

# PICKLEBALL STRATEGY

A GUIDE TO 3.5 AND BEYOND



**REACH THE NEXT LEVEL  
OF YOUR GAME**

An eBook by Payton Bond

**This is a Sample of the book:**

# **Pickleball Strategy**

## **A Guide to 3.5 and Beyond**

**An Illustrated Guide to Pickleball**

*Based on the Pickleball35.com Blog*

**Strategy, Court Positioning and How  
to Eliminate Common Mistakes**

---

**To purchase (\$9.99) the full eBook visit**  
**[Pickleball35.com](http://Pickleball35.com)**

## Copyright © 2025 by Payton Bond

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, distributed, or transmitted in any form or by any means, including photocopying, recording, or other electronic or mechanical methods, without the prior written permission of the publisher, except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical reviews and certain other noncommercial uses permitted by copyright law.

Published in the United States by Smallbizbi LLC.

1E03212025

---

**Note: The Table of Contents is complete, but some sections are not included.**

Content for entries in the Table of Contents with \*\* are in the Sample. Other articles are available in the full Book.

# Contents

## Introduction

## The Serve

- Pickleball Serve Overview
- Pickleball Serve Consistency \*\*
- Pickleball Serve Options
- Pickleball Serve Legality \*\*
- Serving Under Pressure
- Pickleball Serve Positioning
- Defensive Positioning \*\*
- Pickleball Stacking
- Serve Stacking \*\*
- Defensive Stacking
- Advanced Serves

## Return of Serve

- Return of Serve Tips \*\*
- Serve Return Control \*\*
- Advance to the Kitchen
- Serve Return Freeze \*\*
- Handling Spin Serves

- Consistent Serve Returns
- Serve Return Targeting \*\*
- Serve Return Spin
- Spin Physics

## **The Third Shot**

- Third Shot Options \*\*
- Drive, Lob, or Drop?
- Third Shot Communication \*\*
- Stepping In with Your Forehand
- Pickleball Lob Shot
- Third Shot Drive \*\*
- Overhead Smash Tips
- The Lob Switch \*\*
- Poaching in Pickleball
- Pinching the Middle \*\*
- Angle Smash Shot
- Third Shot Drop
- The 5th and 7th Shot Drop \*\*
- The Put Away Shot
- Third Shot Drop Targeting
- Third Shot Drop Advancing
- Drop Shot Mistake \*\*

- Drop Shot Defense
- The Pickleball Reset
- The Shake and Bake \*\*
- Drop Shot Against Power Players
- Blocking a Drive

## **Dinking**

- Dinking Overview \*\*
- Footwork and Tethering
- The Cross-Court Dink \*\*
- Attacking a Dink
- The Dink Fake
- 3 Common Dinking Mistakes \*\*
- The ATP (Around the Post)
- The Erne \*\*

## **Social/ Mental**

- Resilience in Pickleball
- The Power Player Challenge \*\*
- Patience in Pickleball
- Poaching Opinions
- From Tennis to Pickleball \*\*
- Seeing the Court \*\*
- From Drives to Drops

## **Pickleball Etiquette**

- Pickleball Partner Etiquette \*\*
- Pickleball Opponent Etiquette
- Handling Serve Legality Disputes
- Playing Up, Playing Down

## **Popular Facebook Posts – Payton Bond**

- Seeing the Court
- Playing Up, Playing Down \*\*
- Third Shot Progression
- The Power of Resilience in Pickleball \*\*
- Pickleball Partner Etiquette
- The Split Step
- Defending Drop Shots
- Who’s Taking the Third Shot?
- The Power Player Challenge \*\*
- Popular FaceBook Quotes \*\*

# Introduction

## Welcome to the Pickleball 3.5 Strategy Blog

The Pickleball 3.5 Strategy Blog is your guide to understanding Pickleball strategy, court positioning, and techniques to elevate your game. Whether you're a beginner aiming for a 3.5 skill rating or an experienced player looking to refine your strategy, you'll find actionable advice and insights here.





## Why Strategy Matters

Beginners often learn pickleball by playing, watching videos, taking lessons, or chatting with friends. While these methods are helpful, they tend to emphasize shot execution over strategy. Advanced pickleball, however, is a game of strategy. Understanding positioning, tactics, and how to avoid common mistakes is key to success. This blog focuses on strategy because learning to think strategically is your fastest path to improving your game.

# The Serve

Pickleball Serve shot strategy posts.

# -Pickleball Serve Overview

Post #1 of 11 in All Serve Posts

---



You might be thinking, “It’s just the serve, right? Toss the ball, hit it over, and move on. What’s the big deal?” Well, here’s the secret: the serve sets the tone for the entire point. How you start can make or break your chances of staying in control—or scrambling to recover.

-----  
*Read the rest of this post in the full eBook.*

*Visit [Pickleball35.com](https://Pickleball35.com) to purchase the complete eBook for \$9.99.*

# -Pickleball Serve Consistency \*\*

Post #2 of 11 in All Serve Posts

---



---

## Pickleball Serve Consistency: It's All About Starting Strong

The serve in pickleball might seem simple—you hit the ball, they hit it back, and the game goes on. But let's face it: there's a big difference between just *getting the ball over* and setting yourself up for a strong rally.

Some players see the serve as their chance to score a quick point, but experienced players know the truth: it's not about the power or fancy spin. It's about consistency, control, and making sure the rally starts on your terms.

---

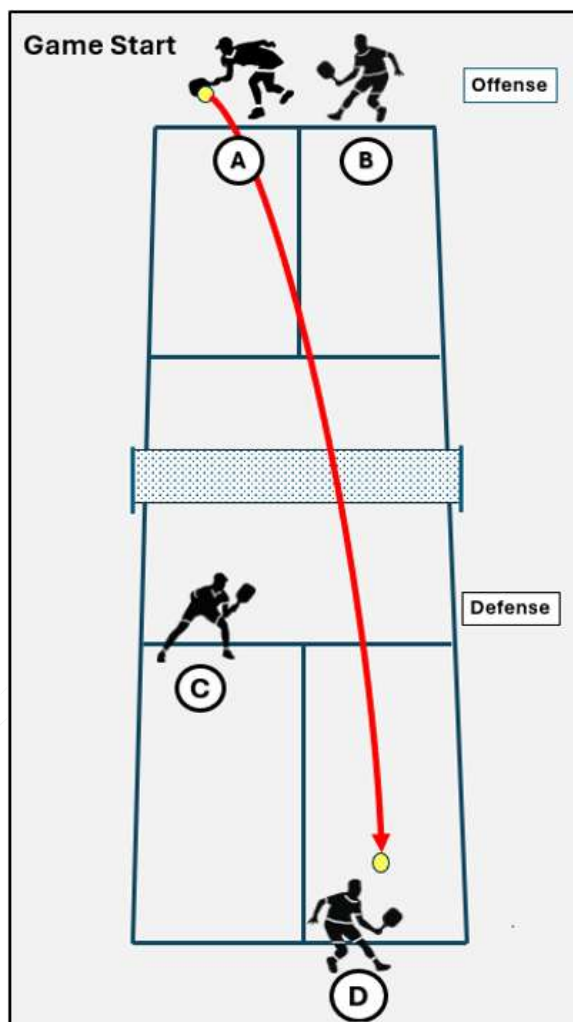
## Why Serve Consistency Is Key

Think of the serve as the opening line in a conversation. Start strong, and you're more likely to keep control. Start with a stumble, and you'll spend the rest of the rally playing catch-up—or worse, watching your serve hit the net.

To advance to the coveted 3.5+ skill level, you need a serve that's reliable, precise, and strategic. Here's how to make it happen:

## Focus on Consistency and Control

Take a look at the illustration below. Notice the serve going safely to the middle of the opponent's service court. That's not just for show—it's a smart play.



In pickleball, your serve should prioritize consistency and control over power. Sure, a blazing-fast serve *sounds* impressive, but if it doesn't land inbounds, it's just a gift to your opponent. Instead, focus on:

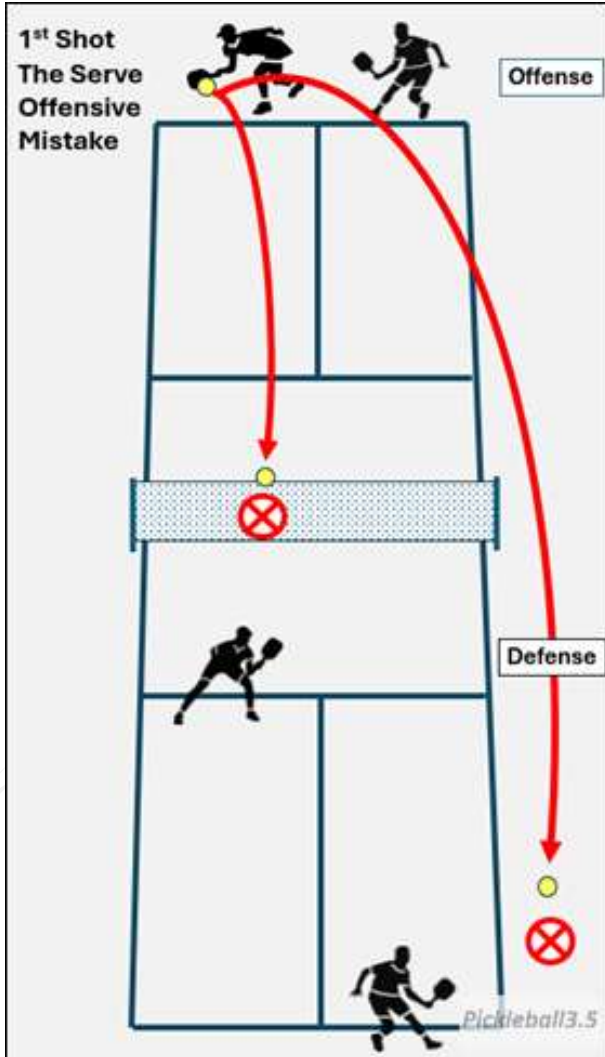
**Emphasizing Placement:** Aim for the middle of the opposing service court. Deep serves keep your opponent on their toes (literally) and buy you time to set up your next move.

**Practicing for Consistency:** If your serve feels like a roll of the dice, spend time on repetitive drills with a partner. Don't worry—every player has a phase where they feel like their serve is out to embarrass them. Stick with it, and you'll find your groove.

**Mastering the Basics:** Forget about spin tricks and lightning-fast serves for now. A simple, steady serve that lands deep in the opponent's court is far more effective. Fancy doesn't win games—consistent does.

# Common Serve Mistakes to Avoid

The serve isn't just about what you *should* do—it's also about what to avoid. Here are some classic pitfalls to sidestep:





Even experienced players can fall into these common pitfalls:

- **Chasing Quick Points:** Trying to win the rally with a flashy serve is tempting, but it's risky. Remember, the goal is to start the rally—not end it before it begins.
- **Overusing Power and Spin:** Sure, spinning the ball looks cool, but it's not worth the added errors if you haven't mastered the basics. Loft and depth are your best friends at this stage.
- **Ignoring Placement:** A deep, well-placed serve puts the ball in your court (pun intended). Make your opponent work for it by keeping them on the back foot.

## Advancing Your Serve

Once you've nailed consistency and control, it's time to level up:

- **Target Weaknesses:** If you notice your opponent struggles with backhands, aim for it. It's not mean—it's strategy.
- **Mix It Up:** Add spin, speed, or placement changes to keep your opponents guessing. But remember, even advanced serves should still be consistent.
- **Minimize Risk:** Missing serves at an advanced level is a no-go. Advanced techniques should only complement—not replace—a solid foundation.

---

### Summary: Consistency Wins Games

A consistent, controlled serve isn't just a checkbox for 3.5+ players—it's a must. Focus on getting the ball in play with precision, then build from there. Remember:

- **A missed serve is a missed opportunity.**

- **3.5+ players rarely miss serves.**
- **Even the best serves can be returned—so keep the rally going and minimize unnecessary risks.**

Keep practicing, keep refining, and keep reading posts in this section to master the pickleball serve. With consistency and control, you're well on your way to leveling up.

# -Pickleball Serve Options

Post #3 of 11 in All Serve Posts

---



In pickleball, the serve isn't just a formality—it's your first chance to make an impression, like a firm handshake but with more topspin. While some players try to intimidate with power, seasoned players know that a consistent, strategic serve is the key to success.

And guess what? You've got options.

-----  
*Read the rest of this post in the full eBook.*

*Visit [Pickleball35.com](https://Pickleball35.com) to purchase the complete eBook for \$9.99.*

# -Pickleball Serve Legality \*\*

Post #4 of 11 in All Serve Posts

---



## **Pickleball Serve Legality: Disputes, Drop Serves, and Staying Sane**

Ah, the pickleball serve legality dispute—a classic tale as old as the kitchen line. If you’re using the traditional volley serve, chances are you’ll eventually hear an opponent yell, “That serve isn’t legal!” And let’s be honest, they might not even be sure what the rules are—they just don’t like losing.

## Why Serve Legality Gets Tricky

The rules for the traditional volley serve are pretty specific:

1. Hit the ball **below the waist**.
2. Use an **upward motion**.
3. Keep the **paddle below your wrist** at contact.

These rules make perfect sense when you read them but can be hard to judge in real-time, especially from across the court. Is it legal? Is it not? Cue the drama.

# The Drop Serve: Your Dispute-Free Backup Plan

If you're not sure about the legality of your serve—or if someone challenges it mid-game—switch to the drop serve. Why? Because the drop serve is the Switzerland of pickleball serves: neutral, straightforward, and hard to argue with.

Here's why it works:

- No waist-level restrictions.
- No upward swing motion required.
- No wrist-angle drama.

You just drop the ball, let it bounce, and smack it. Easy peasy.

---

## How to Handle Serve Challenges Like a Pro

If someone questions your serve, take the high road:

1. **Stay Calm:** No need to channel your inner pickleball lawyer.

- 2. Acknowledge Their Concern:** A simple, “Thanks for pointing that out,” works wonders.
- 3. Switch to a Drop Serve:** “I believe my serve is legal, but I’ll switch to a drop serve to keep the game going.” This shows sportsmanship and avoids unnecessary drama.

Later, grab a partner and review your traditional serve to make sure it’s on point for future games.

## **Calling Out Opponents: To Do or Not To Do?**

If you’re on the other side of the net and think your opponent’s serve isn’t legal, proceed with caution:

- **Ask Yourself: Is it Obvious?** Unless their serve looks like it came from a tennis tournament, let it go.
- **Pick Your Timing:** Calling someone out mid-game can lead to awkward silences and “accidental” paddle bumps during changeovers. A better move? Mention it



privately after the game and suggest they check the rules.

## **Keep the Focus on Fun**

At the end of the day, pickleball is about having fun, not reenacting courtroom drama over a serve. Disputes are bound to happen, but handling them with grace keeps the game enjoyable for everyone.

So, whether you're sticking with the volley serve or switching to the drop serve, keep your focus on good sportsmanship. And remember: the only thing worse than an illegal serve is losing a friend over it.

# -Serving Under Pressure

Post #5 of 11 in All Serve Posts

---



---

Serving under pressure in pickleball is like trying to parallel park with a crowd watching—you know you can do it, but the moment feels *huge*. Whether it's game point, a tough opponent, or just a bad day, pressure has a way of messing with your serve.

-----

*Read the rest of this post in the full eBook.*

*Visit [Pickleball35.com](https://Pickleball35.com) to purchase the complete eBook for \$9.99.*

# -Pickleball Serve Positioning

Post #6 of 11 in All Serve Posts

---



In pickleball, maintaining good serve positioning might not be the flashiest part of the game, but it's absolutely essential. After all, the last thing you want is to be caught off guard by a rocket-fast return aimed straight at your feet.

---

*Read the rest of this post in the full eBook.*

*Visit [Pickleball35.com](https://Pickleball35.com) to purchase the complete eBook for \$9.99.*

# -Defensive Positioning \*\*

Post #7 of 11 in All Serve Posts

---

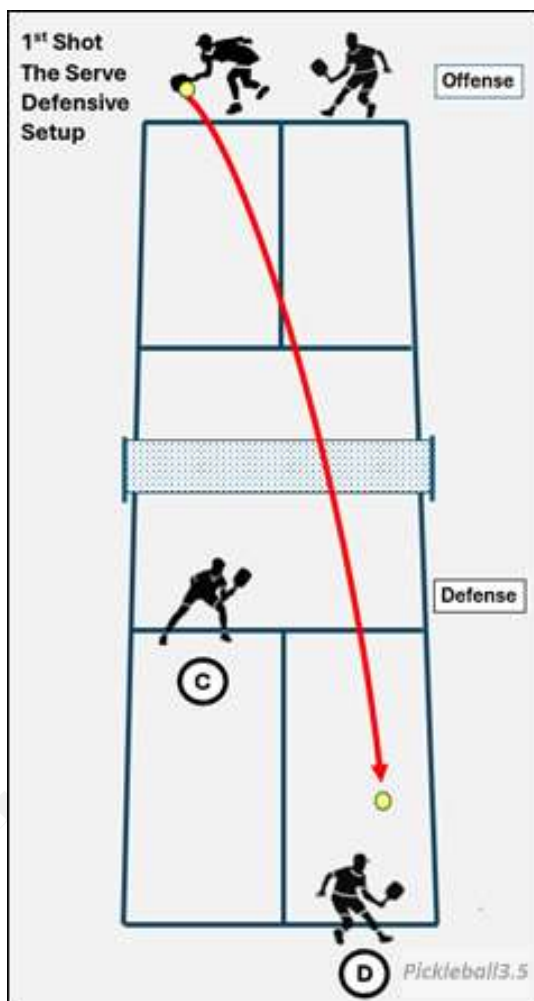


---

Defensive positioning in pickleball might not sound glamorous, but it's the key to staying ahead when the serve comes your way. With the right stance and placement, you can maximize your advantage as the receiving team—and avoid unnecessary scrambling.

## Serve Defense Starting Positions

Let's talk about where you should stand to keep your defensive advantage intact:



- **Player C:** Stand as close to the kitchen line as humanly possible without stepping in it. Bend your knees, widen your stance, and hold your paddle up like a shield, ready for

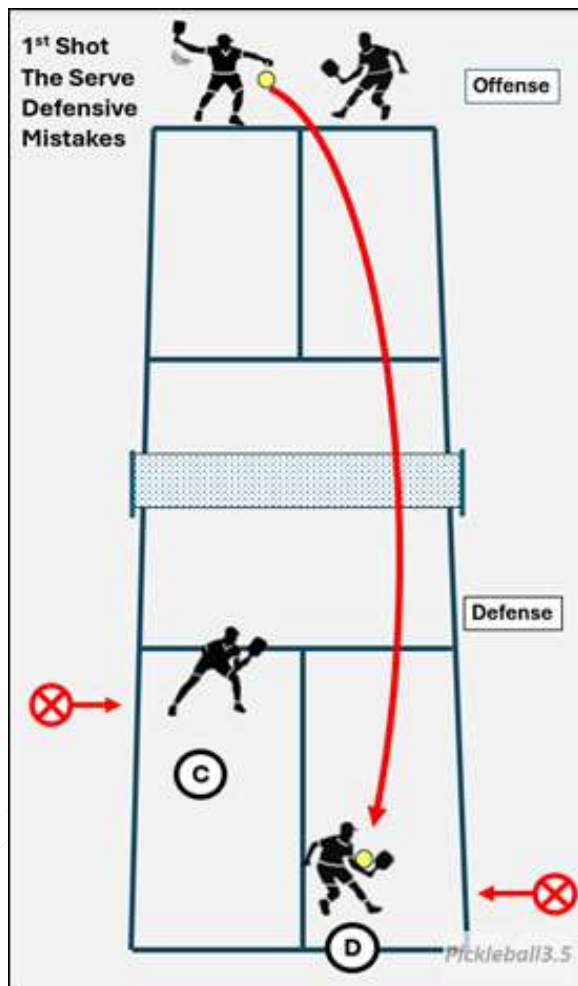
action. You're here to defend against the third shot—not watch it drop at your feet.

- **Player D:** Stay *behind* the baseline, not on it, and definitely not ahead of it. Remember, the serve has to bounce before you can hit it, and being too far forward makes it harder to handle deep serves.

