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# Pickleball Points: Five pickleball tips from physical therapist Bob Cairo

Vaughn Baker  
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When I first moved to Ocean View, I was on a cane — the result of an unknown auto-immune attack when I was competing at a national tennis tournament. It wasted the muscles in my legs, but with the help of Bob Cairo of Tidewater Physical Therapy in Ocean View, I was able to build some strength in my legs. Pickleball did the rest, and I tossed the cane.

During two knee replacements this year, Bob and I would periodically talk about pickleball when I was visiting for physical therapy. He mentioned that many of his patients had started to play pickleball, and he noted they were always anxious to get back on the court.

A few weeks ago, I dragged Bob and his wife out to the pickleball court. Bob is an excellent athlete and lettered in football at the University of Delaware. Fairway Village's Mike Smith joined me and, in a very short time, Bob and his wife were playing pickleball.

Afterwards, I asked his opinion of pickleball from a therapist's perspective, regarding the majority of pickleball injuries he was treating.

Bob Cairo's Pickleball Point 1: Use the proper footwear. Immediately, he recognized that we are absolutely correct when we insist that pickleballers wear the correct court footwear in pickleball. Had it not been for his excellent balance, Bob just about took several serious tumbles with his cross-trainer footwear.

Bob's Point 2: He didn't expect to find pickleball so enjoyable and addictive, acknowledging that “This is great exercise for just about anyone ... and we need weekly exercise to keep all our body systems working.”

Bob's Point 3: Nor did he realize there were so many levels of play, from something for the person just looking for some recreational fun to the competitive mavens playing in national competition. He emphasized that folks like himself, with higher-level experience in different sports, can easily appease their competitive instincts in pickleball.

Bob's Point 4: Warm up! Bob did quickly detect that, unlike in football, tennis and baseball, where the flight of the ball is fairly predictable, that plastic pickleball seems to have its own idea of where it wants to go. And in a gust of wind, the ball can almost make a left- or right-hand turn.

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That unpredictable turn can suddenly cause the players to have to make a sudden sideways turn or accelerate from zero to 60, and hit the ball off balance. Most people, if they don't warm up and stretch adequately, are not in good enough shape to withstand such fast acceleration, or maintain their balance if they don't use footwork to adjust to the sudden change in direction. His suggestion: a serious warm-up!

Bob's Point 5: Footwork is king! In his very first lesson, he wasn't yet able to master getting to the no-volley-zone, better known as “the kitchen,” to toe the line with his partner. But Bob watched others and saw quite a few balls hit off-balance, from a leaning position, which added additional unnatural force to the arm or shoulder.

He now understands why there are so many sore shoulder injuries. Footwork, maintaining balance and proper stroke production are critical to reduce unnecessary stress on the joints. Players should remember to do footwork and core strength exercises so they address the ball properly from a balanced position, using proper weight transfer when they hit the ball.

At the end of the afternoon, Bob and I had had a lot of fun and shared a great deal of laughter. Now he understands why pickleball patients are so impatient to get back on the court. Now when his patients say they can't wait to “dink,” he won't think they mispronounced the word drink. “When can

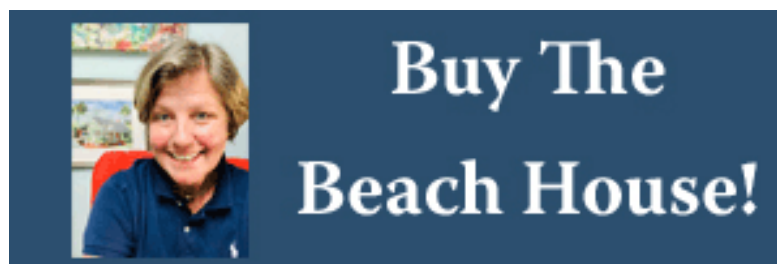
we play pickle again?” were his departing words. He has already purchased a new Paddletek paddle, and, hopefully, he will make a visit to New Balance and get a proper pair of court shoes.

*Bob Cairo manages Tidewater Physical Therapy in Ocean View, located at 63 Atlantic Avenue. He writes a regular physical therapy column for the Coastal Point.*

*Vaughn “The Baron” Baker is a Senior Olympics gold-medalist in pickleball, and is public relations director for the First State Pickleball Club (FSPC) and captain of the Ocean View Crew pickleball community. He spent his career working with top tennis professionals while working for Wilson Sporting Goods and introducing the Prince Tennis Racket and Wimbledon Tennis Lines. For more information, visit [PickleballCoast.com](http://PickleballCoast.com).*

**By Vaughn Baker**

Special to the Coastal Point



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Pickleball columnist