

I Worry Too Much About My Partner.

What's Really Going On?



You're not a bad partner.

In fact, the problem may be that you are trying so hard to be a good partner that you have stopped playing your own game.

That is a strange pickleball trap. It does not look selfish. It does not look careless. It looks considerate. It looks responsible. It looks like you care about the team.

And you do care.

“

But caring can quietly turn into carrying.

Now you are not just hitting a dink. You are protecting your partner from disappointment. You are not just serving. You are trying not to confirm some imagined suspicion that you are the weak link. You are not just returning the ball. You are trying not to become the subject of a silent courtroom drama taking place inside your own head.

What's really going on is this:

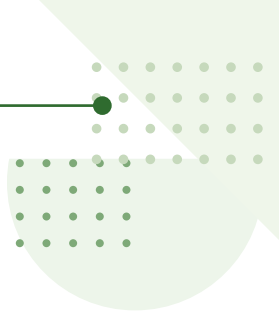
Your attention has shifted from the ball to your partner's imagined reaction.

Before you hit, part of you is already thinking:

- Will they be annoyed?
- Will they think I'm the weak link?
- Did I just ruin their game?
- Are they wishing they had a different partner?
- Are they going to stop trusting me?
- Are they going to poach everything now?
- Should I play safer?
- Should I stay out of the way?
- Should I apologize again, even though I already apologized for a shot that was not technically a felony?

Once that starts, you are no longer just playing the point.

You are playing through someone else's approval.



What's Really Going On?



And the problem is that you may not even know what your partner is actually thinking. You are often playing through your imagined version of their reaction. They may be focused on the next ball. They may be blaming themselves. They may not care nearly as much as you think. They may simply have the resting facial expression of a person who has just opened a tax bill.

But once you begin imagining their disappointment, your body changes.

- Your attention leaves the ball.
- Your freedom shrinks.
- Your hand gets careful.
- Your swing gets smaller.
- Your serve gets protected.
- Your return gets pushed.
- Your dink gets guided.
- Your feet get a little heavier.

You start choosing shots to avoid blame instead of letting the body respond clearly.

In Fluid Motion Factor terms, you have moved away from the direct experience of the ball and into the future. You are not just responding to what is happening. You are trying to manage what the point might mean socially, emotionally, and relationally.

“

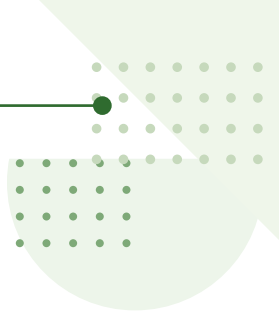
That is far too much burden for one shot.

The body cannot play freely while also trying to win approval, avoid embarrassment, protect your partner's mood, preserve the team dynamic, and submit a clean performance report to the imaginary doubles committee.

So your game tightens.

Not because you do not care.

Because you care in a way that pulls you out of freedom.



What Am I Misunderstanding?

Your misunderstanding is this:

“ You think being a good partner means making sure your partner is never disappointed.

But that is impossible.

In doubles, both players are going to miss. Both players are going to guess wrong. Both players are going to hit good shots, bad shots, lucky shots, weird shots, and the occasional “what in the world was that?” shot that appears to have been designed by a committee of raccoons.

That is doubles.

Your partner will miss returns. You will miss returns. Your partner will pop up a dink. You will pop up a dink. Your partner will attack a ball they should not attack. You will attack a ball you should have sent gently back into civilization.

Nobody gets through a match without leaving fingerprints on the crime scene.

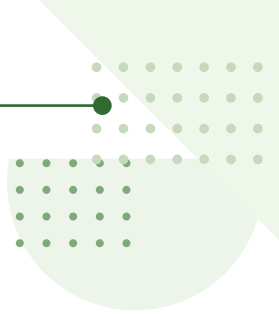
So if your definition of a good partner is “I must never disappoint my partner,” you are giving yourself an impossible assignment.

A good partner is not a perfect partner.

- A good partner is present.
- A good partner stays available.
- A good partner keeps playing the next ball.
- A good partner does not turn every mistake into a personal identity crisis.
- A good partner does not make the entire match about whether they are approved of.
- A good partner recovers.

That last word matters.

Recovering is one of the great doubles skills. Not just recovering positionally, though that matters too. Recovering emotionally. Recovering attention. Recovering freedom.



The Better Gift



If you miss a shot and spend the next three points apologizing internally, you are not helping your partner. You are staying stuck in the last ball. Your body is still dragging the previous mistake around the court like a suitcase with a broken wheel.

That makes the next shot harder.

The better gift to your partner is not perfection.

It is availability.

Can you be here for the next ball?

Can you keep your eyes soft?

Can you feel your paddle?

Can you let the body play?

Can you stay in the point instead of in the imagined judgment?

“

That is what a partner needs.

They do not need you to become flawless. They need you to remain playable.

The approval trap also misunderstands where your attention belongs. Your partner matters. Of course they do. Doubles is a shared game. You communicate. You cover the middle. You move together. You encourage each other. You make tactical decisions. You notice patterns. You protect space. You help each other.

But your partner's approval is not the center of the game.

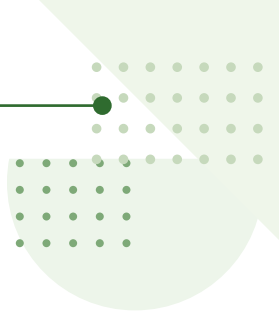
The ball is still the center of the shot.

The point is still happening now.

Your body still needs freedom to respond.

When you make your partner's reaction the center of your experience, you are no longer playing with them. You are performing for them.

And performing for approval is a very different thing from playing.



What's Your One Key Correction?

Play with your partner, not for your partner's approval.



That is the correction.

Your partner is part of the game.

Their approval is not the center of the game.

This does not mean you become indifferent to them. It does not mean you stop communicating, stop caring, or start whacking every ball like a person trying to settle a private score with the universe.

It means you stop making your partner's imagined reaction the thing that organizes your body.

- You are allowed to play.
- You are allowed to miss.
- You are allowed to recover.
- You are allowed to be a partner, not an employee under review.

Before the next point, bring your attention back to something real.

- Feel your feet.
- Feel the paddle in your hand.
- Soften your eyes.
- Let the court widen.
- Acknowledge the ball.
- Let your body be available.

Your cue is:

YOUR CUE



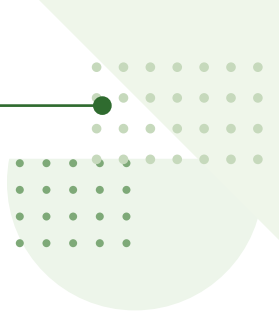
My ball.



Our point.



That *+* puts everything in the right order. *Free body.*



Put Everything in the Right Order



My ball.

That means I am responsible for this contact. I see it. I acknowledge it. I let myself play it.

Our point.

That means I am connected to my partner, but not trapped by their approval. We are playing together. We are not running a courtroom.

Free body.

That means I give my skill a chance to come out. I do not shrink, steer, or protect every shot to avoid blame.

“

The best gift you can give your partner is not perfection. It is freedom.

A free player is easier to partner with. A free player can recover from mistakes. A free player sees the ball better. A free player communicates more naturally. A free player does not collapse into apology or tighten into self-protection.

So enjoy the point.

Let yourself be in it.

Let the partner be beside you, not above you.

Let the ball be the ball.

If you miss, come back.

If your partner misses, let them come back.

That is doubles.

Not two people trying to avoid disappointing each other.

Two people trying to stay free enough to play the next ball.