**Pro Tip:** Right-handed players should favor the center line, while lefties drift toward the sideline. This positioning sets you up to handle serves aimed at your backhand.

# Defensive Positioning Mistakes

Now, let's look at some common blunders and how to avoid them:



## Mistake #1: Standing on the Baseline (Player D)

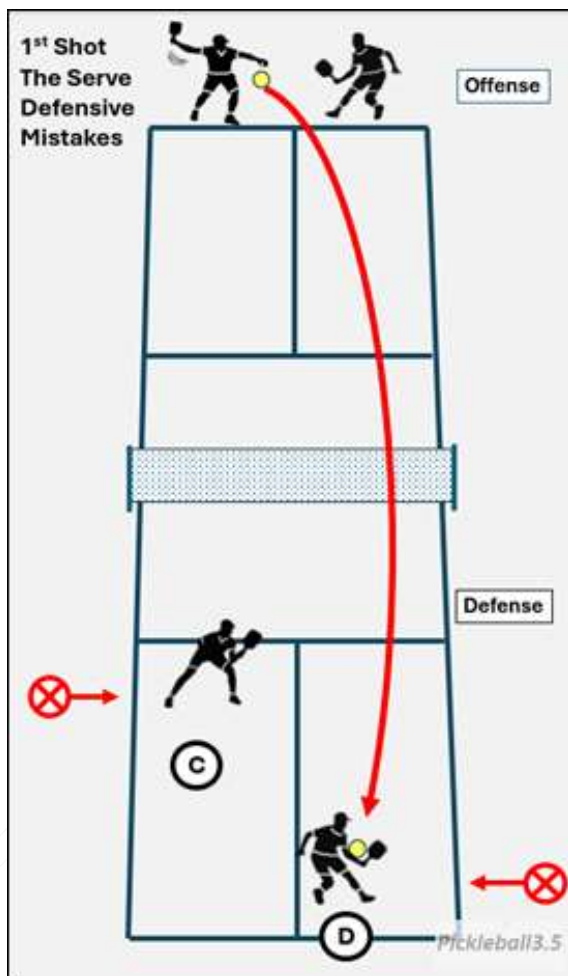
Being on or ahead of the baseline leaves you vulnerable to a fast, deep serve. Start behind the line—it's much easier to move forward than to

retreat. Plus, you'll have more time to react and set up for your return shot.





The illustration below shows the defensive player (**Player C**) back away from the kitchen line and out of position at the start of a point.



## **Mistake #2: Hanging Back from the Kitchen Line (Player C)**

If you're hanging out a foot or two behind the kitchen line, you're giving up prime real estate. You want to be at the line, ready to volley the

third shot back. Letting it bounce just gives your opponent an opening to take control.

**Pro Tip:** If you're nervous about being so close to the net, don't worry. Your reflexes are faster than you think. With practice, defending at the kitchen line becomes second nature—and it's crucial for shutting down the offense.

## **Summary: Defensive Positioning Rules to Live By**

1. **Player D:** Stay behind the baseline and be ready to return the serve after it bounces.
2. **Player C:** Own the kitchen line—don't give up an inch.
3. **Adjust as Needed:** Fine-tune your positioning based on your opponent's serve style.

Defensive positioning isn't just about avoiding mistakes; it's about staying in control and setting yourself up for success.

# -Pickleball Stacking

Post #8 of 11 in All Serve Posts

---



Stacking in pickleball might sound like something you'd do with pancakes, but it's actually an advanced doubles strategy that can take your game to the next level. By shifting positions at the start of a point, stacking ensures your strongest forehand is always in the middle of the court—because, let's face it, backhands are a little trickier (and who doesn't want to avoid them?).

---

*Read the rest of this post in the full eBook.*

Visit [Pickleball35.com](https://Pickleball35.com) to purchase the complete eBook for \$9.99.

# -Serve Stacking \*\*

Post #9 of 11 in All Serve Posts

---



Serve stacking in pickleball isn't just a fancy term—it's a game-changing strategy that helps you dominate doubles by putting your strongest forehand smack in the middle of the court. To be competitive at higher levels you need to use stacking.

## Why Use Serve Stacking in Pickleball?

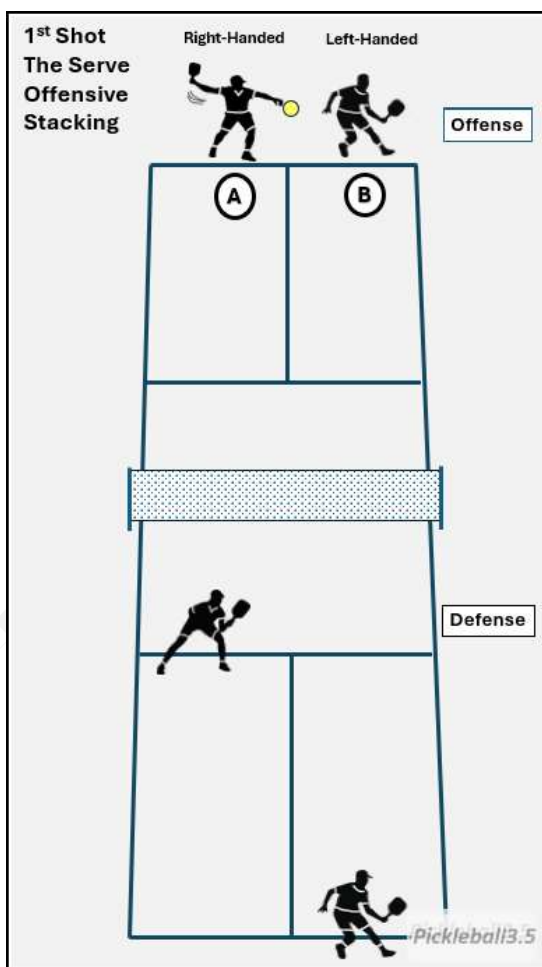
Without serve stacking, you're leaving your team vulnerable to opponents exploiting the center of the court, forcing backhand responses under pressure. Here's why serve stacking is worth mastering:

- **Play to Your Strengths:** Put your strongest player (or strongest forehand) in the best possible spot to handle the third shot.
- **Neutralize Returns:** A forehand in the middle makes it harder for opponents to exploit the center of the court.

This strategy works for all teams, whether you've got one righty and one lefty, or two players looking to maximize their offensive potential.

Imagine your team lined up without stacking with a right-handed server and left-handed partner. There is no forehand in the middle to play the third shot.

It's like giving your opponents a gift-wrapped opportunity.

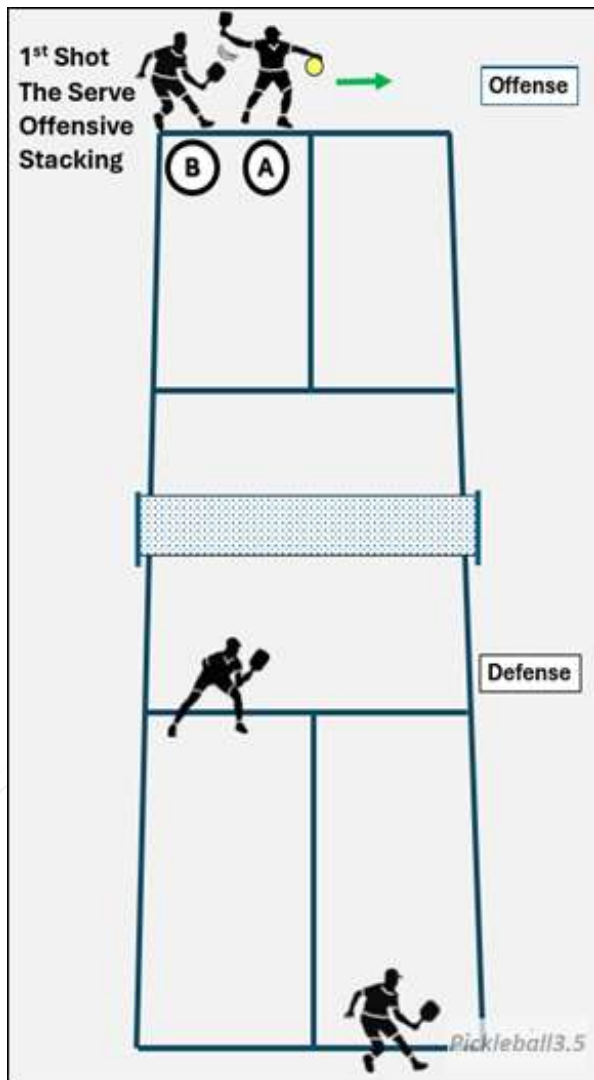


## **The Problem Without Serve Stacking**

Advanced players won't hesitate to take advantage, they will always hit the serve return up the middle in this scenario to force a backhand response.

# How to Stack Effectively on the Serve

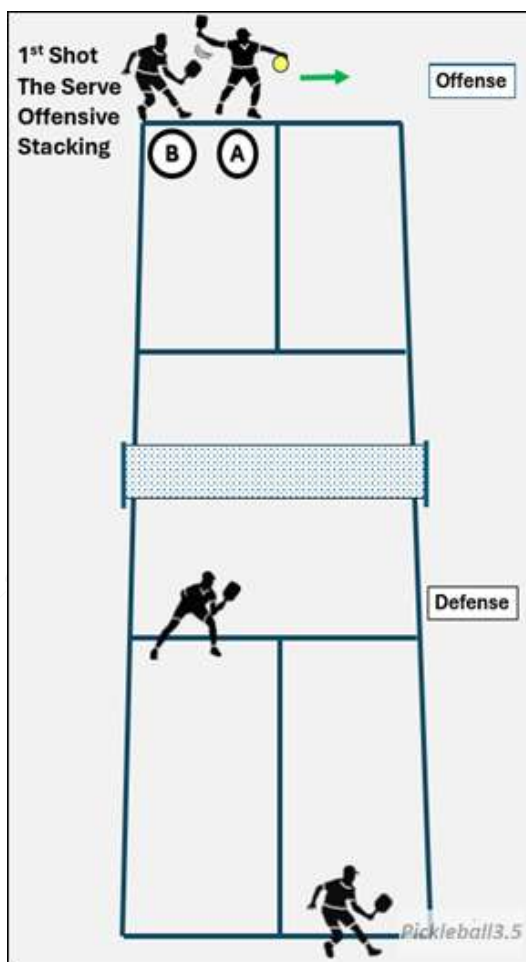
Serve stacking is all about adjusting your positions without losing track of the serve rotation. Here's how it works:





## Starting Positions:

- **Player A (Right-Handed):** Stands on their normal serving side.
- **Player B (Left-Handed):** Moves to the opposite side of the court, standing behind Player A.



## Movement After the Serve:

- **Player A:** Serves, then shifts to the opposite side of the court to take Player B's position.
- **Player B:** Moves forward to their designated spot, ensuring their forehand now dominates the middle.

## Stay on Top of Serve Rotation:

The serve order doesn't change, but keeping track of who's serving and which side is critical.

Practice this to avoid confusion—or, worse, penalties.

## Advantages of Serve Stacking

Here's what serve stacking does for your team:

- **Forehand Control:** Puts the forehand where it matters most—in the middle.
- **Stronger Returns:** Handles center-court shots with ease, minimizing weak backhand responses.
- **Perfect for Mixed-Handed Teams:** Maximizes the strengths of a righty-lefty duo.

# Challenges and Tips for Mastering Serve Stacking

Like any advanced strategy, serve stacking takes practice to get it right:

- **Communication is Key:** Talk to your partner and clarify roles to avoid mid-court collisions.
- **Practice in Low-Pressure Matches:** Recreational games are the perfect place to work out the kinks before trying it in tournaments.
- **Stay Sharp on Serve Rotation:** Missteps here can cost you points, and nobody wants to lose on a technicality.

## Summary: Serve Stacking for the Win

Serve stacking is more than just a positioning trick—it's a powerful strategy that can elevate your doubles game. By positioning your strongest forehand in the middle, you'll:

- Neutralize your opponents' returns.

- Dominate third-shot scenarios.
- Stay competitive, especially in mixed-handed partnerships.

Whether you're playing with a right-handed and left-handed partner or just looking to optimize your court coverage, serve stacking is a must for advancing to the 3.5+ level.

# -Defensive Stacking

Post #10 of 11 in All Serve Posts

---



---

Defensive stacking in pickleball might not sound as exciting as nailing an Erne, but trust me, it's just as crucial. This strategy positions a forehand in the center of the court, giving your team a solid defense against offensive third shots.

-----

*Read the rest of this post in the full eBook.*

*Visit [Pickleball35.com](https://Pickleball35.com) to purchase the complete eBook for \$9.99.*

# -Advanced Serves

Post #11 of 11 in All Serve Posts

---



If you're aiming for the 3.5 level (or beyond) in pickleball, having a solid serve strategy isn't optional—it's essential. Sure, your serve gets the ball in play, but why stop there? With a little finesse, it can also set you up for a killer third shot.

-----  
*Read the rest of this post in the full eBook.*

*Visit [Pickleball35.com](https://Pickleball35.com) to purchase the complete eBook for \$9.99.*



# Return of Serve

Pickleball Return of Serve shot  
strategy posts.

# -Return of Serve Tips \*\*

Post #1 of 9 in All Serve Return Posts

---



The pickleball return of serve isn't just a formality—it's the first big move in the dance of the rally. A thoughtful, well-placed return can flip the script, keeping your opponent scrambling and your partner grinning at the net.

This post covers the basics of returning a serve. Even if you've been playing for years, you might uncover a habit or detail that could use a little polishing. Let's dive in and make your return of serve a shot worth bragging about.



# The Basics of the Pickleball Return of Serve

A good return of serve does three things:

1. **Challenges Your Opponent:** Make them work for the point.
2. **Keeps Them Moving:** Control the court by dictating their position.
3. **Sets Up Your Partner:** Your teammate at the net will thank you for making their job easier.

**Key Tip:** Avoid trying to win the rally outright with your return. It's not about showing off; it's about setting up the next play. Missed returns are missed opportunities—and advanced players rarely waste those.

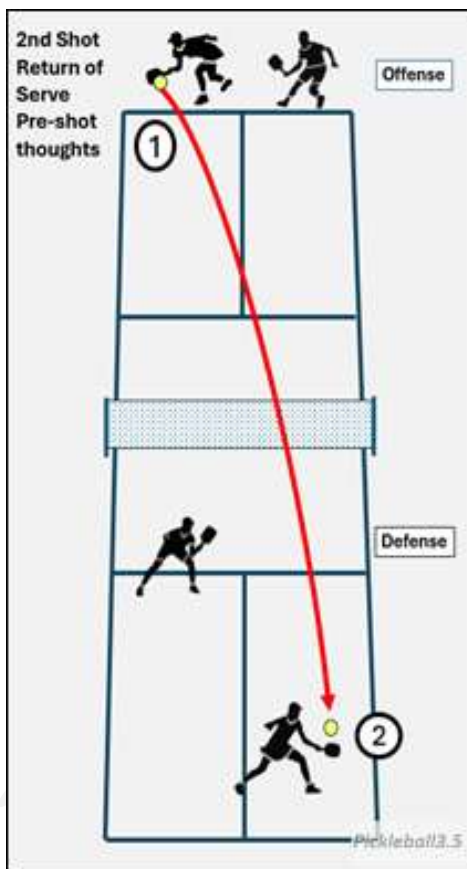
## How to Master the Return of Serve

### 1. Focus on the Ball

Think of the ball as your sole focus. From the moment it leaves the server's paddle, track it with unwavering attention.

**Stay sharp:** Avoid letting your mind wander or getting distracted, focus on the ball.

**Stay consistent:** Keeping your eyes on the ball and staying engaged will prepare you to handle any shot coming your way.



## 2. Use a Smooth, Controlled Swing

A panicked, rushed swing is a recipe for disaster. Instead:

- **Stay smooth:** A controlled swing lets you place the ball exactly where you want it.
- **Add loft and depth:** A deep return buys you time to advance to the kitchen line while pushing your opponent back.
- **Avoid aggression:** Risky, aggressive returns might look cool—until they land out of bounds.

**Pro Tip:** Advanced players focus on consistency over flash. A safe, effective return is always better than a missed one.

### Court Positioning for the Return of Serve

Where you stand and how you move matter just as much as your swing:

- **Start Behind the Baseline:** Give yourself space to react to deep serves. Moving forward is easier than retreating.

- **Anticipate the Serve:** Expect serves targeting your backhand and adjust your positioning accordingly.
    - Right-handers: Shift slightly toward the center line.
    - Left-handers: Position closer to the sideline.
  - **Use Your Forehand Whenever Possible:** It's usually more reliable and powerful than a backhand, so move your feet to set it up.
- 

## **Ready Position: Stay Alert and Agile**

Before the serve even happens:

- **Knees bent, feet ready:** A solid stance lets you move quickly in any direction.
- **Paddle up:** Keep your paddle at the ready, prepared for forehand or backhand returns.

## **Advance to the Kitchen Line**

Once you've nailed your return, it's time to hustle:

- **Join your partner at the net:** The kitchen line is where rallies are won or lost.
- **Strengthen your defense:** Your position here helps you counter your opponent's next shot.
- **Be a team player:** Your partner expects support—don't leave them hanging!

## **Summary: Make Your Return Count**

The pickleball return of serve might seem simple, but it's one of the most important shots in the game. It sets the tone for the rally and determines whether you'll maintain control or end up on defense.

Here's the recap:

- **Challenge your opponent:** Keep them on their toes with thoughtful placement.
- **Maintain consistency:** Avoid unnecessary risks and focus on depth.

- **Advance to the net:** Strengthen your defense and prepare to dominate.

Mastering the return of serve is a cornerstone of success in pickleball. Use these tips to refine your game and stay tuned for advanced strategies in the posts to come.

---

### **Video on simple thoughts for the Return of Serve**

Courtesy of The Art of Pickleball

[Watch this video on the Pickleball Return of Serve on Youtube.](#)

# -Serve Return Control \*\*

Post #2 of 9 in All Serve Return Posts

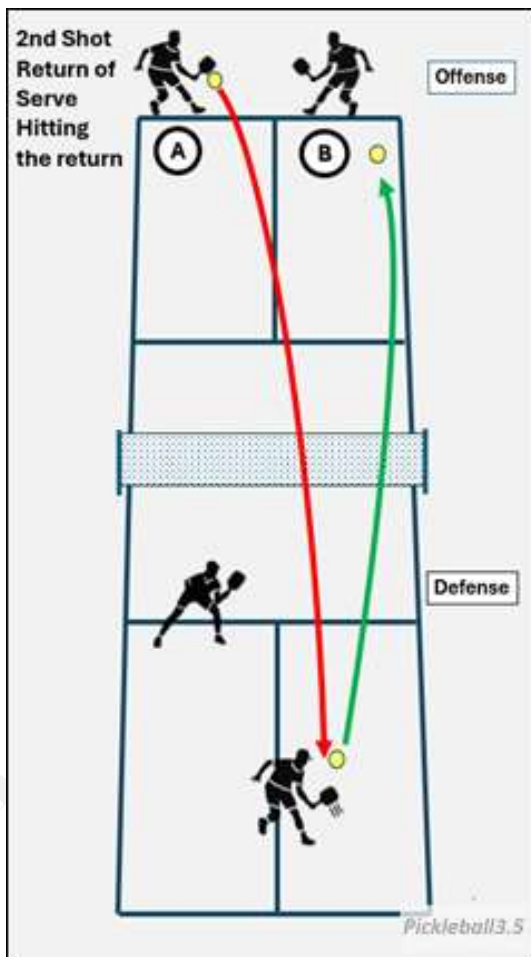
---



The serve return isn't just about getting the ball over the net—it's your chance to seize control of the point and set the tone for the rally. Whether you're facing a rocket-fast serve or a trickier placement, your return strategy can make all the difference in staying ahead of your opponents. You have the advantage on defense with your partner already at the net, don't give this up.

## Position Yourself for Success

Start a couple of feet behind the baseline—it's not about being cautious; it's about being smart.



## Why Stay Back?

- **Deep Serves Demand It:** Strong opponents will test your positioning with fast, deep



serves. Standing back lets you move forward instead of backpedaling awkwardly.

- **Balance is Key:** Backpedaling throws you off balance and makes for weaker returns.

**Pro Tip:** Adjust your stance as you learn your opponent's tendencies. Anticipating their serve gives you an edge.

---

## **Body Mechanics: Move with Purpose**

A great return isn't just about the paddle—it's a whole-body effort.

