

I've recently been asked several questions about paddle weights. Perhaps no one in the world knows more about pickleball paddles than Steve Wong. Steve founded Onix Sports and more recently TOPP. I recently discussed this issue with Steve to get his ideas on the subject of paddle design in general and more specifically, paddle weights.

It is most important for a pickleball paddle to feel balanced while swinging the paddle, using your personal swinging motion. Each person's swing is a bit different, but skilled paddle designers know how to balance their paddles for the largest proportion of pickleball players.

Most players can determine if a paddle is properly balanced for them, by just holding the paddle and hitting a few balls. Selecting a paddle that is balanced for you will increase the likelihood you will be able to consistently strike the ball with your paddle's sweet spot, thus enabling you to target your shots accurately.

The weight of the paddle is another design factor that will impact your ability to hit with your paddle's sweet spot and generate power. Generally speaking, heavier paddles generate more power than lighter paddles, but if a paddle is too heavy you will frequently miss hitting with your paddle's sweet spot and thus, not have the control needed to target your shots effectively.

Successful pickleball paddle designers know how to develop paddles with the shape and size of sweet spots they want. The TOPP wide-body paddle is designed to have the largest sweet spot possible that is located in the very center of the paddle's face. This provides the player with the largest margin of error when striking the ball. TOPP's new Reacher paddle is longer and thus has a long but narrower sweet spot. Longer paddles give you a bit more reach, but the narrow sweet spot is less forgiving (because it is relatively narrow). The shape of the sweet spot means a paddle like the TOPP wide-body is generally more appropriate for a beginner because the large sweet spot is in the middle of the paddle's hitting surface. More advanced players, who can more reliably hit with their paddle's sweet spot, might be better off getting the Reacher for its greater length and thus reach.

Given the materials used to construct the paddle, as well as the shape and size of the paddle's sweet spot, paddle designers can establish a weight range that is most effective for any given paddle. The TOPP wide-body paddle still has a good amount of power but is most effective in a lighter weight (in the lower 7 oz. Range). The Reacher's performance is maximized at a somewhat heavier weight (in the middle to upper 7 oz. range).

Because of our advanced levels of maturity at Westbrook (we are generally older), we tend to have more physical limitations that impact the paddle weight with which we feel most comfortable. Most of us should stay away from really heavy paddles and make absolutely certain any paddle we use feels balanced in on our hands. Most of our Advanced Group members should go with a well-balanced, mid-weight paddle. If you can target your shots with the power you want using a lighter paddle (say 7.2 oz. to 7.4 oz.), then go for a lighter paddle. However, keep in mind the paddle designer's recommended weight range.

I'll use my situation as an example. My shoulder problem has worsened over the last year or so. I was using the lightest, longest paddles I could find. I felt I could offset the limited power of these paddles (because they were quite light) by swinging harder. But now that my shoulder problem has worsened, I'm not able to swing the paddle with as much speed as before. Thus, I need a somewhat heavier paddle – not a heavy paddle, but one that is just a bit heavier.

This might seem a bit counter-intuitive. Why get a heavier paddle if my shoulder hurts? Because I don't have to swing the paddle quite as hard to get the same amount of pace on the ball. So, I've decided to move to a mid-weight, longer paddle. I still can play with the Onix Summit, but I've found the mid-weight TOPP Reach is ideal for me. Because it is too light for me now, I've decided to retire my Selkirk Omni.

In sum, my recommendation is to first find a paddle that feels well-balanced in your hand for your personal swinging motion. Next, select the paddle shape and handle length that is best for you. If you want a longer paddle, think carefully about the handle length you need. Stubby handles are great for table tennis players and those who like to keep a finger on the paddle face. This is how paddle designers can maximize paddle face length – they make paddles with stubby handles (like the Onix Summit). If you have a tennis background and want to keep your tennis grip on your pickleball paddle you should consider a longer (but not maximum paddle face length) like the TOPP Reach. Lastly, consider the weight factor, but realize the paddle designer's recommended weight range is most important. If you go with a really light paddle, remember you will need to swing that paddle with a bit more speed to get the pace on the ball you want.

Nearly all of the paddle manufacturers produce some very good paddles and provide responsive service. One of our group recently had a problem with an Engage paddle that was about a year old, but the manufacturer quickly took care of the problem. I know the TOPP and Onix paddles best because I represent them. The newest sports company to enter the pickleball business is Head. I've only hit a couple of balls with their new paddle, but it sure looks fantastic. Expect most of the pickleball manufacturers to introduce new paddles over the next few months. I know Onix is scheduled to introduce three new paddles by the end of the year, as well as a new line of balls. I don't think any one pickleball manufacturer is absolutely better than the others. Just keep in mind balance, shape, and weight (in that order) when selecting a pickleball paddle.

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