

Too Many “UNFORCED” Errors?? by Dahlia Hirsch MD, PPR Certified Pickleball Professional Instructor

People often say- “We lost because we made too many Unforced Errors”!! The more productive follow up question might be, “What kind of errors did we make and how can we fix them?” My Coach, Steve Kennedy, emphasizes it is important to learn the most likely correction for each error.

Unforced errors often fall into several categories, and when we examine them. Most are not unforced at all! Some of these categories are:

1. Location- we put ourselves in bad position (Respect the X and learn the exceptions- discuss these with your partner ahead of time)
2. Timing – we are late getting to the position (watch your partner hit the ball, and get to the right spot for the most likely opponent response- and of course respond to your own shots and by all means hit the shot that your partner expects so they can do the same)
3. Form- we use form that does not lead to consistency ( form translates into function and consistency- a good instructor will teach you form that works)
4. Decision Making—we make bad shot choices that allow our opponent to return the ball in a way that is inopportune for us (you will learn to understand when the point got derailed- often several shots before the last one)
5. Deer in the Headlights- we don’t figure out how to adjust our game plan midstream (that takes some time- we often think we are playing worse but the other team figured out a new strategy- use your time outs to adjust to their adjustment- think more than who the weaker player is to target or stacking, think different shot selection)
6. Lack of recognition- we don’t recognize what we are doing well, and we don’t recognize when the opposing team adapts to our strategy- How many times have we bemoaned losing a game where we were way ahead?!!
7. Options/ times- we forget that there are options - offensive, neutral, defensive for all the kinds of shots that we do. ( an example is thinking the answer is to get more aggressive when it might be to hit more soft shots)
8. Stubbornness - sometimes we keep doing the same shot over and over even when it is not working- stop and try something else for a while
8. Nervousness- Confidence- (often that results in us holding the paddle tighter and popping the ball up or too far, or in the net due to timing) Working on your proper form so your shots become 2<sup>nd</sup> nature will help, but there are just times we need to kindly remind ourselves—“I can play better”. And it helps our partners to be completely supportive during competition! Pretend you are playing “Backyard pickleball” to keep it in perspective!
9. Lack of Focus- we get tired, either physically or mentally

10. Communication—Me, You, Me, You- the value of practicing communication on the court cannot be overestimated!!! Also, let your partner know ahead of time what kind of suggestions you welcome, and what makes you completely lose your game!!

11. Forgetting that This is FUN—we play better when we remember we are privileged to be out here having fun! **Gratefulness is a real winter!!**

When I first started playing at the local Recreation center, there was a man who would sit on the side and count people's "unforced errors"- like watching a baseball game! And sure enough, there were a lot of them! And then he would say—"Don't Make so Many Unforced Errors" And we would say "Duh! "

Here are some practices I use, which become more instinctual when repeated while practicing. When I am making a lot unforced errors, the 1<sup>st</sup> thing I ask myself is if there is something I can do to correct my form to play better defense or offense. Examples are: Is my non- dominant arm up, am I staying low, is my paddle low when the ball is coming from high and is it up at the nvz. Am I moving my derriere out of the way when the ball comes directly to me. Am I tracking the ball and not the spot on the court across from me. Am I following through. Am I holding the paddle too tightly. Is my paddle in front of me with wrist locked. Is my paddle angled correctly. Am I split stepping early enough. Each one of these often relates to a specific shot error.

Then I start thinking if there is anything I can do differently with shot selection or positioning. Am I in the right spot facing the right direction early enough- watching my partner's paddle and then my opponents positioning to be at the right spot early. Am I hitting the shots my partner expects me to hit, so they can be better prepared. If they are constantly beating me in a particular shot, what am I feeding them that allows that to happen. And depending on who is playing better, can I set my partner up or myself up to make a winning shot. And yes, the obvious observation of who is the weaker player on the other side to hit the ball to.

When you work on your shots properly, then hopefully they will become more 2<sup>nd</sup> nature and your confidence will increase. **Sometimes you are just up against a better team with better skills, or conditioning, experience, strategy,** and then you can identify what you need to work on, what shots you could add to your selections, and how to strategize better! Learn from the experience, And say "**Great Game-** hope to meet you again and play a better game against you! "