### **Use a Split Step**

- Just before the serve reaches you, take a small hop to stabilize your stance and prepare for quick movement.
- **Stay Still While Swinging:** Hitting on the move makes your shot less accurate. Keep your feet steady during the swing.
- 

## **Shift Your Weight Forward**

**Momentum Matters:** Returning the ball is one thing—getting into position for the next shot is just as important.

Lean into the ball as you hit it. This adds power and naturally moves you closer to the kitchen line.

## **Strategic Serve Returns**

Consistency trumps flash every time. Your return doesn't need to be flashy; it needs to be effective.

## **Aim for the Middle**

- Forcing your opponents to communicate is pickleball's version of playing mind games. The middle return often causes hesitation and weak shots.
- **Force the Backhand:** The middle of the court is your best chance to push your opponent into an uncomfortable backhand return.

## **Add Depth and Loft**

- A deep, lofted return buys you time to advance to the net while pushing your opponents onto their heels.
  - **Avoid Over-Aggression:** Missing a return isn't just embarrassing—it's handing your opponent the point. Play it safe when in doubt.
- 

## **Advance to the Kitchen Line**

The return is just the beginning—getting to the kitchen line is where the real work begins.

- **Move Up Quickly:** The kitchen line is the battleground where most points are won. Don't linger at the baseline.
- **Set Up for Success:** A well-placed return gives you the time and space to get to the net confidently.

**Pro Tip:** A rally at the kitchen line favors the team with better positioning. Don't give your opponents the upper hand by staying back, get to the net.

## Summary: Master the Serve Return

An effective serve return isn't just a defensive move—it's a chance to control the rally and set the tone for the point.

Here's what to focus on:

1. **Positioning:** Start behind the baseline for better balance and control.
2. **Body Mechanics:** Use a split step and shift your weight forward to add power.
3. **Strategy:** Aim for the middle, add loft, and focus on depth over risk.
4. **Advance Aggressively:** Get to the kitchen line to dominate the rally.

Mastering this fundamental shot will help you stay in control, keep your opponents on their toes, and advance your game to the next level.

---

 **Short Video on Hitting the Return Shot**

Video courtesy of “The Art of Pickleball”

[Watch this video on the split step on Youtube.](#)

 **Short Video Showing the Split Step**

Video courtesy of “Pickleball Minute”

[Watch this video on the split step on Youtube.](#)

# -Advance to the Kitchen

Post #3 of 9 in All Serve Return Posts

---



In pickleball, getting to the kitchen isn't just important—it's essential. Your partner is already at the line, holding down the fort, and it's your job to join them as quickly as possible. Staying back is like waving a white flag to your opponents, handing them the advantage.

---

*Read the rest of this post in the full eBook.*

*Visit [Pickleball35.com](https://Pickleball35.com) to purchase the complete eBook for \$9.99.*

## -Serve Return Freeze \*\*

Post #4 of 9 in All Serve Return Posts

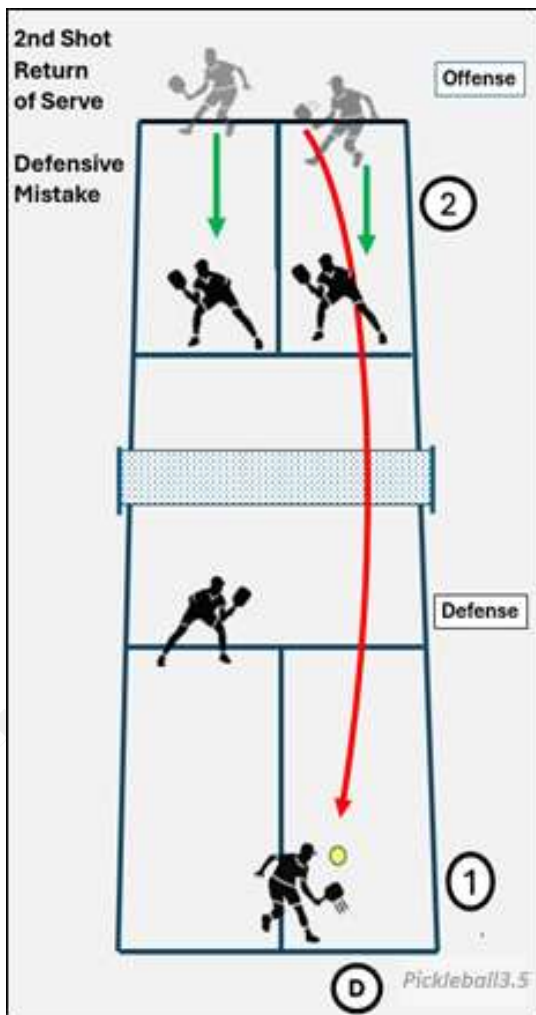
---



In pickleball, staying back after your serve return is a rookie mistake. Your partner is already holding down the kitchen line, and it's your job to join them—fast! The team at the net controls the point, and if you hesitate, your opponents will take full advantage.

## Don't Freeze – Hit and Go!

Your serve return isn't just about getting the ball over the net—it's about setting yourself up to control the rally.



In this illustration...

**1 – You Froze and Failed to Advance**



- The serve is deep, and Player D hesitates after the return, thinking they're too far back to make it to the kitchen.
- Even though they hit a decent return, their lack of confidence lets the opposing team dictate the point.

## **2 – Your Opponents Take the Advantage**

- Spotting the hesitation, your opponents drive the third shot hard and deep.
- They advance to the kitchen line, leaving you stuck and scrambling to defend.

**Lesson:** If you don't advance, you're giving away the point.

## How to Avoid Freezing

Here's the golden rule: Let your momentum carry you forward as you hit your return.

- **Mental Cue:** Think, “Hit it and go.” Don’t overanalyze—just move.
  - **Know the Rules:** Remember, your opponent can’t hit the third shot until it bounces, so you have time to get to the kitchen.
- 

## When Staying Back is the Exception

While advancing is almost always the right move, there are moments when staying back is your best bet:

### If Your Return is Short

- A short return invites your opponent to drive the ball aggressively.
- **Defensive Play:** Hold your ground, get low, and prepare to block or return the shot.

**Key Tip:** Staying back should only happen when absolutely necessary. Focus on hitting deep, lofted

returns that give you the time to advance confidently.

---

## **Summary: Hit It and Go!**

Advancing to the kitchen line is non-negotiable if you want to dominate in pickleball.

Here's what to remember:

1. **Make It a Habit:** A deep, lofted return gives you time to move up.
2. **Use Your Momentum:** Follow through naturally to get to the kitchen quickly.
3. **Be Smart:** Stay back only if your return is short and your opponent is driving a shot at you before you get to the kitchen.

Control the kitchen, control the game. The next time you're on the court, remember: "Hit it and go!"

# -Handling Spin Serves

Post #5 of 9 in All Serve Return Posts

---



When you're new to pickleball, facing spin-heavy serves can feel like stepping into a physics class you didn't sign up for.

From topspin serves that leap off the court to sidespin shots that curve like they're dodging traffic, spin serves can make you feel like you're playing against a magician with a paddle.

-----  
*Read the rest of this post in the full eBook.*

*Visit [Pickleball35.com](https://Pickleball35.com) to purchase the complete eBook for \$9.99.*

# -Consistent Serve Returns

Post #6 of 9 in All Serve Return Posts

---



As your pickleball skills develop, the temptation to show off with flashy return shots is real. Maybe you're eyeing that powerful topspin return or picturing yourself nailing a sharp-angle shot. But let's pause for a reality check: serve return consistency is king.

---

*Read the rest of this post in the full eBook.*

*Visit [Pickleball35.com](https://Pickleball35.com) to purchase the complete eBook for \$9.99.*

# -Serve Return Targeting \*\*

Post #7 of 9 in All Serve Return Posts

---



As you progress toward the 3.5 skill level and beyond, it's time to level up your serve return strategy. Sure, getting the ball in play is always important, but now it's about placing your returns with surgical precision to disrupt your opponent's third shot.

The secret weapon? **Target their backhand.** Most players treat their backhand like an old treadmill—functional but neglected. By forcing your opponent to use it, you create weaker responses and keep them on the defensive.

## Awareness and Control

Your first step is to know your opponent. Before the serve, do a quick inventory of where your opponent's backhands are.

- **Right-handed players:** Aim slightly left of center to force backhand responses.
- **Left-handed players:** Reverse it—slightly right of center.
- **Mixed pair:** If you have 2 backhands in the middle, always aim for that sweet spot.

Good players are quick and will always try to come around your return shot aimed at their backhand to use their forehand. Even if they try to dance around the ball to use their forehand, that

extra movement adds complexity to their shot  
(and often errors).

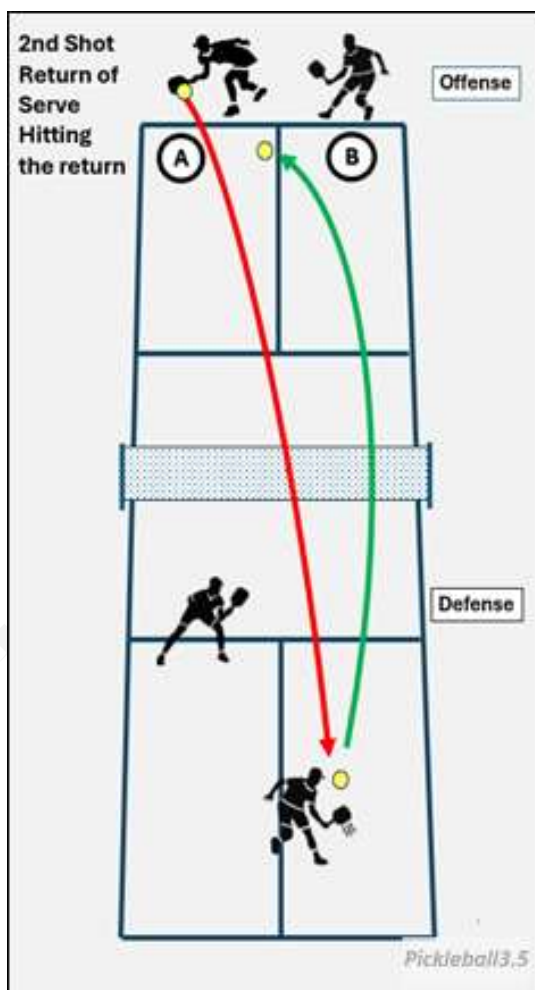




# Serve Return Strategies for Common Scenarios

## Two Right-Handed Opponents

When both players are right-handed, your job is simple:



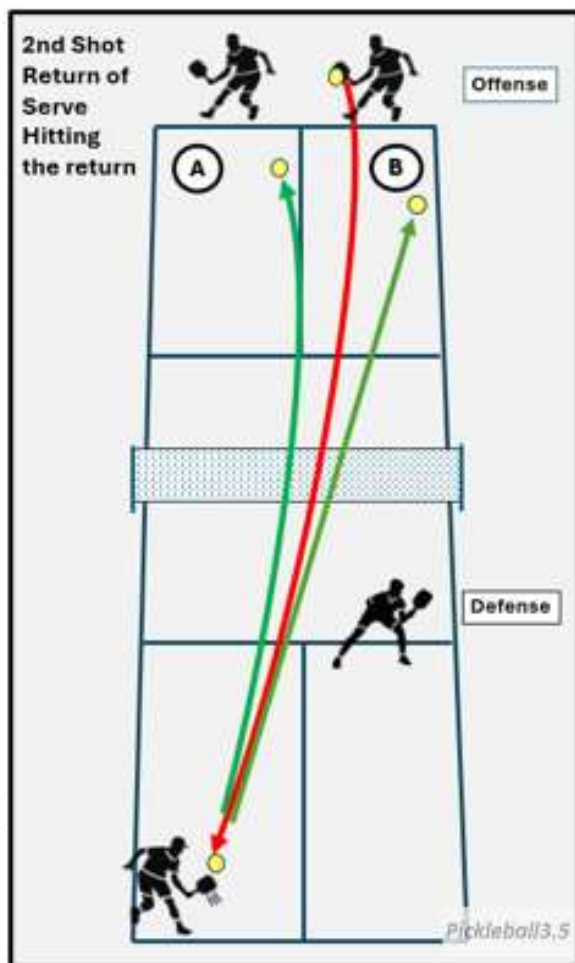
**Primary Target:** Aim slightly left of center toward the server (Player A).

**Why it works:** This forces Player A to use their weaker backhand, creating a less effective third shot.

**Ideal Outcome:** While Player B could step in to take the return with their forehand, often Player A attempts the backhand, which is exactly what you want.

## On the Flip Side: Player B Is Serving

When Player B is the server, the strategy remains consistent but flips:



**Primary Target:** Aim slightly left of center, again toward Player A.

**Why it works:** This placement often entices Player A to respond with their backhand, giving you the upper hand.

**Alternate Play:** You can also target Player B's backhand directly, but this is a riskier shot as it involves hitting cross-court toward the sideline. Save this for situations where you've practiced it extensively.

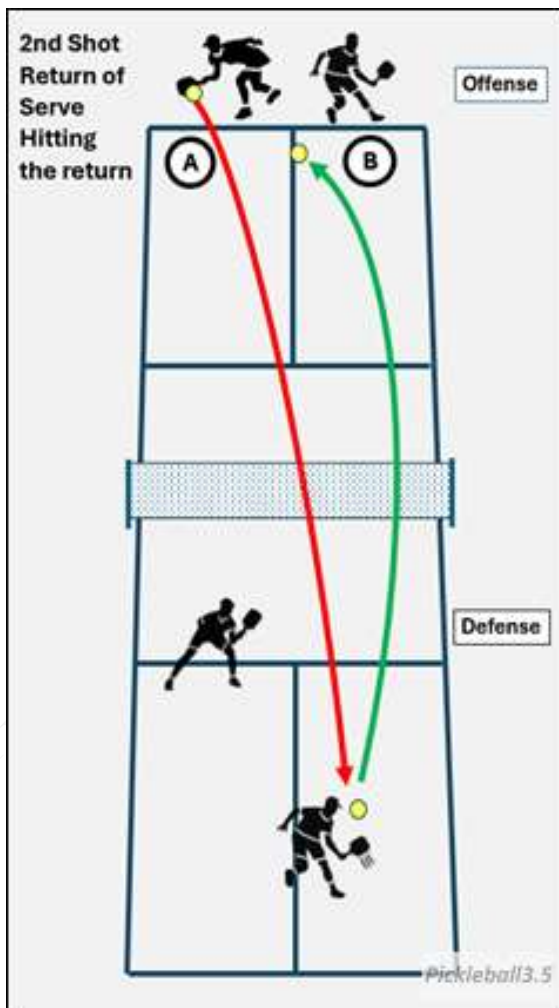
## **Two Left-Handed Opponents**

For two left-handed players, simply mirror the right-handed strategy:

**Primary Target:** Aim slightly right of center to force the backhand response from Player A or Player B.

## Right-Handed and Left-Handed Opponents (The Mix)

When opponents are mixed-handed, this is where things get interesting:



**Golden Opportunity:** Many mixed pairs don't use stacking, leaving two backhands in the middle.

**Primary Target:** Return the serve up the middle to exploit this gap.

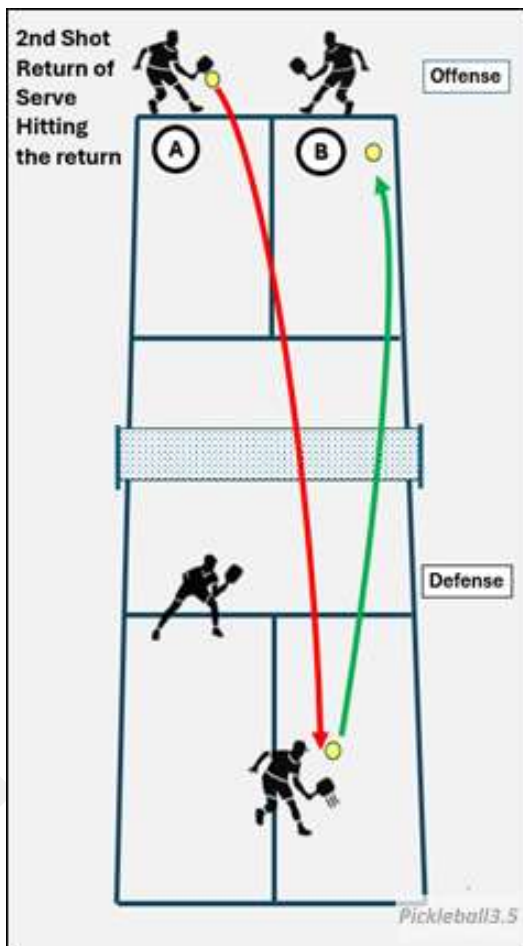
**Why it works:** Without a forehand in the center, your opponents will struggle to use a forehand and you will likely get a backhand return.

This is what you want.

To advance in pickleball, seeing two backhands in the middle is a scenario you should always take advantage of.

## Left-Handed Server, Right-Handed Partner

If the server (Player A) is left-handed and their partner (Player B) is right-handed:



## Target the Backhand of the Player in Front of You (Player B):

- Aim your return at Player B's backhand if they are directly across from you.

- **Why it works:** A well-placed shot to Player B's backhand makes it harder for them to execute an effective third shot.

### **Avoid Returning Up the Middle:**

- If you return up the middle, both players have the opportunity to use their forehands.
- **Why it matters:** With two forehands in the middle, your return may set up an easy third shot for your opponents.

### **Consider Risk and Reward:**

- This return placement has some risk, as aiming toward Player B's backhand requires precision to avoid the sidelines.
- **When to use it:** As you advance in your skill level, this shot becomes more straightforward and should be added to your toolkit.

### **Even a Straight Return Has Value:**

Even a solid straight return to Player B still works. This can lead to your opponent awkwardly



adjusting to use their forehand, adding complexity to their shot.

## **Risk vs. Reward in Serve Return Placement**

While targeting backhands is an excellent strategy, don't forget the golden rule: a missed return is a gift to your opponent. Even the fanciest placement won't matter if your shot sails out or into the net.

### **Tips to Stay Consistent:**

- **Prioritize Depth:** Deep returns push opponents back and give you time to approach the kitchen line.
- **Play It Safe When Needed:** In tight games or when feeling unsure, aim for deep, in-play returns rather than risky sideline shots.
- **Practice Cross-Court Shots:** If targeting a server's backhand across the court, spend time practicing the shot before using it in games.

## **Summary: Strategically Target the Backhand**

Strategically placing your serve returns is a hallmark of advanced pickleball play. By focusing on targeting your opponents' backhand, you'll disrupt their third shot, force weaker responses, and stay in control of the rally.

Whether you're aiming slightly off-center, exploiting backhands in the middle, or practicing riskier cross-court shots, the goal is always the same: make their third shot as difficult as possible. Remember, consistency wins games—so target wisely, stay focused, and elevate your game to the next level.

# -Serve Return Spin

Post #8 of 9 in All Serve Return Posts

---



As you advance in pickleball, adding spin to your serve return can give you a big advantage. Spin challenges your opponent by complicating their third shot, forcing them to make adjustments that often lead to mistakes. Mastering spin gives you control over the pace and trajectory of the rally, setting you up for success.

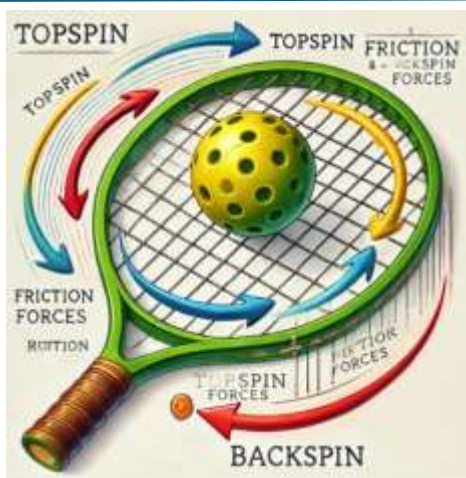
-----  
*Read the rest of this post in the full eBook.*

*Visit [Pickleball35.com](https://Pickleball35.com) to purchase the complete eBook for \$9.99.*

# -Spin Physics

## Post #9 of 9 in All Serve Return Posts

---



Have you ever hit a return of serve that unexpectedly flew higher than a kite and out of bounds—or barely scraped the net on its way to nowhere? The culprit might not be your technique but the sneaky spin your opponent added to the ball. Spin in pickleball is like the plot twist in a mystery novel: always lurking, often surprising, and guaranteed to catch you off guard if you're not paying attention.

