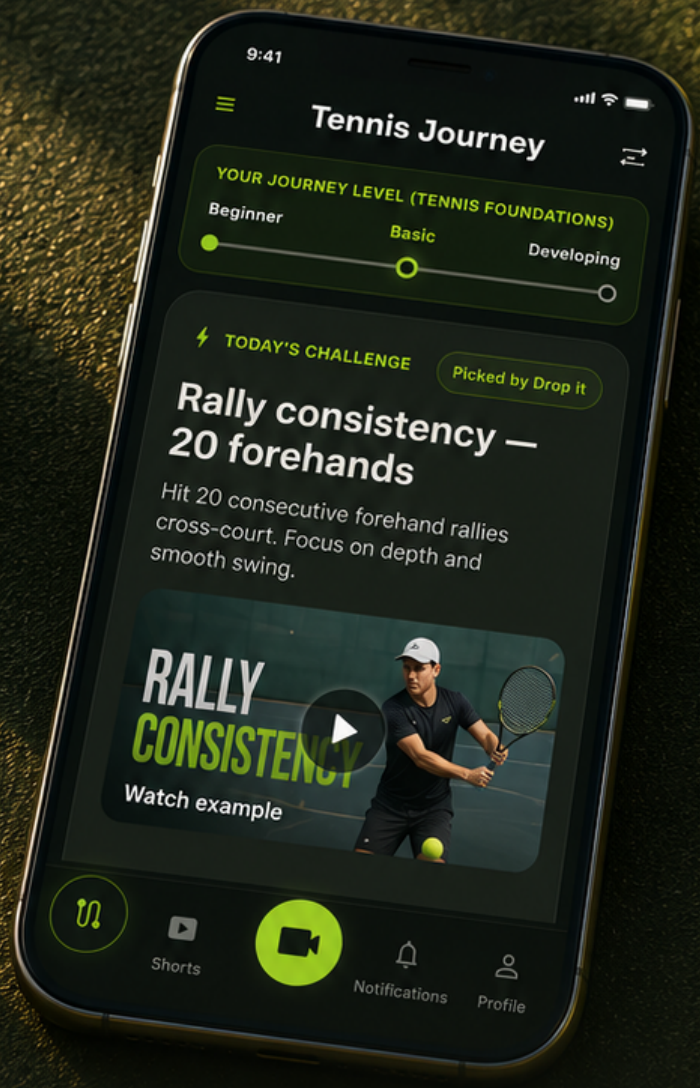
Do I need to buy expensive gear to start?
No. A basic racket or paddle in the $30-60 range is fine to learn with. Upgrade once you know your playing style — there's no need to buy premium gear before your first few sessions.

What should I wear?
Comfortable athletic wear and court/tennis shoes with good lateral support. Running shoes work in a pinch, but court shoes reduce injury risk if you play regularly.

How do I find a partner or coach?
Local clubs, community centers, and Facebook/WhatsApp groups for your city are the fastest routes. Many pickleball courts have informal "open play" sessions that are beginner-friendly by design.

Where can I play if I don't have a club membership?
Public parks and community courts are common for both sports. Search for public courts in your area, or check if a nearby club offers pay-per-session access.

How long before I feel comfortable?
Most beginners feel reasonably comfortable with the basics after 4-6 sessions. Consistency matters more than intensity — shorter, regular sessions beat occasional long ones.



TAKE DROPIT WITH YOU

Your next step

Track your practice. Get personalized feedback.
Follow a coaching plan that grows with you.

Download Dropit:

Download on the App Store

GET IT ON Google Play

See you on the court,
Team Dropit