It’s a sunny, cold day outside, but inside the conversation is about pickleballs…and it is really heating up. Literally, we’re talking about the way the pickleball bounces, or, more specifically, how different balls bounce, how they differ and how they favor different styles of play. You’d think this wouldn’t be such a big deal, but it really is.

The way we play pickleball is on the line. Literally.

Pickleball has been growing by leaps and bounds, and with it, the demand for more equipment, more instruction, more tournaments, more places to play, and literally more of everything that has to do with the sport. It’s awesome and yet it’s becoming a very vulnerable time.

We’re facing a dilemma; the pickleballs and the way they bounce. Not only that, but the way they play over the course of a game, and over the course of a tournament.

Lately, the discussion seems to be about the Onix Pure 2 (indoor), and the JUGS (indoor) balls. Many players have noticed a difference, and have begun to offer many opinions.

The qualities of each have merit. The longevity and liveliness of the Onix ball vs. the way JUGS ball favors touch and finesse around the net.

In my opinion, in order for pickleball to survive and thrive as a unique sport, it has to maintain its identity. Certain rules that make pickleball unique, like the underhand serve and the double bounce rule help, but they really don’t define the essence of the sport. The essence, the aura, and the spirit of pickleball is created and maintained in the no volley zone – aka, the kitchen.

The dink game is a world of its own. It can be very subtle, involving placement, touch, and patience. It is the only place where men and women are equals, and have the same advantages and disadvantages.

Strategies like the ‘3rd shot’ are specifically practiced so that people at the net have a much harder time keeping the other team back at the line. It’s hard to ‘tee off’ when the ball bounces lower than the top of the net. A lively ball, that bounces higher (especially at the net), favors aggressive, tennis like variety of play. Many players who have come from that sport seriously exploit and enjoy this quality.

A less lively ball encourages shorter shots and longer dinking games at the net. These are skills that take time and commitment to develop. Right now, it is my understanding that 4.0 players
That’s the Way the Ball Bounces: a discussion

and above must demonstrate the ability to dink the ball, drop the ball from the baseline into the kitchen, and play the kitchen strategies that are a trademark of pickleball.

In this sense, the ball can make or break this sport. Do we want to risk losing this particular uniqueness to the game?

SO. The question becomes, what do we want to encourage? Do we want ‘Tennis Jr.’? Do we want our own personalities and backgrounds to dictate the future of the sport? How do we maintain the integrity of pickleball indoors and outdoors?

We have to be aware of the possibility, that if we’re winning with a certain type of ball, that’s what we’ll advocate for. But, truly, what is BEST for pickleball, its future, and its success? Right now, it has an identity of its own. That’s our friend, and we need to think of what’s best for our friend, not what’s best for us as individuals. In my opinion, that’s what we need to discuss.

What do you think?? Please add your comments.

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**In my experience. There is another ball that is in the mix, and that is the Dura Fast 40 which is an outdoor ball. Please see an in depth discussion titled USAPA Reapproves Jugs Pickleballs, Clarifies Ball Conditioning Requirements for Pure 2 on the PickleballCentral blog.