-----  
*Read the rest of this post in the full eBook.*

*Visit [Pickleball35.com](https://Pickleball35.com) to purchase the complete eBook for \$9.99.*

# The Third Shot

Pickleball third shot strategy posts.

# -Third Shot Options \*\*

Post #1 of 22 in All Third Shot Posts

---



---

To reach the 3.5+ level in pickleball, you'll need to master the art of the third shot. This pivotal play determines whether you can level the playing field against opponents already at the kitchen line.

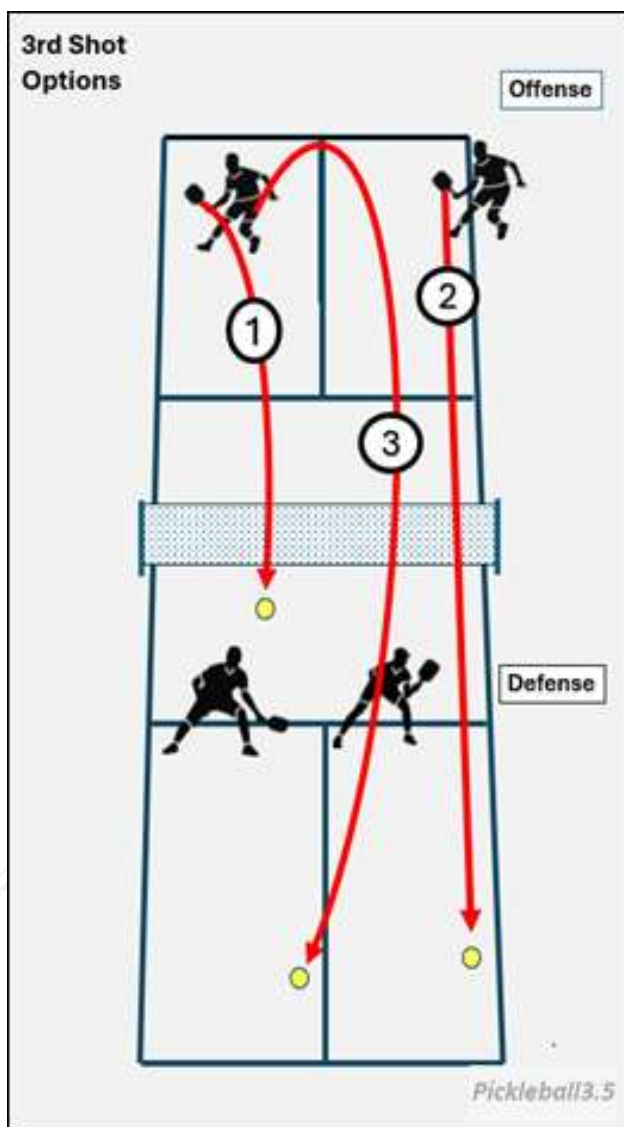
The three primary options for the third shot are:

1. **Drop Shot**

2. **Drive**

3. **Lob**

These choices aren't just about variety—they're about knowing the right tool for the right situation and executing it with precision.





## Why the Third Shot Matters

The third shot in pickleball is the first shot that isn't constrained by placement rules. The Serve has to be hit a certain way and land in the service court. On the return of serve, only one player can play the shot after they let it bounce. The third shot starts the action. After the ball bounces, either player can play the shot. This shot dictates how the rest of the point will play out and it gives the offense an opportunity to attack and set the tone.

A well-executed third shot is your ticket out of the transition zone and into an advantageous position at the net. It's your chance to even the odds against opponents who already dominate the kitchen. Without consistent control, sharp execution, and strategic decision-making, you'll struggle to beat stronger players.

Most players evolve their third-shot game over time:

- They **start with the drive**, keeping it simple.
- Eventually, they **experiment with lobs**, adding a bit of flair.

- Finally, they **learn the drop shot**, the cornerstone of advanced play.

This progression is critical to advancing your skills—and your rating. Check out the next post on Third Shot Player Progression to learn more about how this evolves.

---

## **Third Shot Options**

### **1 – Drop Shot**

The drop shot is the surgeon’s scalpel of pickleball—precise, soft, and devastating when executed correctly. It’s a gentle shot that just clears the net and lands near your opponent in their kitchen zone.

#### **Why It Works:**

- Forces opponents to hit up, limiting their ability to attack.
- Neutralizes their net advantage, giving you time to advance.
- Often causes errors like pop-ups or net shots.

**Pro Tip:** A great drop shot is like a whispered secret—it's quiet, subtle, and leaves your opponent scrambling to figure out their next move.

## 2 – Drive

The drive is a fast, flat shot that says, “Let’s see you handle this!” It’s a great option when you see an opening or want to pressure your opponent into a mistake.

### Why It Works:

- Forces quick reactions and errors, especially if aimed at their body.
- Keeps your opponents on their toes and unable to settle at the net.

**Pro Tip:** Think of the drive as the fastball of pickleball—straight, powerful, and intimidating when placed well. Just don’t get carried away and send it sailing out of bounds.

### 3 – Lob

The lob shot is your surprise card, a high, arching stroke that forces your opponent to retreat from the net. It's particularly effective against players who aren't very mobile or lack good overhead skills.

#### **Why It Works:**

- Pushes your opponents back, giving you time to reposition.
- Forces them into awkward angles for an overhead smash.

**Pro Tip:** A good lob is like a Hail Mary in football—it's risky but spectacular when it lands. Use it wisely, and don't give your opponents too many opportunities to smash it back at you.

#### **Progress Through Practice**

The third shot is a skill that grows with time and experience. Most players naturally start with the drive, dabble in lobs, and eventually embrace the drop shot. Mastering all three options is essential to advancing your game, especially as you move

into higher skill levels where variety and consistency are non-negotiable.



# -Drive, Lob, or Drop?

Post #2 of 22 in All Third Shot Posts

---



If you've ever felt like the third shot in pickleball is a mysterious rite of passage, you're not alone. Many players stumble their way through the progression, discovering what works (and what *really doesn't*) through trial, error, and maybe a few smashed lobs.

---

*Read the rest of this post in the full eBook.*

*Visit [Pickleball35.com](https://Pickleball35.com) to purchase the complete eBook for \$9.99.*

# -Third Shot Communication \*\*

Post #3 of 22 in All Third Shot Posts

---



---

Ever hesitated on the third shot, unsure if you or your partner should take it? You're not alone.

When I started playing pickleball, this was one of the most awkward situations in a point for me, and I quickly learned there were two common approaches for handling the third shot:

## **1. Forehand in the Middle**

This approach suggests that the player whose forehand is positioned in the middle should take the shot, even if it requires moving slightly in front of their partner. The rationale is that

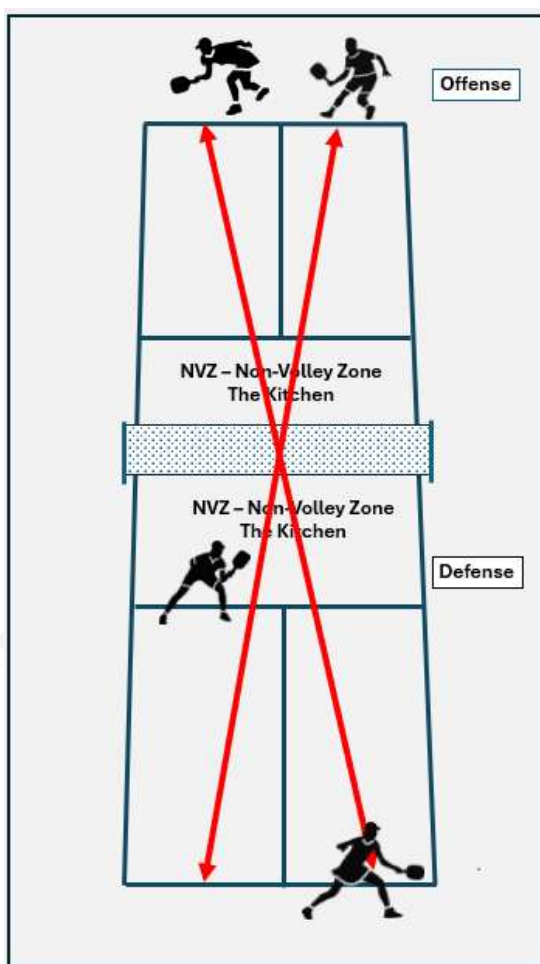
forehand shots are generally stronger and more controllable than backhands.





## 2. Respect the X

This strategy involves an imaginary “X” on the court, connecting diagonal players. Respecting the X means that the player on the ball’s natural trajectory should take the shot, even if it requires a backhand.



Both strategies have their merits and potential drawbacks.

Forehand in the Middle can lead to players overextending or lunging, leaving their part of the court exposed.

Conversely, Respect the X emphasizes court positioning and coverage but may require more backhand shots.

Regardless of the approach, communication is key.

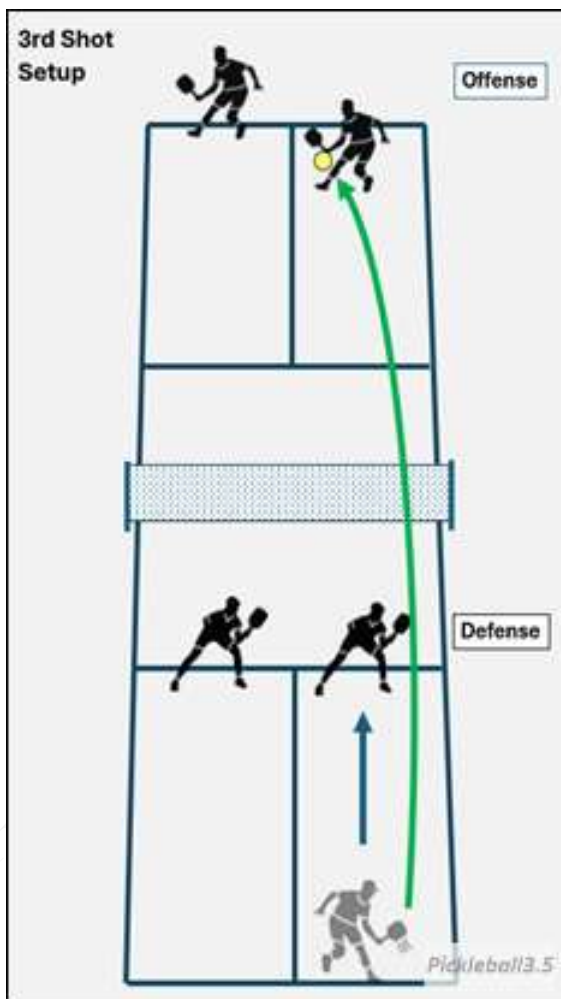
## Why Communication in Pickleball Matters

At times, I hesitated because the ball was angling toward my partner. They'd take a backhand shot, then say, "That was your shot," especially if they missed. Other times, both of us would move toward the ball, then back off at the last second. We'd either bang paddles, swing late, or, worst of all, let the ball drop between us.

I quickly noticed many players avoid communication, relying on either the forehand rule or Respect the X, hoping for the best rather than ensuring clarity.

As I played more, I made a decision: communication would be part of my game, and I would always use it on the third shot.

The illustration below shows a return of serve and the serve returner advancing to the kitchen line to join their partner.



## The Third Shot: A Pivotal Moment

The third shot is where communication can make or break a rally. It's the first shot where either player can step in, making clear calls is essential

to executing a winning strategy and avoiding confusion.

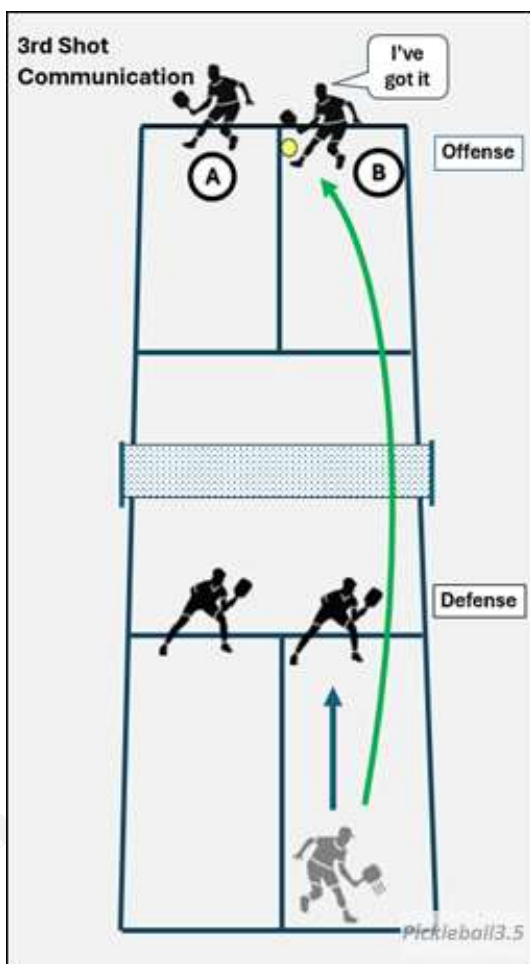
A poorly communicated third shot leads to easy points for the opponents.

A well-executed third shot can at least level the playing field by helping you reach the net—or better yet, put pressure on the defense, forcing an error.

## Who Should Take the Third Shot?

Unlike the serve or return, the third shot isn't automatically assigned to one player. Deciding who takes it is critical to avoid hesitation and missed opportunities.

The illustration below shows a player communicating to their partner that they have it and will hit the third shot.



## General Rule:

The player with their forehand in the middle should take the lead in calling the shot, not necessarily taking it. If you Respect the X,

communication is still needed since the X isn't always clear.

If the forehand player can take it, they should confidently call "I've got it!" and hit the shot.

If they can't reach it, they should quickly call "You take it!" or "You go!" to ensure their partner is ready.

Righty-lefty pairs with forehands in the middle should decide beforehand who will call the shot.

If your partner isn't communicating, step in and do it for them. Some players lack confidence or assume it's unnecessary.

If they aren't calling the shot, help establish the habit by saying "You go!", even when it's obvious. Likewise, if they don't signal for you to take the shot, step in with "I've got it!" to make it clear.

Without clear calls, players hesitate, both go for the shot, or, worse, both assume the other will take it, leading to an awkward or late shot.



Consistent communication is a key pickleball habit and should almost always happen on the third shot.

## **The Ripple Effect of Third Shot Communication**

When players communicate on the third shot, it carries over to other areas, calling lobs, poaches, or dinks. The more consistent the communication, the stronger the team.

### **Final Thought**

Good third-shot communication lays the foundation for strong teamwork throughout every rally. Clear, decisive calls keep both players on the same page and one step ahead of opponents.

At the 3.5+ level, strong players aren't just technically sound, they communicate effectively. Calling shots confidently keeps both partners in sync and reduces errors.

# -Stepping In with Your Forehand

Post #4 of 22 in All Third Shot Posts

---



In pickleball, the third shot often dictates the flow of the rally. If a return is placed toward the server's backhand, it can create an opportunity for their partner to step in and take the shot with a forehand. This play can neutralize the opponent's strategy and set up your team for success—if executed with clear communication and teamwork.

---

*Read the rest of this post in the full eBook.*

*Visit [Pickleball35.com](https://Pickleball35.com) to purchase the complete eBook for \$9.99.*

[Pickleball35.com](https://Pickleball35.com)

[Back to Table of Contents](#)

Protected Content – Not for Resale or Redistribution © 2025 by Payton Bond

# -Pickleball Lob Shot

Post #5 of 22 in All Third Shot Posts

---



---

The pickleball lob shot is a high, arching shot designed to clear your opponent's head and land near the baseline. When executed well, it forces your opponents into a difficult position:

- They may attempt an overhead smash from an awkward angle.
- They might let the ball bounce and scramble to return it.

-----

*Read the rest of this post in the full eBook.*

*Visit [Pickleball35.com](https://Pickleball35.com) to purchase the complete eBook for \$9.99.*

# -Third Shot Drive \*\*

Post #6 of 22 in All Third Shot Posts

---

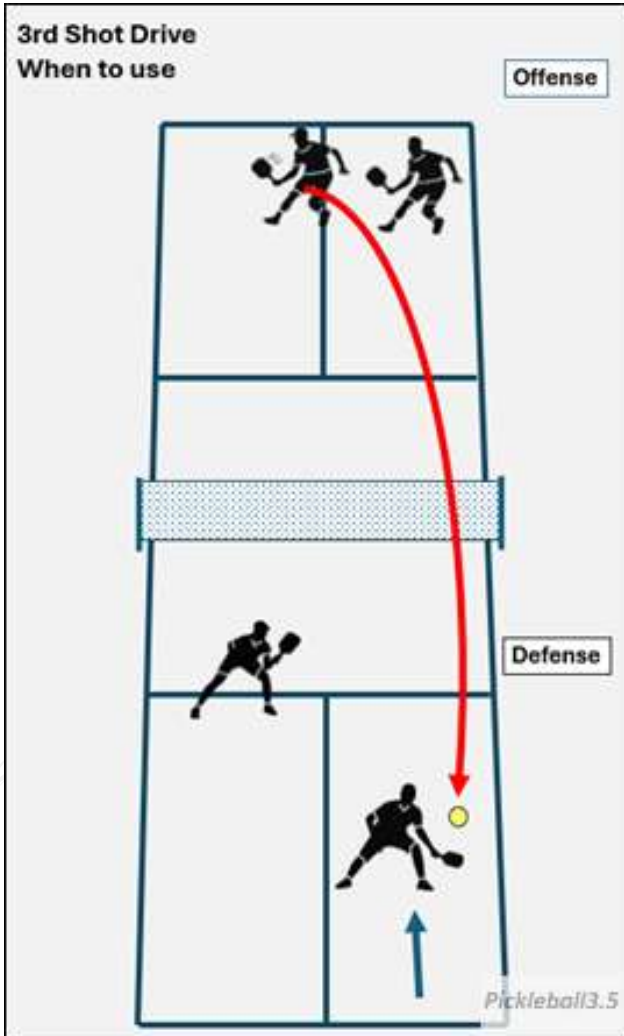


In pickleball, the third shot is the rally's turning point—it determines whether you'll seize control or remain on the defensive. Among the third shot options, the **pickleball third shot drive** is a powerful tool when used strategically.

For players striving to reach the 3.5+ skill level, understanding when and how to execute this shot isn't just important—it's essential. But remember, it's not about blindly smashing the ball; it's about recognizing the right moments to unleash the drive and using it to your advantage.

# Best Time to Use the Third Shot Drive

The illustration below shows a third shot drive used on a short return of serve to keep the server returner back.



The third shot drive is most effective in these scenarios:

## 1. Short Return of Serve

When your opponent's return of serve is short, you almost always want to drive the ball. Not taking advantage of this situation is like forgetting your umbrella on a rainy day—an avoidable mistake.

Here's why:

- **Opponent Movement:** After returning the serve, your opponent is likely still moving toward the kitchen line. If their return is short, it's often because they hit from deep in the court after a strong serve. Driving the ball keeps them back and disrupts their momentum.
- **Force a Mistake:** A fast, low drive at their feet is hard to handle, especially when they're on the move. Expect a pop-up or an error.

- **Take Control:** A strong drive can push your opponent into a defensive position, giving you the opportunity to advance to the net and take control of the rally.

## 2. Your Opponent Doesn't Advance

If the returner hesitates or fails to move forward after their return, that's your cue to drive the ball. This often happens when they're caught deep after a strong serve. A well-placed drive will keep them stuck at the baseline, making it easier for you to move in and dominate the point.

## Additional Situations for the Third Shot Drive

While a short return is the prime opportunity, there are other situations where a drive is a smart play:

### 1. Driving Against Opponents at the Kitchen Line

Even if both opponents have reached the kitchen, a drive can still be effective:

- **Mixing It Up:** Alternate between drives and drops to keep your opponents guessing.

