



Cup of Joe

WHAT ARE
YOUR PRIORITIES?

HOW WELL CAN YOU ***WATCH THE BALL?***

BY JOE DINOFFER

“**W**atch the ball hit the racquet (or paddle)!” We’ve all heard it, and on the surface it makes sense. However, the irony of this instruction is that it is impossible.

Don’t get me wrong. There is definitely merit to the instruction, “Watch the ball.” After all, tennis AND pickleball are complex and fast-paced sports. In a fraction of a second, players need to judge, prepare, and position for each incoming ball. Of course you need to watch the ball! But, can you really see the ball hit the paddle?

The answer is “No.” Test it for yourself. Just bounce the ball off the paddle up in the air repeatedly. Even at this unrealistically slow ball speed, the event of ball contact happens too quickly. How fast? About 3-4 milliseconds. But, even though you can’t see the ball hit the paddle, the process of trying to see that point of contact can help many players. That effort may trigger several favorable things such as better breathing, concentration, and even more relaxed and full swings.

In tennis, much of the momentum of this instruction comes from tennis great Roger Federer since he is often cited as the perfect “ball watcher” and his success alongside his technique is legendary. Federer has a habit of turning his head and appears to rivet his eyes on the strings at the point of contact. Although pickleball and tennis are very different, the fact that a large percentage of pickleball players have played tennis makes this comparison a relevant consideration. •



Joe Dinoffer is a master professional in the USPTA and PTR, has written seven tennis books and 22 DVDs, and has appeared on the Tennis Channel. His company www.OncourtOffcourt.com manufactures training aids for pickleball and tennis. He brings that experience and passion to pickleball in this regular column of *Pickleball Magazine*.