- **Exploiting Openings:** Aim for the sideline, an open spot, or drive up the middle to create confusion. Watching opponents clash paddles over a middle drive is always satisfying.
- **Exploiting Weakness:** If you notice one opponent isn't handling your drives very well and dropping them into the net or popping them up, drive more at them. You are taking advantage of a weakness, but this will only make them better at handling drives.
- **Be Ready to Defend:** Anticipate a volley or block and be prepared to respond.

## 2. Shake & Bake

If you hit a strong, low drive just clearing the net (the Shake) and you and your partner move in looking for a put away (the Bake) off a popped-up response, this is the [Shake & Bake](#) play. It's a power play and you and your partner should be on the same page when executing this.

## How to Execute a Third Shot Drive



Executing a third shot drive effectively requires precision and awareness:

1. **Hit Low and Fast:** Keep the ball on a flat trajectory just over the net, targeting your opponents' feet if they are back.
2. **Capitalize on Momentum:** Opponents moving forward are more likely to mishit or send the ball out.
3. **Advance When Possible:** If your drive puts them on the defensive, use it as an opportunity to move to the net and take control.

## Summary

To advance your pickleball game to the 3.5+ level, mastering the third shot drive is non-negotiable. Here's what to remember:

- **Prime Opportunity:** Use the drive on a short return of serve, targeting your opponent's feet as they move toward the kitchen.
- **Recognize Mistakes:** Capitalize when opponents freeze or fail to advance.
- **Stay Versatile:** Mix in third shot drops to keep opponents off balance.
- **Move In:** Follow up a good drive by advancing to the net, and look for Shake & Bake opportunities when you force a weak return.

***Pro Tip:** While the third shot drive is a fantastic tool, as you progress, the third shot drop will become your go-to shot against skilled opponents who can handle drives with ease.*

*With practice, you'll develop the ability to read the court and know when the third shot drive is*

*the right choice. So, next time you see a short return, don't hesitate—drive it like you mean it!*

---

## **Video on the Pickleball Drive Shot**

**Courtesy of Ben Johns and Lifetime Pickleball**

[Watch this video on the Pickleball Drive Shot on Youtube.](#)

# -Overhead Smash Tips

Post #7 of 22 in All Third Shot Posts

---



---

The overhead smash is one of the most decisive shots in pickleball. When your opponent lobs the ball or pops it up high, they're handing you the perfect opportunity to take control—or win the point outright.

A strong smash doesn't just end rallies; it sends a clear message: Lobbing won't work here.

-----

*Read the rest of this post in the full eBook.*

*Visit [Pickleball35.com](https://Pickleball35.com) to purchase the complete eBook for \$9.99.*

# -The Lob Switch \*\*

Post #8 of 22 in All Third Shot Posts

---



---

The pickleball lob switch is a coordinated movement where you and your partner swap court positions to defend against a lob shot. It's not just a fancy maneuver—it's a critical skill for advancing to higher levels of play, especially against opponents who strategically use lobs to disrupt your positioning.

This tactic requires three things:

1. **Effective Communication** – To signal the switch.

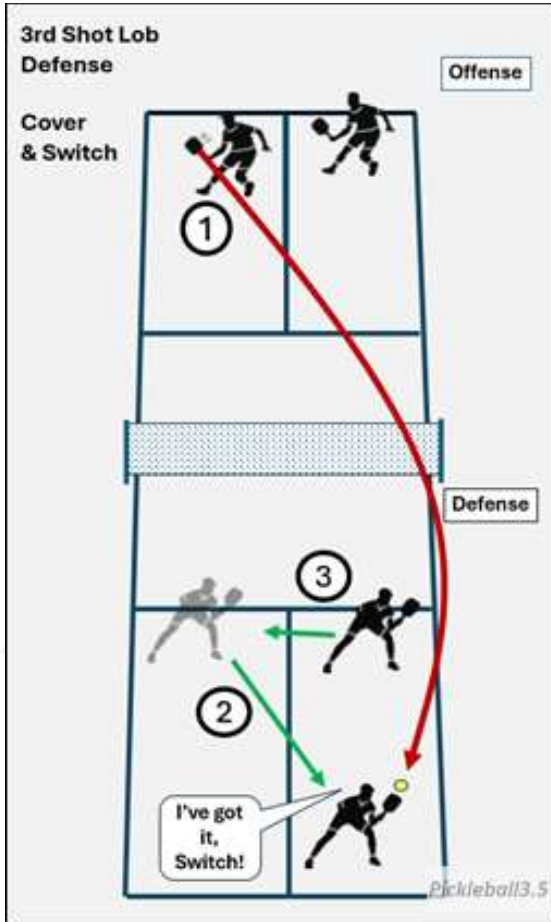
2. **Quick Decision-Making** – To determine who should cover the lob.

3. **Smooth Execution** – To maintain court coverage and keep the rally alive.

**Pickleball Wisdom:** A well-executed lob switch is like a seamless dance—minus the twirls but with plenty of footwork.

# Pickleball Lob Switch Scenario

The illustration below shows an effective lob going over the head of a player. Their partner covers for them to play the shot, and they switch positions on the court.



Here's how a typical lob switch unfolds:

## 1. The Lob

Your opponent hits a high lob shot over your partner's head, targeting the open court behind them.

## **2. Your Movement and Communication**

- You recognize that you have the better angle to reach the ball.
- You sprint diagonally toward the ball's landing spot.
- As you move, you call out clearly to your partner, signaling the switch with phrases like “Switch!” or “I’ve got it!”

## **3. Your Partner's Adjustment and Your Response Shot**

- Your partner slides over to cover the half of the court you vacated.
- You play the shot, aiming to keep the rally alive—whether with a lob return, drop shot, or drive.

**Pro Tip:** If you're playing opponents who frequently lob, have a pre-game conversation with your partner about who will typically cover lobs and how to communicate during switches.



# Why the Pickleball Lob Switch Is Essential

As you progress to the 3.5+ skill level, the lob switch becomes second nature. Here's why it's vital:

## 1. Improves Court Coverage

Switching ensures the entire court is covered, even when your opponent tries to exploit the space behind one of you.

## 2. Increases Lob Return Success

By positioning the player with the better angle for the lob, you increase your chances of returning it effectively and staying in the rally.

## 3. Strengthens Communication and Trust

Consistent execution of the lob switch builds trust between you and your partner. When you're in sync, opponents will struggle to break your formation, no matter how crafty their lobs are.

**Key Benefit:** A reliable lob switch neutralizes lob-happy opponents and keeps you in control of the rally.

---

## Summary: Communication Is Key

The pickleball lob switch isn't just about movement—it's about teamwork and communication. Here's what you need to remember:

1. **Always Cover for Your Partner:** When the lob goes over their head, step in to make the play.
2. **Call the Switch Loudly and Clearly:** Let your partner know you're taking the shot and where they should move.
3. **Focus on Smooth Transitions:** Ensure both players are in position after the switch to maintain a strong defense.

With practice, the lob switch will feel instinctive, helping you defend against challenging lobs and keeping you competitive in rallies.

**Final Thought:** The pickleball lob switch is a reminder that great doubles play is about being

two players acting as one team—ready for anything, especially those pesky lobs.



# -Poaching in Pickleball

Post #9 of 22 in All Third Shot Posts

---



---

Pickleball poaching is when you boldly cross in front of your partner to take a shot headed their way. Think of it as a calculated court hijack—stepping in for the good of the team (or at least that’s how you’ll explain it later).

-----

*Read the rest of this post in the full eBook.*

*Visit [Pickleball35.com](https://Pickleball35.com) to purchase the complete eBook for \$9.99.*

## -Pinching the Middle \*\*

Post #10 of 22 in All Third Shot Posts

---



Pickleball pinching the middle: In pickleball, having solid defensive positioning is critical, especially in doubles play. One essential strategy you'll hear about is **“shading”** or **“pinching the middle.”**

Think of it like squeezing a tube of toothpaste—if you leave gaps, things are going to get messy fast.

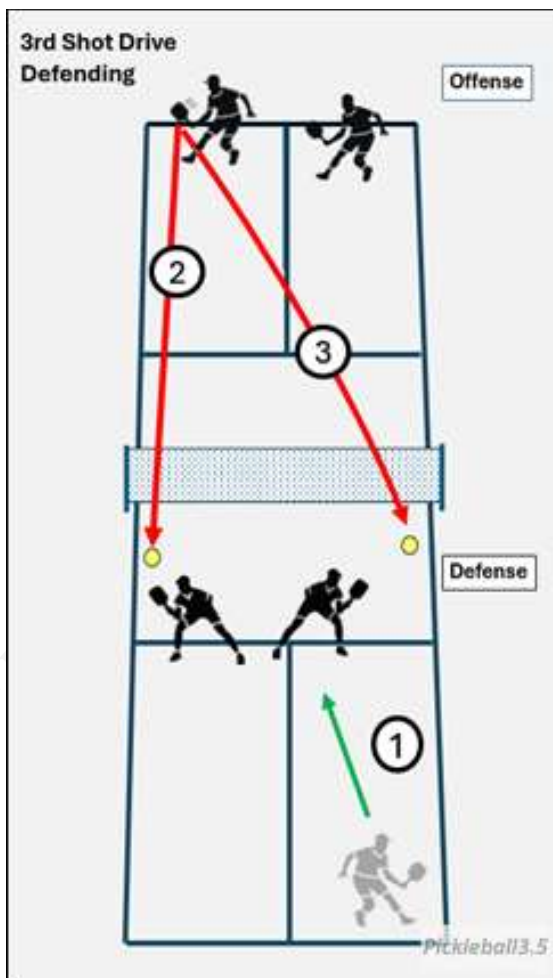
## **Pinching the Middle: A Must for Advanced Play**

To advance to the 3.5+ level in pickleball, good court positioning isn't optional; it's mandatory. And a key part of that is always **pinching the middle**—because, let's face it, leaving the center open is like handing your opponents an engraved invitation to win the rally.

Good communication and awareness of each other's positioning are key here, and when done right, this tactic can force your opponents into riskier shots. It's a great way to take control of the rally, protect your territory, and set yourself up for a solid counterattack.

## Pinching the Middle Scenario:

In the illustration below the serve returner hits the return to the far side and moves to the middle to defend against the third shot while their partner stays to cover the sideline.



1. You return the serve and come to the net. If you return it to the middle or more towards your

opponent on the far side, cut off the angle of an attempted return shot up the middle. Come to the net more towards the middle.

2. Your partner is already at the kitchen line and should be protecting the side-line to not allow your opponent to hit a 3rd shot drive winner down the line. You move up angling towards the middle of the court. Now you are covering the middle and slightly to the left.

3. Now the only spot open for a winning drive is to your far side. Your opponent needs to hit a perfect drive shot across the court for a winner. A very difficult shot. If they hit it to the middle, you are there to volley or block it, if they hit outside, it goes out of bounds.

## **Summary**

Court positioning like this to pinch the middle is something you should do in many gameplay scenarios. If the ball is hit to the side or a corner, the player on that side protects the side-line and the other cuts off the angle by moving slightly towards the middle of the court.



As you gain more experience, you will see the court situation better and will always shade or pinch the middle as points play out.

To advance to the 3.5+ level in Pickleball, you need to always have good court positioning, and you should always be “Pinching the Middle”.

# -Angle Smash Shot

Post #11 of 22 in All Third Shot Posts

---



---

As you improve your overhead smash in pickleball, you might notice something frustrating: **your smashes are coming back at you**. It's like throwing a boomerang when you expected a one-way ticket.

-----

*Read the rest of this post in the full eBook.*

*Visit [Pickleball35.com](https://Pickleball35.com) to purchase the complete eBook for \$9.99.*

# -Third Shot Drop

Post #12 of 22 in All Third Shot Posts

---



---

The pickleball third shot drop is your best third-shot option in most situations.

For players aiming to advance to the 3.5+ skill level, mastering this shot is non-negotiable. Consistency and precision in executing the third shot drop can turn the tables against even the toughest opponents.

-----

*Read the rest of this post in the full eBook.*

Visit [Pickleball35.com](https://Pickleball35.com) to purchase the complete eBook for \$9.99.

## -The 5th and 7th Shot Drop \*\*

Post #13 of 22 in All Third Shot Posts

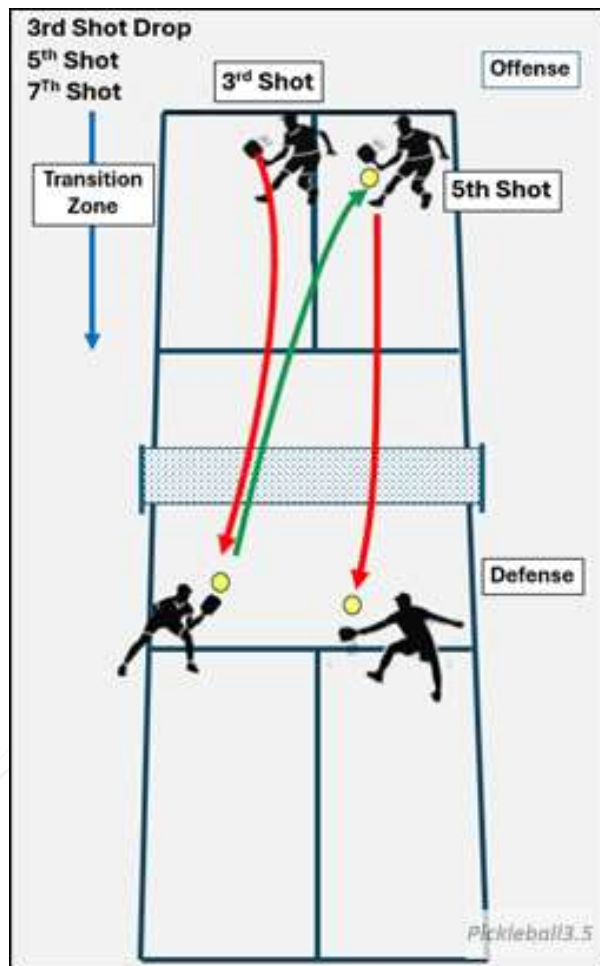
---



As reviewed in the previous post, you will need to use the third shot drop effectively and consistently to advance to the 3.5+ skill level in pickleball. The pickleball 5th shot drop is just another drop shot you hit after attempting a third shot drop.

## The 5th Shot Drop

In the illustration below a third shot drop is attempted. It is volleyed back by the defender and another drop shot; the 5th shot drop is attempted.



Navigating through the transition zone to the kitchen line is one of the great pickleball challenges. It's not always a straight shot—

sometimes it's more of a zigzag journey that often requires multiple drop shots to get there.

---

## **The Art (and Struggle) of the Drop Shot**

First things first: your drop shot needs enough power to clear the net. A shot too short ends the point immediately, and no one enjoys handing their opponents a gift-wrapped point. Knowing this, you'll naturally focus on clearing the net—but in doing so, you'll sometimes hit drop shots too deep.

***Pickleball Wisdom:** A short drop shot ends the rally; a deep one keeps it interesting (if slightly nerve-wracking).*

Over time, your consistency will improve, but even seasoned players hit bad drop shots now and then. That's okay—it's all part of the journey to becoming an advanced player. The key is to keep practicing and, more importantly, to **keep hitting drop shots**. This is how you advance, even when it feels like a game of trial and error.

## When a Drop Shot Goes Too Long

If your drop shot is too long, your opponent will likely seize the opportunity to volley or smash it back. When this happens:

1. **Move forward slightly:** Don't charge blindly; step in just enough to prepare for the next shot.
2. **Adopt a defensive stance:** Keep your paddle ready, stay balanced, and prepare for a fast return.

### The “Stretch and Volley” Scenario

Not all deep drop shots are a disaster. If your opponent has to stretch to volley it, they probably won't have enough control to put the shot away. Instead, they'll likely:

- Volley the ball back toward your feet to keep you back.

This is your cue to reset the rally with another drop shot—the famous “**5th shot drop.**”

***Pro Tip:** Don't let one bad drop rattle you. Think of it as a warm-up for the next one—you're just getting closer to that perfect drop.*

---

The transition zone may be tricky, but persistence and smart positioning will help you master it. With practice, you'll find your way to the kitchen line and start winning those hard-fought rallies.

### **Pickleball 7th Shot Drop – Don't give up**

If your next attempt comes back to you, execute a 7th shot drop and so on.

Keep hitting drop shots until you successfully land a drop shot in front of your opponent forcing them to hit a dink return or volley with an upward motion.

On each shot, if your opponent can't put the shot away, you may take a step or two forward slowly making your way to the kitchen line.

You are slowly moving through the transition zone as you put pressure on your opponent with each drop shot.



## Summary – Don't Give Up

If your third shot drop isn't perfect and is volleyed back, try another drop shot.

After hitting a good shot, move in towards the net quickly.

Failing to move in means you're not ready to counter your opponent's response. As you move in, if your opponent tries to volley a shot back at you and it is above net height, use your quick hands to put the shot away. Their response will likely be moving upward, and this is just what you are looking for to end the point.

Experienced opponents will recognize a good drop shot and know you are closing in and will just do a dink return. If they do this, you have succeeded and can now fight it out in a dinking rally.

Be assertive and advance on a successful drop shot to finish the play or get into a dink rally.

# -The Put Away Shot

Post #14 of 22 in All Third Shot Posts

---



---

In pickleball, landing the perfect pickleball put away shot is like finding an open parking spot right by the entrance—it's rare, satisfying, and worth the effort.

-----

*Read the rest of this post in the full eBook.*

Visit [Pickleball35.com](https://Pickleball35.com) to purchase the complete eBook for \$9.99.

# -Third Shot Drop Targeting

Post #15 of 22 in All Third Shot Posts

---



Developing a good pickleball third shot drop strategy is a key step toward reaching the 3.5+ skill level. As your drop shot improves and you gain more confidence in yourself and your partner, you'll start to see the court as a chessboard—strategically placing your shots where they'll give your opponents the most trouble.

-----  
*Read the rest of this post in the full eBook.*

Visit [Pickleball35.com](https://Pickleball35.com) to purchase the complete eBook for \$9.99.

# -Third Shot Drop Advancing

Post #16 of 22 in All Third Shot Posts

---



Hitting an effective third shot drop and moving to the net is a cornerstone of advancing your pickleball game to the 3.5+ level. Of course, not every third shot drop is a masterpiece—sometimes it’s more of a “third shot flop.” Rushing in on a poorly executed drop shot can turn into an unintentional gift for your opponents.

-----  
*Read the rest of this post in the full eBook.*

*Visit [Pickleball35.com](https://Pickleball35.com) to purchase the complete eBook for \$9.99.*

## -Drop Shot Mistake \*\*

Post #17 of 22 in All Third Shot Posts

---



When you first start incorporating drop shots into your pickleball game, it's easy to get a bit obsessed—like the person who just discovered avocado toast and now puts it on everything. But here's the catch: one of the most common mistakes isn't just mishitting a drop shot; it's using it at the wrong time.

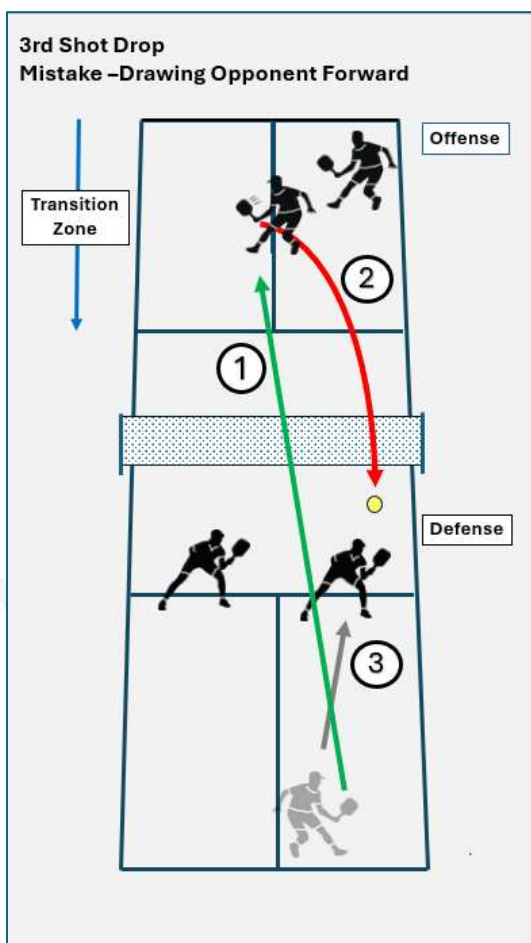
Let's not forget, in pickleball, the defense starts the point with a pretty sweet deal. They've already got one player at the kitchen line, while you and your partner—on offense—are still

hanging out at the baseline. To keep their advantage, the serve returner on defense needs to hit a strong return of serve and hustle up to join their partner at the net. Once both defenders are at the kitchen line, the defense locks down the court like it's their fortress, making it tough for the offense to break through—just as the game is designed.

For the offensive team, the goal is to figure out how to advance and engage those defenders at the net. As covered in the third shot drop posts, the drop shot is the go-to move for closing the gap and neutralizing the defense when both opponents are already stationed at the kitchen line. But—and this is where things get interesting—if you can keep the serve returner back by driving a shot at them after they hit a short return of serve, you've just opened the door to take immediate control of the point. Skip the drop shot, drive the ball and move in fast to flip the script.

## Mistake: Hitting a Drop Shot and Drawing Your Opponent Forward

In the illustration below a drop shot is hit back to the serve returner after they hit a short return and haven't reached the kitchen line. This is usually a mistake.



**Scenario:**

1. Your opponent returns your serve, and it's a short return.
2. You advance, fixated on executing a drop shot, and hit a drop shot to the open area in front of the serve returner, thinking they won't reach it in time.
3. After their short return, your opponent hesitates to advance, expecting you might drive the ball. However, when they see your drop shot, they rush in, hitting a forceful shot or dink back at you. This invites them to the kitchen line, exactly where they want to be after returning the serve.



## Why This is a Mistake

Picture this: your opponent serves you up a short return—a gift-wrapped opportunity to drive the ball and keep them back. But instead of taking the gift and running with it, you decide to drop the ball just over the net. Congratulations! You've handed the gift right back, complete with a bow, and invited them to stroll up to the kitchen line like they own the place.

Driving the ball forces them to stay back. But by hitting a drop shot, you essentially said, “Oh, I insist, please come up to the kitchen!” Worse yet, if your drop shot isn't great and pops up, the other opponent already at the kitchen line will gleefully poach the shot and leave you muttering, “Why did I do that?”

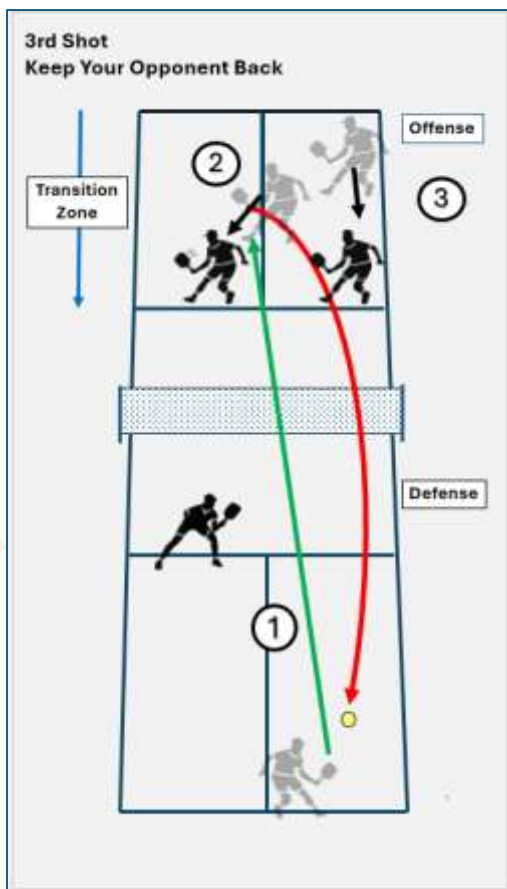
A well-placed drop shot can be effective in certain situations, but in this case, it allowed your opponent to regain control and erased the advantage you could have maintained.

## The Correct Play

When your opponent sends you a short return and is still stranded in no-man's-land:

- **Drive the ball** back at them. Make them feel the pressure of staying back and the panic of being caught out of position.
- **Don't help them out!** Giving them the chance to waltz up to the kitchen is like handing them a VIP pass to the party. Keep them back, and you'll be the one in control.

In the illustration below, you see the proper way to handle this. A crisp drive to the feet of the returner not only keeps them on their toes (literally) but also allows you and your partner to advance to the kitchen line and start dictating the point. This is how you go from reactive to proactive—pickleball style!



**Scenario:**

1. Your opponent returns your serve, and it's a short return.
2. You advance quickly and drive the ball back at the serve returner who is still relatively deep in the service court.
3. You and your partner advance quickly to the kitchen line and take control of the point.

## **Summary**

Sharpening your court awareness allows you to seize opportunities and make confident, strategic choices for your third shot.

Rather than defaulting to a drop shot out of habit, assess the situation and choose the option that keeps you in control and puts your opponent on the defensive. Smart decisions win points—and matches!

# -Drop Shot Defense

Post #18 of 22 in All Third Shot Posts

---



I remember when I started playing pickleball and starting at the net on defense. It was great... blocking drives, smashing bad shots, and poaching occasionally. It seemed so easy already being in the best position on the court. As I advanced, I started playing against better opponents and began having drop shots hit at me.

-----  
*Read the rest of this post in the full eBook.*

Visit [Pickleball35.com](https://Pickleball35.com) to purchase the complete eBook for \$9.99.

# -The Pickleball Reset

Post #19 of 22 in All Third Shot Posts

---



A reset shot in pickleball is your defensive superpower—a way to slow down the pace of a rally, neutralize your opponent’s aggression, and regain control. Whether you’re under pressure or out of position, the reset shot helps you turn chaos into calm by softly landing the ball in your opponent’s kitchen.

-----  
*Read the rest of this post in the full eBook.*

Visit [Pickleball35.com](https://Pickleball35.com) to purchase the complete eBook for \$9.99.

# -The Shake and Bake \*\*

Post #20 of 22 in All Third Shot Posts

---



If you've spent any time around pickleball courts, you've probably heard the terms '*Shake and Bake*' or '*Crush and Rush*'. The Shake and Bake is an aggressive, high-pressure play designed to seize control of the rally and keep your opponents on their heels. It involves driving the third shot hard and immediately charging the net—it's all about dictating the pace and taking the fight to your opponents.

This play is a great option if you're confident in your ability (or your partner's) to execute a strong

third shot drive. It's not for the faint of heart—this is advanced 3.5+ level play.

To execute the Shake and Bake successfully, you'll need two key skills:

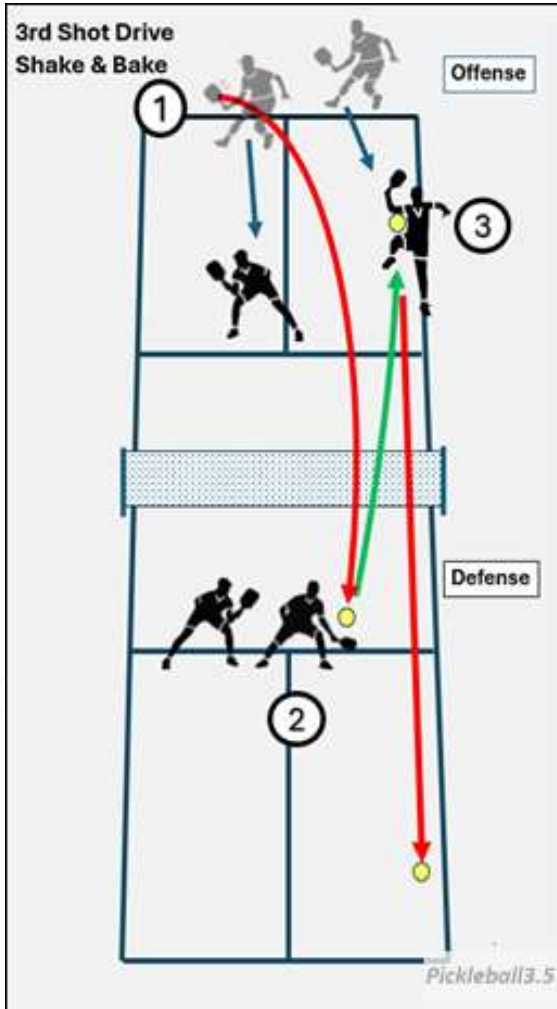
- A solid **3rd shot drive** to initiate the attack.
- Quick, confident **volley skills** at the net to finish the job.

It's a bold strategy, but when done right, it puts your opponents under immediate pressure and often forces errors or weak returns. If you're ready to level up your game, the Shake and Bake might just be your new favorite move!



# Pickleball Shake and Bake Scenario

In the illustration below, a drive is hit (the shake) on the third shot, both offensive players advance quickly, and a popup response is put away (the bake).



## 1 – Drive the Third Shot (Shake)

Drive the 3rd shot at the opponent in front of you or your partner. Look for a good drive going just over the net. Before the ball even gets there, you and your partner move in towards the kitchen line..

## **2 – Look for an attackable block or pop-up**

Your opponent is moving in towards the kitchen line or is at the kitchen line already. They volley or block the hard drive. The block comes back across in the air and above the net height. You are hoping for a pop up but if you are fast enough you can also deal with a volley shot hit right at you.

## **3 – Attack for a winner (Bake)**

You have moved in, and you anticipate the ball coming to you in the air and above net height. When this happens, you or your partner attack it for a winner.

The “Shake” is the hard drive shot and the “Bake” is the put away shot.

## **Keys to Success for the Shake and Bake**

To nail the Pickleball Shake and Bake, the key is to ensure the third shot drive is solid before charging the net.

- **The drive should be sharp**—just over the net and moving with good pace. If it has topspin, even better! The topspin helps the ball dip below net height after crossing, forcing your opponent into a defensive volley that’s likely to pop up.
- **Timing is everything.** This play happens fast, and you’ll need quick judgment to decide whether to commit or hang back.

---

## Watchouts for the Shake and Bake

- **Beware of a bad drive.** If your shot sits up high, your opponent will gleefully volley it downward toward your feet as you move in. That’s not the kind of “baking” you’re looking for!
- If the defensive volley doesn’t pop up or at least rise toward you, your rush to the net will end in frustration—and probably a lunge for a ball heading straight for the ground.

- **Adjust as needed.** Watch the drive. If it's good, commit to moving in. If not, stay back and be ready for your opponent's return.

With experience, you'll sharpen your ability to decide when to go for it. When you execute it successfully, the Shake and Bake is not only effective but incredibly satisfying—nothing beats putting away that final shot with authority.

---

## **Communication is Key**

Don't forget to loop in your partner! Let them know when you plan to attempt the Shake and Bake. If they have a great drive shot, switch things up by having them drive it at the opponent in front of you while you charge in to finish the play. Teamwork makes this move even more effective—and keeps your opponents guessing.

## **Summary**

The Pickleball Shake and Bake is a bold and exciting play that puts immediate pressure on your opponents. Use it strategically to surprise them, force weak returns, and seal the point with a satisfying put-away shot. Timing, execution,

and teamwork are your recipe for success—so go ahead, mix it up, and bake those points!

---

## **Pickleball Shake and Bake Action Video**

**Courtesy of “In2Pickle”**

[Watch this video on the Pickleball Shake and Bake on Youtube.](#)

# -Drop Shot Against Power Players

Post #21 of 22 in All Third Shot Posts

---



As you advance in pickleball and start mastering third-shot drops, you'll feel great about your growing skills, smart court positioning, and strategic gameplay. Then... you'll meet a power player—or worse, a team of two.

These opponents won't be impressed by your finesse. They'll fire relentless drives and make the court feel like a war zone.

-----  
*Read the rest of this post in the full eBook.*

Visit [Pickleball35.com](https://Pickleball35.com) to purchase the complete eBook for \$9.99.

[Pickleball35.com](https://Pickleball35.com)

[Back to Table of Contents](#)

Protected Content – Not for Resale or Redistribution © 2025 by Payton Bond

# -Blocking a Drive

Post #22 of 22 in All Third Shot Posts

---



---

Blocking a pickleball drive is as straightforward as it sounds—no fancy swings or heroics needed. Simply hold your paddle steady, and let the ball’s momentum do the work.

-----

*Read the rest of this post in the full eBook.*

Visit [Pickleball35.com](https://Pickleball35.com) to purchase the complete eBook for \$9.99.

# Dinking

Pickleball Dinking strategy  
Posts.



# -Dinking Overview \*\*

Post #1 of 8 in All Dinking Posts

---



---

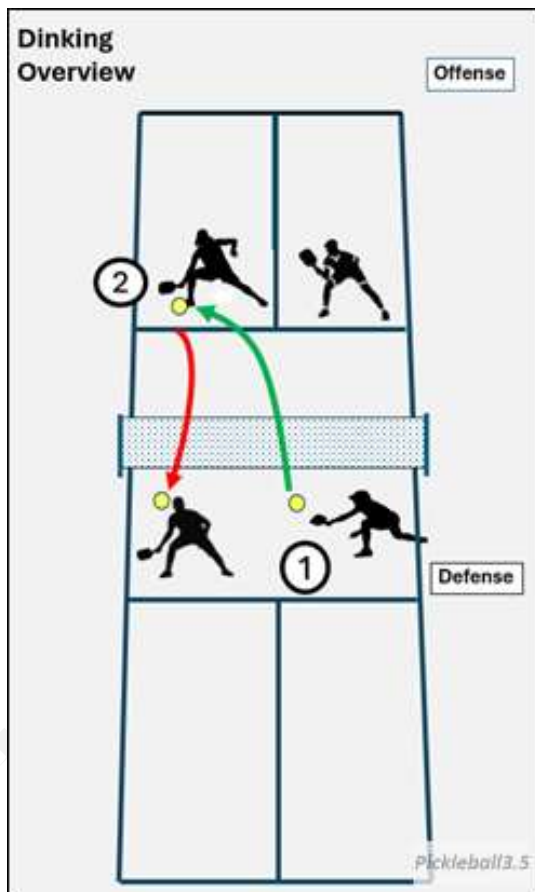
Good pickleball dinking is your golden ticket to advancing to the 3.5+ level. If you want to dominate at the net, you'll need a consistently solid dink shot in your arsenal. After all, dinking isn't just a fun word—it's where higher-level pickleball games are won and lost.

Good players use drop shots to get to the net and set up dinking rallies, leveling the playing field and creating opportunities to win points. As you improve, you'll find yourself doing the same—working your way to the net with drop shots and gearing up for those dink battles.

But let's be honest: dinking isn't always pretty. Most rallies end in a mistake—a popped-up dink that gets pounced on, a dink that finds its way into the net, or the classic rookie move of trying to attack an unattackable dink (you know, the ones taunting you just below net height). Patience is the name of the game—don't let an itchy paddle hand ruin your hard-earned position!

## Dinking Setup

You have successfully hit a good third shot drop and you and your partner have advanced to the net.



### 1 – Good Drop Shot

Your third shot drop is not attackable, and your opponent dinks your shot back over the net. This is often their best play if the drop shot is not attackable.

Otherwise, they risk popping it up or volleying it with an upward swing motion.

This will make their volley attackable by you as you have moved in.

## **2 – Dink Return**

You respond with a dink. You are now in a dinking rally.

### **Dinking Rally and Patience**

A pickleball dinking rally is the ultimate patience test—like a game of chess played with paddles. Whichever team blinks first (read: makes a mistake) is usually the one to lose the point.

Stay calm, stay focused, and let your opponent make the first misstep.

When an opportunity does present itself—a dink floating above net height and within reach—don't hesitate. That's your chance to attack. Volley the ball hard to an open spot, down at your opponent's feet or hit it right at them. If no opportunity arises, keep dinking and aim for the toughest spots for your opponent to handle, keeping them off balance.

## **Kitchen Rules and Dinking Technique**

Remember, you can step into the kitchen to hit a ball that bounces there—just be sure to step back out quickly. If you're in the kitchen your opponent may speed up their next dink right at you. If you touch it while you're in the kitchen it is point over in their favor. A single step in with one foot should be enough to make the shot.

Successful dinking requires soft hands and a smooth stroke. Any stiffness in your grip or motion is a recipe for disaster—think popped-up shots begging to be smashed or dinks hitting the net. Regular practice will help you develop the precision needed to land your shots softly and consistently over the net.

## The Practice Dilemma

Finding time to practice dinking is often easier said than done. Depending on the situation and players, warm-ups can be rushed or skipped entirely as everyone is eager to jump into games. This lack of dedicated practice can leave your dinking game feeling rusty when it matters most.

If you have the chance to reserve a court for yourself or a small group, prioritize focused dinking drills. Even brief practice sessions can sharpen your soft touch and make a big difference in your gameplay. Remember, consistent practice builds confidence and control for those high-stakes rallies.

## Summary

At an advanced level, dinking rallies are inevitable. Both teams will use successful drop shots to slow the game down and set the stage for a battle of patience and precision.

Advanced players understand the value of dinking, preferring to fight it out with finesse rather than attempt risky attack shots against a well-placed drop shot. Mastering the dink isn't just a skill; it's your ticket to winning those high-level rallies—and maybe even to outsmarting those eager power players.

---

### **Great Dinking Rally**

Courtesy of Selkirk TV

Watch this [Dinking Rally](#) on Youtube.

# -Footwork and Tethering

Post #2 of 8 in All Dinking Posts

---



---

Dinking footwork and tethering are the unsung heroes of pickleball. Mastering these skills can make or break your performance in dinking rallies. With experience, your footwork will naturally improve, and staying tethered to your partner will become instinctive.

-----  
*Read the rest of this post in the full eBook.*

Visit [Pickleball35.com](https://Pickleball35.com) to purchase the complete eBook for \$9.99.



# -The Cross-Court Dink \*\*

Post #3 of 8 in All Dinking Posts

---



---

When dinking in pickleball, you can direct the ball either forward or cross-court. Both options can be effective when executed well, but the cross-court dink is often your best bet.

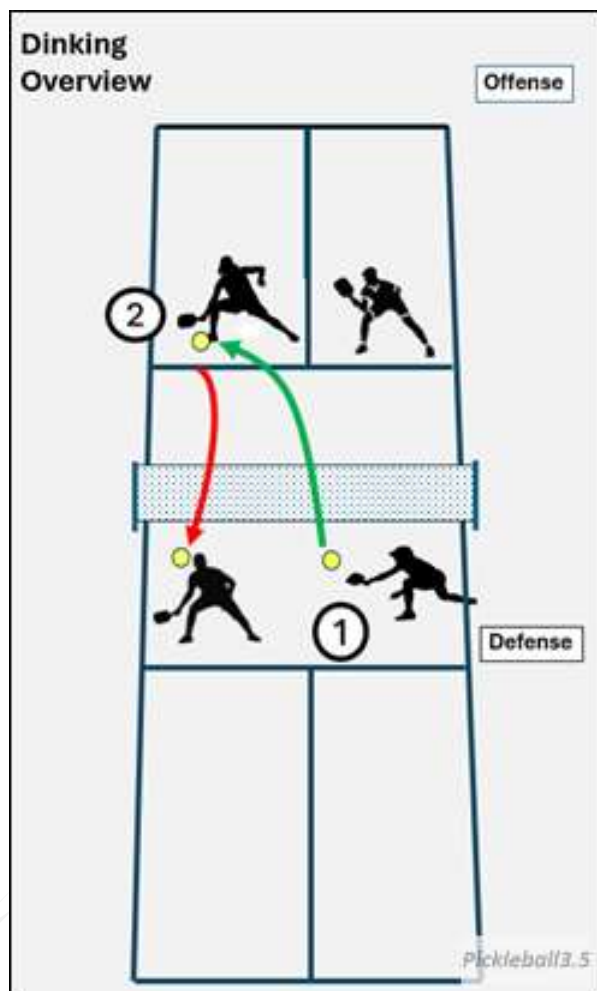
---

A forward dink aimed straight at your opponents covers less distance, which can make it easier for them to intercept or pop up for an attack. While it has its place in certain situations and good to use to mix things up, it's riskier against skilled opponents who are ready and waiting at the net.

Hitting a cross-court dink, on the other hand, has several advantages. It travels a longer distance, giving you more room for error, and can be placed close to the net, making it harder for your opponents to reach or attack effectively. It also keeps them moving, which can create openings or force mistakes.

# Forward Dink

Below is an illustration of forward dinking.



## Tips for Forward Dinks

If you decide to hit the dink shot forward, placement is key to making it effective:

- **Aim for the middle:** Softly direct the dink into the middle of the court to create

confusion between your opponents about who should respond. Indecision can lead to errors or weak returns.

- **Target the backhand:** If aiming directly at the opponent in front of you, focus on their backhand side. Knowing who has a backhand in the middle at the start of each point allows you to target that spot consistently for an advantage.

Always use a gentle, smooth stroke to arc the ball just over the net and into your chosen spot in the kitchen. With practice, you can add spin to your forward dinks, making them even trickier for your opponents to handle effectively. Mastering this technique ensures your forward dink becomes a strategic weapon rather than an easy opportunity for your opponents.

## **Cross-Court Dink**

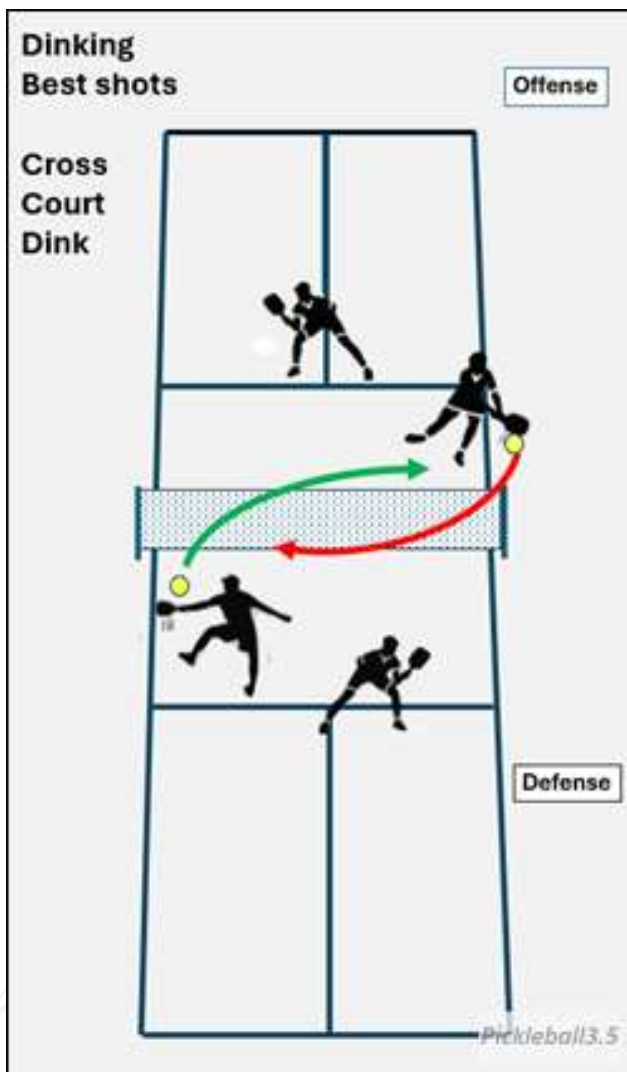
The cross-court dink is a smart and effective option, offering more distance and allowing for a bit more speed while still keeping control.

Aim the ball diagonally across to the opposite side of the court, targeting a spot close to the net.

This forces your opponent to stretch or move quickly, reducing their ability to respond effectively. Be sure your shot clears the net while staying low and out of reach to maintain the upper hand in the rally.

The cross-court dink's added distance also gives you more room for error, making it a reliable and strategic choice during dinking battles.

Below is an illustration of cross-court dinking.



## Mastering the Cross-Court Dink

Perfecting the cross-court dink is like finding the cheat code to pickleball success—it gives you a major edge, especially against opponents with weaker backhands. In a cross-court dinking rally,

both players often rely on their backhands—particularly if both you and your opponent are right-handed—making this the perfect chance to target any weaknesses.

As you advance in skill, this shot becomes a game-changer, giving you control, strategic placement, and a bit more wiggle room for error.

## Summary

Mastering the dink shot is a must for taking your pickleball game to the next level. The cross-court dink isn't just a good option—it's a reliable, go-to strategy. Use it often in dinking duels, and watch as you control the pace, create openings, and keep your opponents on their toes at the kitchen line.

---

## Video on Dinking Strategy

**Courtesy of Dicks Sporting Goods and Wayne Dollard**

[Watch this video on Pickleball Dinking on Youtube.](#)

# -Attacking a Dink

Post #4 of 8 in All Dinking Posts

---



---

In pickleball, one of your primary goals during a dinking rally is to spot and pounce on a bad dink from your opponent.

Dinking rallies almost always end in one of two ways:

-----  
*Read the rest of this post in the full eBook.*

Visit [Pickleball35.com](https://Pickleball35.com) to purchase the complete eBook for \$9.99.



# -The Dink Fake

Post #5 of 8 in All Dinking Posts

---



---

The pickleball dink fake is an advanced strategy you use to put away an unattackable dink shot.

In a dinking rally, mistakes are inevitable—hopefully made by your opponents. But when you recognize a chance to attack, sometimes even on an unattackable shot, it's time to seize control.

-----  
*Read the rest of this post in the full eBook.*

Visit [Pickleball35.com](https://Pickleball35.com) to purchase the complete eBook for \$9.99.

## -3 Common Dinking Mistakes \*\*

Post #6 of 8 in All Dinking Posts

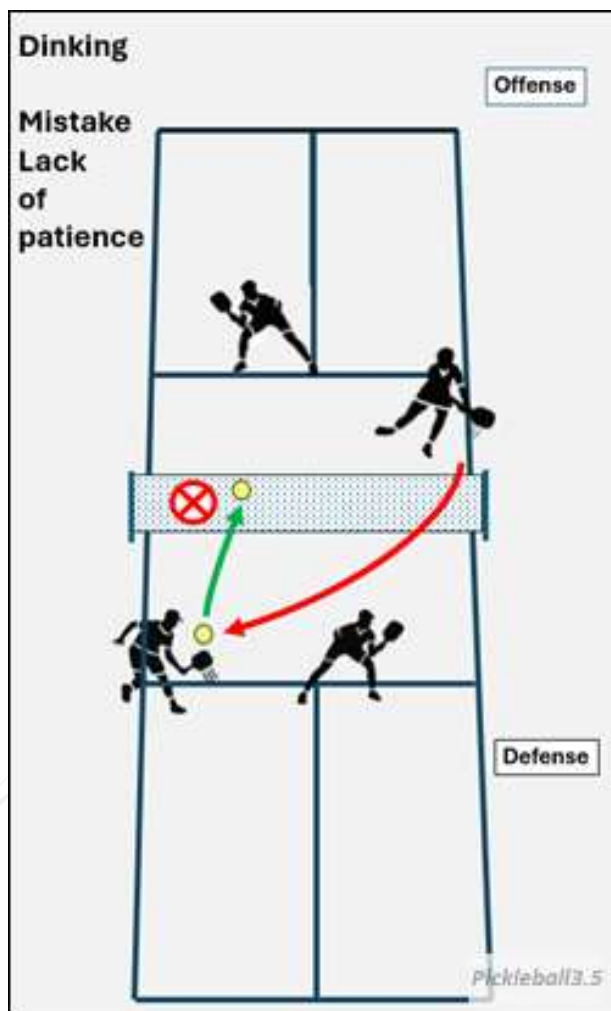
---



Good dinking skills are required to play advanced pickleball. Once the third shot drop is in play, you're likely headed into a dinking rally. The goal is to hit a soft shot that barely clears the net and lands in the kitchen, in a spot that's tough for your opponent to attack. Pickleball dinking mistakes often end the point. Avoiding mistakes sets good players apart and will advance your game.

## Pickleball Dinking Mistake – Lack of Patience

The illustration below shows a player losing patience in a dinking rally and hitting an unattackable ball into the net.



Dinking is a skill and patience game. One of the most avoidable mistakes when dinking is to simply not lose patience.

When you get good at dinking you can softly drop it over the net and place it in different spots.

Good opponents will respond in kind with good dinks. Dinking can go on for a while when there are no good attackable shots to put away or speed up.

Many times, the team who loses the dinking battle loses because a player lacks the patience to continue and attempts a put away or speed up on an unattackable dink.

This often ends up with a ball hit into the net, hitting too high where it is attacked by your opponent, or hitting it too hard and out of bounds.

Keep dinking until you get an attackable dink return within volley reach at net height or higher. If you get an opportunity to hit an attackable dink, take it, otherwise stay patient and let your opponent make the mistake.

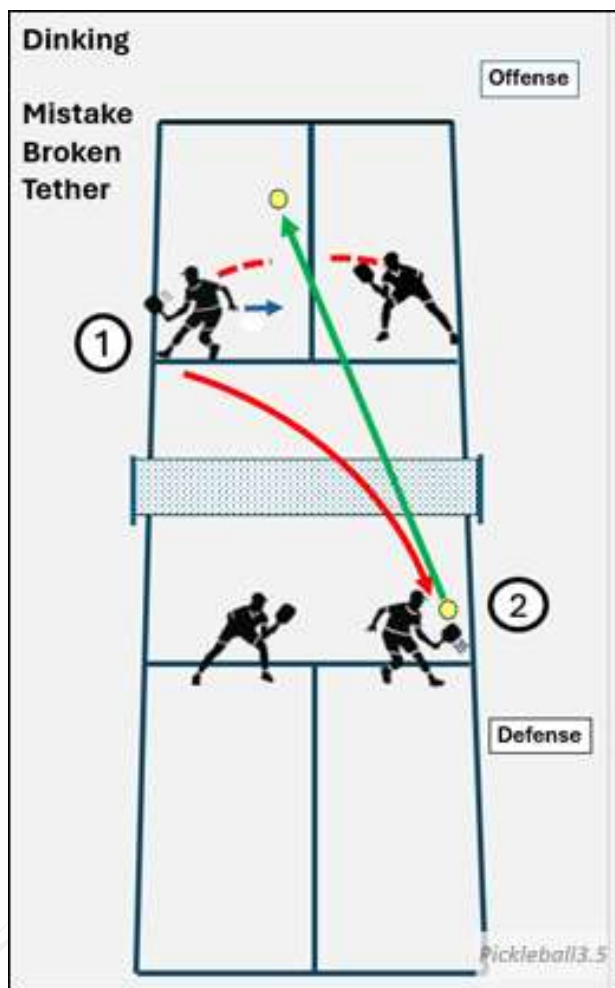
## **Pickleball Dinking Mistake – Broken Tether**

As you are dinking you are moving side-to-side and in and out of the kitchen.

You need to stay tethered to your partner so you don't leave a gap where your opponents can hit a speed up shot in the opening.

Good players will always see the opening and use a dink fake to hit a shot into the open court.

The illustration below shows a dinking mistake when players don't stay connected at the net.



**In this scenario:**

1. You dink across the court. Your partner slides over to cover the line and defend where your shot lands. You don't move over with your partner to the center of the court.

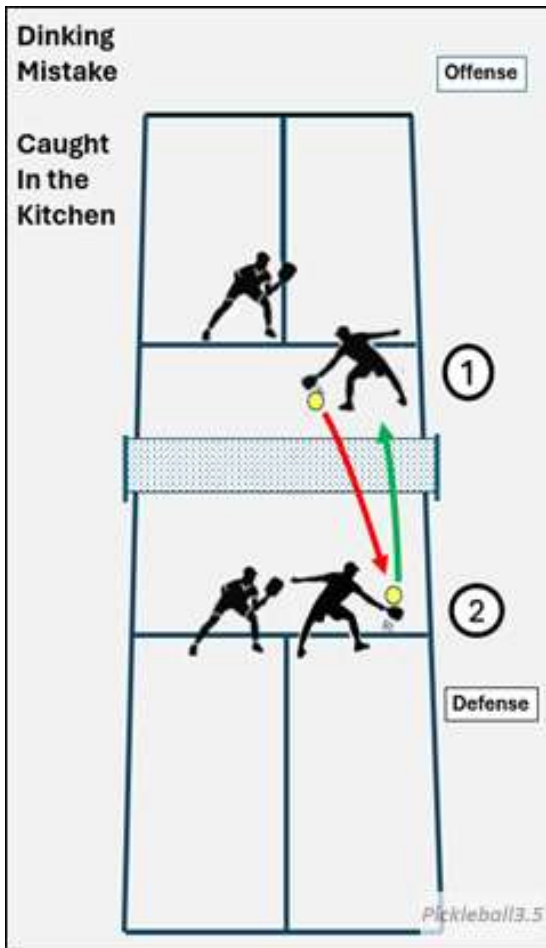
2. Your opponent sees this and speeds up a shot for a winner in the opening between you and your partner. In summary, always move back and forth on the kitchen line tethered to your partner. If you leave an opening a good opponent will see this and exploit your mistake.

## **Pickleball Dinking Mistake – Caught in the Kitchen**

While dinking you may have to go in and out of the kitchen. This is legal as long as the ball has bounced in the kitchen. If you do go in, hit a return dink and get back out quickly.

If a ball hits you while you are in the kitchen you lose the point.

In some cases, you need to go deep into the kitchen to make a play on the ball. This happens with a good opponent dink shot or maybe the ball catches the top of the net and just bounces over.



## In this scenario:

1. You go deep into the kitchen to get to a ball and dink it back. Deep means both feet are likely in the kitchen.
2. Your opponent sees this and hits the ball quickly (speed up shot) right at you.

You were too slow getting back out of the kitchen and got caught. Even an unattackable ball can be



hit up and at you. As soon as you touch it, your opponent yells... “You’re in the kitchen!”.

You didn’t have enough time to get back out. Your opponent is experienced and knows how to get a point from this. Be mindful and get out quickly when you go into the kitchen. Try not to put your whole body in the kitchen while dinking, sometimes you have to but try to step in with one foot, reach and hit the shot and then step back out.

## Summary

Good dinking skills are required to play advanced pickleball. Once the third shot drop is in play, you're likely headed into a dinking battle.

Dinking is a patience game—whichever cracks first is usually the one who loses the point.

Use good footwork and stay connected to your partner not leaving gaps your opponents can exploit.

Move quickly in and out of the kitchen area as needed.

The more you practice, the better you'll get—especially with dinking. It's one of those skills that takes time to refine, but it's worth it. As you progress, you'll rely more and more on dinking, especially as drop shots and resets come into play to slow the game down.

# - The ATP (Around the Post)

Post #7 of 8 in All Dinking Posts

---



The Pickleball ATP (Around the Post) is an advanced play that usually happens during a dinking rally.

As you advance to the 3.5+ skill level you will understand the ATP well and will likely have hit a few of them.

-----  
*Read the rest of this post in the full eBook.*

Visit [Pickleball35.com](https://Pickleball35.com) to purchase the complete eBook for \$9.99.

# -The Erne \*\*

Post #8 of 8 in All Dinking Posts

---



---

The Pickleball Erne is an advanced play named after pro player Erne Perry, who popularized this bold and dynamic move. As you progress to the 3.5+ level, you'll start looking for opportunities to incorporate the Erne—if you have the physical agility to pull it off.

Here's the rule:

- In pickleball, you can't volley a shot while standing in the kitchen.
- You also can't land in the kitchen after hitting a shot you contacted in the air outside of it.

But there's a loophole:

[Pickleball35.com](https://www.Pickleball35.com)

[Back to Table of Contents](#)

Protected Content – Not for Resale or Redistribution © 2025 by Payton Bond

- You *can* volley the ball from the side of the kitchen.
- You can also volley over the kitchen as long as you leave the ground from outside the kitchen and land outside the kitchen.

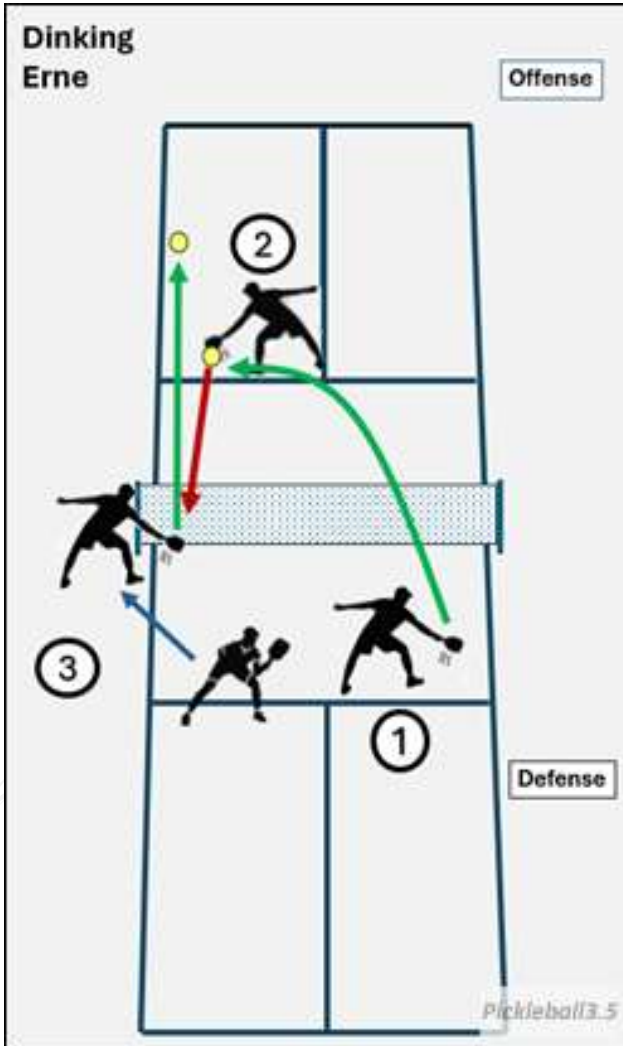
The Erne takes advantage of this rule. By moving from behind the kitchen line to the side and striking the ball in the air, you can execute a shot that's both unexpected and hard to counter.

This advanced technique requires not just agility but also court awareness and timing. You'll need to watch for the perfect setup—a poorly placed [dink](#) or drive that sets you up to swoop in from the side and execute the Erne with flair.

It's not an easy play to master, but when you pull it off, it's as satisfying as it gets. Your opponents won't just be scrambling—they'll be stunned.

# Pickleball Erne Scenario

The Erne happens mostly when teams are at the net in a dinking rally. The illustration below shows an Erne.



**In this scenario...**

1. Your partner dinks a shot back at the opponent in front of you.
2. Your opponent dinks it straight back at you.
3. You anticipate this and jump from the back line of the kitchen, over the sideline. While the dink is just coming over the net, you are moving through the air and can reach it before it drops. You volley it hard and put it away. You land safely on the side of the court and never touch the kitchen line.

**Amazing!**

Your opponents are stunned and don't know what hit them because it happened so fast.

## **Pickleball Erne Limitations**

The Erne is a powerful play, but it comes with strict rules:

- You cannot touch the net or land on the kitchen line when executing the shot.
  - If you prefer not to jump over the kitchen, you can run through it to the sideline instead. Just make sure your feet are firmly planted outside the kitchen when you hit the ball.
- 

## **Look for the Erne Setup**

The Pickleball Erne is a fantastic tactic for advanced players, but it requires preparation and awareness. Anticipate it during dinking rallies, especially when positioned near the sideline. Be ready for a forward dink coming your way that sets you up for the move.

The Erne is all about anticipation, timing, and quick decision-making. It demands skill, athleticism, and a keen eye for opportunities.

Good luck—and when you land your first Erne, enjoy the well-earned applause!





## **A collection of Pickleball Erne plays...**

Courtesy of PickleballerTV

[Watch this video on the Pickleball Erne on Youtube.](#)

# Social/ Mental

Social and mental aspects  
of Pickleball.

# -Resilience in Pickleball

---



---

Resilience is the backbone of both mental and physical strength. It's what allows players to bounce back from setbacks, refocus, and keep pushing forward. In pickleball, just like in life, resilience can turn a tough moment into an opportunity for success.

-----

*Read the rest of this post in the full eBook.*

*Visit [Pickleball35.com](https://Pickleball35.com) to purchase the complete eBook for \$9.99.*

# -The Power Player Challenge \*\*

---



---

As I've played over the years, I've faced all types of opponents, each with their own unique style of play. From my perspective, there's no right or wrong in pickleball, every style deserves respect. Whether you prefer a soft game with drop shots to advance to the net, as I do, or rely on powerful drive shots to overwhelm your opponents, your style is your own.

I often play with friends who are aggressive players, relying heavily on drives and rarely using drop shots. Dink rallies tend to be shorter with them, sometimes so short I wonder why I

bothered running to the kitchen in the first place. I occasionally joke that they need to slow their game down, but they just shrug and say, “*Why mess with what works?*” I win some, I lose some, but I always enjoy the challenge, and the occasional laugh.

Playing a softer, more strategic game is great, but to advance, you’ll eventually have to face power players. Rather than shying away from them or labeling them, embrace the challenge. These aggressive players rely on relentless drives to dominate, and their fast-paced style can feel overwhelming. But here’s the good news: even though many come from tennis and look like they were born with a racquet in hand, they’re not unbeatable. If you play a softer game, stick to your game plan and force them into a slower, more strategic game, one they’re less comfortable with.

## **How to Counter Power Players**

### **Defense:**

- **Strong Serves and Returns:** Hit deep, lofted serves and returns to give yourself time to prepare for their serve returns and third-shot drives. Aim for their backhand and hope they have to use it. Watching them struggle with it can feel oddly satisfying.
- **Block and Volley:** Punch or volley their third-shot drives back to their backhand side; otherwise, expect another forehand drive coming your way. If they're very deep on the court, use soft blocks to drop the ball just over the net. Mastering this skill can end points quickly but requires precision to avoid drawing them in.
- **Read Out-of-Bounds Shots:** Watch for signs they're overhitting, such as a big backswing or attempting to drive a low ball while moving forward. A drive shot angled upward, even if it's just above the net, may fly long thanks to their powerful swing or forward momentum. With practice, you'll instinctively know when to step aside and let them hand you the point.

- **Avoid the Shake and Bake:** Power players will drive the third shot right at you and attack forward looking for anything coming back at them. Block their drive down and away to prevent them from rushing the net to finish the point.

## **Offense:**

- **Drop Shots and Resets:** Hit consistent drop shots to their backhand. A low, well-placed drop can force errors or draw them into the soft game they prefer to avoid. Even a less-than-perfect drop can challenge them when they're reaching and volleying with their backhand. Be ready for aggressive responses to high drops, defend and hit a fifth-shot drop back at them. Keep dropping until one lands, then move in.
- **Drive the Third Shot:** If they send a short return, drive the ball quickly to keep them back. If they hit an aggressive return drive from deep, drive it back at them. Their return drive reaches you quickly, giving them less time to advance before your third shot, turn their own speed against them.

- **Net Play:** Once at the kitchen, dink patiently to their backhand. Avoid their forehand, as they'll try to speed up play. Be prepared for aggressive responses; they often consider most shots attackable, even ones they should leave alone.

### **Key Strategies:**

Stick to your soft, strategic game. Don't change your style to match their aggressive play.

Stay patient and composed. Frustrating their power game forces them into mistakes.

Focus on slowing the game down; after all, the soft game is often their Achilles' heel.

### **Mindset: Embrace the Challenge**

Playing against power players can sometimes seem daunting, but it's a valuable opportunity to grow. Their fast-paced style will test your patience, sharpen your defensive skills, and improve your ability to adapt under pressure.

Some advanced players shy away from power players, feeling that their fast-paced style isn't "real" pickleball or that points end too quickly.



However, there's no one right way to play pickleball, and learning to counter different styles, including aggressive, drive-heavy players, makes you a better, more versatile player.

Take on power players as a challenge. Instead of avoiding them, embrace the opportunity to face their aggressive style head-on. When you figure out how to frustrate their strategy and pull them into your game, the satisfaction of overcoming their brute force will make every victory that much sweeter.

By using drop shots, smart positioning, and consistent defense, you'll turn their aggression into frustration and walk away with a hard-earned victory.

# -Patience in Pickleball

---



After years of playing pickleball, my perspective has shifted: patience has become one of the most important skills in my game. Early on, I focused on quick points and aggressive shots, thinking that was the key to success. Over time, I've come to appreciate that patience allows me to stay consistent, make smarter shot selections, and remain calm under pressure.

-----  
*Read the rest of this post in the full eBook.*

*Visit [Pickleball35.com](https://Pickleball35.com) to purchase the complete eBook for \$9.99.*

# -Poaching Opinions

---



When I started playing Pickleball, it took me a while to understand that poaching is an important part of playing effectively. Whether you're covering for a partner who's late getting to the line after a serve return or stepping in with a strong forehand instead of their backhand, poaching isn't just strategy, it's a skill that elevates your game.

-----  
*Read the rest of this post in the full eBook.*

*Visit [Pickleball35.com](https://Pickleball35.com) to purchase the complete eBook for \$9.99.*

# -From Tennis to Pickleball \*\*

---



As a tennis player stepping into pickleball, you've likely noticed that many of your skills transfer well. Your footwork, hand-eye coordination, and court awareness give you a strong foundation. But as you continue learning, you're also seeing that pickleball has its own unique rhythm, strategies, and shot selection. To reach a higher level of play, it's not just about using your tennis skills—it's about adapting them.

## **Adjusting Your Strategy**

Coming from tennis, you're used to controlling rallies with deep, powerful shots. In pickleball,

however, while drives can be effective, long exchanges often shift toward softer play at the kitchen (non-volley zone). If you've found yourself winning some points with power but struggling against experienced players who control the net, this is why. Mastering the balance between power and control—especially at the kitchen—will be key to your improvement.

## **Understanding the Serve**

By now, you've realized that the pickleball serve is very different from what you're used to in tennis. If you're accustomed to hitting powerful serves that win points outright—whether through speed, spin, or placement—pickleball will require a shift in mindset.

Serves in pickleball must be hit below the waist and follow rules that limit power. While you can still hit effective serves that challenge your opponent, most serves will be returned, and outright winners are much less common. That said, a deep, well-placed serve can make the return more difficult by pushing your opponent back and reducing their ability to attack. Since you only get one serve attempt, consistency is

key—your main goal is to get the serve in and start the rally on favorable terms.

## **The Drop Shot: A Game-Changer**

If you're still hitting deep shots from the baseline and struggling to get to the kitchen, learning the drop shot will be a turning point in your game. Unlike in tennis, where drop shots are often a surprise move, in pickleball, they are an essential tool for advancing to the net.

The biggest difference comes from the Non-Volley Zone (NVZ), or kitchen. In tennis, players can take volleys close to the net and put shots away with ease. In pickleball, however, volleys aren't allowed within the NVZ, which changes the dynamic. If you can drop a shot into this area, you force your opponent to hit up on the ball rather than attacking, effectively neutralizing them at the net. A well-executed drop shot not only buys you time to move forward but also shifts control of the rally in your favor.

## **The Kitchen Game: Where Matches Are Won**

One of the biggest adjustments for tennis players is learning to play effectively at the kitchen. In

tennis, aggressive net play is rewarded, but in pickleball, the kitchen line forces a different approach. If you're still volleying aggressively and finding that opponents keep resetting the ball, it may be time to focus on soft, controlled dinks. Knowing when to slow the game down and when to speed it up is what separates intermediate players from advanced ones.

## **Power vs. Precision**

You may have found early success in pickleball by using your tennis strokes to hit hard and put pressure on opponents. But as you face stronger competition, you'll notice that pure power isn't always the answer. Players who can mix pace, place their shots precisely, and force opponents into difficult positions have the advantage. The best players don't just hit harder—they hit smarter.

## **Refining Your Strategy**

At this stage, you've probably realized that pickleball isn't just about reacting—it's about anticipating and dictating play. The ability to read your opponent, adjust your positioning, and make

smart shot selections will take your game to the next level. Pickleball is often compared to a chess match, where patience and strategy win just as many points as athleticism.

## **Blending Your Skills for Success**

Your tennis background has given you a head start, but reaching the next level in pickleball means refining your skills to fit the game's unique style. The more you integrate finesse, shot placement, and strategic play into your game, the more effective you'll become.

At this stage, you may already be overwhelming some opponents with your power and feeling good about how your tennis skills translate. But as you face more experienced players, they will use techniques that neutralize power, forcing you into a more strategic battle. The sooner you adjust to pickleball's unique demands, the more control you'll have over your game—and the more success you'll find on the court. Keep adjusting, keep learning, and enjoy the journey!



## -Seeing the Court \*\*

---



When I first started playing pickleball, I was happy just to get the ball over the net. Now, after years of practice, I'm starting to *really* see the court, reading patterns, predicting moves, and making smarter decisions.

One big realization was that I had more time than I thought to make my next shot. Once I stopped rushing, I started using my peripheral vision to see the whole court and make smarter plays. Here's how that shift has changed my game, maybe you've noticed some of the same things?

## Spotting Opponent Mistakes

- If my opponents don't advance to the kitchen after their return, or if they hit a short serve return, I drive the third shot at them and move forward to the net.
- I always check for right or left-handed opponents. I see when there are 2 backhands in the middle and that's my target for serve returns, third shot drops, or drives. It's almost always their weak spot.
- If there is a right and left-handed opponent, I always see this before the point starts and, if possible, hit third shot drops to the back hand side of my opponents.

## Eliminating Simple Mistakes

- Early on, I tried to hit winner serves and returns. Sometimes they worked, but many times they missed. Now I focus on depth and placement, challenging my opponents but not trying to win the point outright.
- In post-game reflection, I noticed I was backing up on drop shots. I realized this played right into my opponent's hands. I've

since trained myself to hold my position and volley those shots back at their feet instead.

## **Anticipating Shots**

- When I hit a great third shot drop, when I see it dropping into the kitchen or I see my opponent backing up, I move in aggressively.
- On a poor drop shot, I don't rush in, instead I hang back and prepare to defend, often trying another drop shot to recover my position.
- When I see my partner hitting a third shot drive, I watch carefully and if I see it is low and diving over the net, I move in looking for a popup response.
- When I return serves or other shots into my partner's side in the corner, I instinctively pinch toward the middle, cutting off angles while letting my partner cover the line.

## **Poaching and Disrupting**

- If I see my opponent gearing up to drive a third shot at my partner, I step in and poach to take control.

- On the flip side, when I'm driving the third shot towards the serve returner, I watch for my opponent at the net sneaking in to poach. If I spot it, I change my shot at the last second, hitting behind or at them to disrupt their play.

## **Partner Communication**

- I always focus on helping my partner make smart decisions, calling “No!” or “Watch it!” on close balls near the sideline or baseline.
- If my forehand is in the middle for the third shot, I take the lead and always call out “I've got it” or “You go” so there is no question who is taking the shot.

## Kitchen Vision

- In Dinking exchanges, being patient and knowing I have more time, I see openings. If opponents aren't staying tethered, I notice it and speed up the ball into the open space.
- In fast volleys, if an opponent shot slows down enough, I spot gaps as opponents shift and place the ball in openings they can't play easily.

## Reading the Game

- I've fully embraced the golden rule: "*Shoulder high, let it fly.*" I see this better now and it's saved me countless times from swinging at balls that were clearly destined for the next zip code.
- I watch my opponent's body language, paddle angle, and positioning to anticipate their next move. This awareness helps me react faster and get into the best position to counter their shot.

For me, seeing the court is about more than just vision, it's about slowing down, observing, and taking advantage of every opportunity.

What about you? Have you noticed similar improvements in your game? What else do you see better?



# -From Drives to Drops

---



I learned, as I'm sure you know, that the third shot is perhaps the most important shot in any point in pickleball. It sets the tone for the rally and often determines who takes control of the point.

We've all been there, figuring out the third shot in pickleball can feel like a rite of passage.

-----  
*Read the rest of this post in the full eBook.*

*Visit [Pickleball35.com](https://Pickleball35.com) to purchase the complete eBook for \$9.99.*

# Pickleball Etiquette

Posts on Pickleball  
etiquette.



# -Pickleball Partner Etiquette \*\*

---



---

## **Introduction: Pickleball as a Social Experience**

Pickleball is more than just a game—it's a social activity that brings people together in a fun and engaging way. One of the best parts of pickleball is the opportunity to play at open play venues, where players of all skill levels gather, mix, and match up for games. These settings are all about community, spontaneity, and, most importantly, fun.

At open play, you'll often find yourself partnered with—and playing against—a variety of people. This means every game is a chance to meet

someone new, share some laughs, and enjoy the unique camaraderie that pickleball fosters. It's a dynamic environment where good etiquette isn't just a courtesy—it's a key ingredient to making the experience enjoyable for everyone.

Having great court etiquette ensures that your interactions are positive, your games run smoothly, and people look forward to playing with you again. Whether you're a seasoned player or just starting out, embracing the social side of pickleball and practicing good etiquette will enhance every aspect of the game.

Everyone has their own way of handling etiquette on the court. These are just the things I focus on—no judgment, just my approach. What do you do differently?

---

## **Before the Game: Set the Stage**

Before I start, I take a moment to get to my partner. If I'm meeting them for the first time, I mix some friendly conversation with questions about their experience level. This helps me gauge how best to support them during the game.

Start things off on a positive note—I tap paddles and say something like, “Ok, here we go!” or anything encouraging to set a winning tone.

---

## **Mid-Game: Encourage and Communicate**

When my partner makes a great shot, I acknowledge it right away. A simple “Nice shot!” or “Great get!” goes a long way in building a good relationship with them. For standout moments during a rally, follow up after the point

with something specific like, “That was an amazing lob save.”

Even during the point, a quick “Nice!” or “Great get!” can boost their confidence without breaking focus.

---

## **Line Calls: Handle with Care**

When my partner makes a close line call, I avoid overriding them. If I had a better view and think differently, I quietly share my perspective and let them decide whether to change the call. If opponents question it, I calmly explain, “We saw it out.” Keep it respectful—disputes aren’t worth the energy.

---

## **Pep Talks & On-Court Guidance**

Whether it’s your serve or your partner’s, a little encouragement can help, especially if you’re behind. A quick “Ok, let’s do this!” can help refocus the team. If we win a point, I’ll say something like “Ok, let’s keep this going!”

Help your partner by communicating when they shouldn't play a return. I say "No!" for balls likely to go long and "Watch it!" for borderline shots. Most partners appreciate the help.

---

## **Sharing the Court: Balance and Communication**

Don't take over the court unless your partner specifically asks for it. For shots down the middle, I communicate clearly with "I got it" or "You Go." Prioritize shots on your forehand side but be mindful of your partner's positioning. If I accidentally take a shot they expected, I explain briefly—"Sorry, it was on my forehand." And if they correct you, acknowledge it with a quick "You're right, my bad."

## **Feedback: When (and How) to Give It**

If my partner asks for advice during the game, I keep it simple and positive. If they apologize for a mistake, I reassure them with “Don’t worry, you’re doing fine.” I avoid offering unsolicited feedback and save any suggestions for after the game if they seem open to it.

Post-game, if my partner is new and I feel like I could offer some guidance, I start with, “Great playing with you!” If they mention anything negative about their performance or share that they’re just starting out, I take it as an opportunity to offer advice. Usually something like, “Can I share a couple of tips?” I focus on strategies like positioning or movement instead of critiquing their shot technique. For example: “I noticed that after returning the serve, you didn’t always move up to the net. Doing this consistently can really elevate your game,” rather than saying, “Your dink shot needs work.”

---

## **In Summary: Be the Partner Everyone Wants**

In summary, I try to communicate well, offer encouragement, and keep things constructive. My goal is to leave a positive impression, so your partner is excited to team up again. For me, pickleball is not just about competition—it's a social game where having fun is just as important as winning. What do you think, how do you act in these non-competitive games?

# -Pickleball Opponent Etiquette

---



Everyone brings their own personality to the court—some are competitive firecrackers, and others are as chill as a summer breeze. These tips are simple suggestions to help you be a thoughtful and enjoyable opponent—no judgment, just ideas to make every game better for everyone involved.

-----

*Read the rest of this post in the full eBook.*

*Visit [Pickleball35.com](https://Pickleball35.com) to purchase the complete eBook for \$9.99.*



## -Handling Serve Legality Disputes

---



Ah, the pickleball serve legality dispute—a classic tale as old as the kitchen line. If you’re using the traditional volley serve, chances are you’ll eventually hear an opponent yell, “That serve isn’t legal!” And let’s be honest, they might not even be sure what the rules are—they just don’t like losing.

-----  
*Read the rest of this post in the full eBook.*

*Visit [Pickleball35.com](https://Pickleball35.com) to purchase the complete eBook for \$9.99.*

# -Playing Up, Playing Down

---



Pickleball is such a unique journey for every player, and I've noticed that transitioning from open play to leveled play is a milestone many of us experience. I wanted to share my story—not because it's extraordinary, but because I think others might relate or even find it helpful as they navigate their own progression. Whether you're just starting out or trying to move up a level, this is part of what I've learned along the way.

-----

*Read the rest of this post in the full eBook.*

*Visit [Pickleball35.com](https://Pickleball35.com) to purchase the complete eBook for \$9.99.*

# Popular Facebook Posts – Payton Bond

A collection of FaceBook posts by  
Payton Bond.

Many articles in this section are shorter  
versions(designed for FaceBook) of  
original Posts included previously in this  
document.

## -Seeing the Court

---



Content for this section is not included in the sample. Visit [Pickleball35.com](https://Pickleball35.com) to purchase the complete eBook for \$9.99.

## **-Playing Up, Playing Down \*\***

---

Pickleball is such a unique journey for every player, and transitioning from open play to leveled play is a milestone many of us experience. I wanted to share my story—not because it’s extraordinary, but because I think others might relate or even find it helpful as they navigate their own progression. Whether you’re just starting out or working to move up a level, this is part of what I’ve learned along the way.

### **The Journey**

When I started playing pickleball five years ago, the only option I had was full open play—no leveled play at all. I was happy to play with anyone and everyone. Some players were much better, and some were still figuring things out. I focused on understanding the game and strategy, soaking up as much as I could from the stronger players.

Over time, I started seeking out leveled open play. I realized I could compete with better players, and I was growing tired of the wide skill range at open play, especially playing with beginners just

starting out. My first few visits to 3.5 open play were tough, but I pushed through. By that point, I'd been playing for 2–3 years, and it felt like I had “graduated” from general open play to something more focused.

The 3.5 leveled open play wasn't perfect—it had a mix of lower and higher 3.5 players. Some days, I felt like I didn't belong there, and other days, I thought some other players didn't either. It's never an exact science, but it was closer to what I was looking for.

Now, I gravitate toward playing with higher-level players because that's where I continue to challenge myself and improve. But I still enjoy playing with beginners, especially friends who are learning. I feel like I've spent my time at open play, learning from and helping others, and now I'm at a stage where I seek more competitive games.

If everyone goes through this process in pickleball, I think it's a good thing. I still find myself playing with people who are playing up or playing down, but it's much closer now. The players playing up usually try it a few times, and

they either rise to the level or naturally move back down. It's all part of the journey—playing with a mix of people at all levels before “graduating” to more competitive play.

## -Third Shot Progression

---

Content for this section is not included in the sample. Visit [Pickleball35.com](https://Pickleball35.com) to purchase the complete eBook for \$9.99.



# -The Power of Resilience in Pickleball \*\*

Have you ever felt like a single mistake completely threw you off your game? Maybe you missed an easy shot, and instead of letting it go, you let it snowball—grumbling to yourself, tensing up, and making more errors. Or perhaps your partner made a few bad plays, and suddenly, frustration takes over. Before you know it, you're playing distracted, out of sync, and struggling to get back in the zone.

This is where resilience makes all the difference.

## **What Does Resilience Look Like in Pickleball?**

In pickleball, resilience is a player's ability to recover quickly after losing a point, making a mistake, or struggling with a dip in performance. It's about staying mentally tough, maintaining focus, and pushing through the challenges that will inevitably arise in a match.

## **Why Does This Matter?**

Imagine you're trailing by a few points. A player lacking resilience might panic, get frustrated, or start playing recklessly. A resilient player, on the

other hand, sees this as a chance to regroup, adjust their strategy, and fight their way back into the game. Instead of letting frustration take over, they stay composed, analyze what's happening, and make smart adjustments.

Resilient players also manage momentum well. When their opponent starts gaining the upper hand, they don't just hope things turn around. They recognize the shift and actively make changes, whether that's adjusting their serve, hitting with more spin, or focusing on shot placement.

Mistakes are inevitable in any game, but resilient players don't let unforced errors define them. Whether it's a footwork mistake, a misjudged ball, or a poor shot selection, they process it quickly, learn from it, and move on. A losing streak can be especially frustrating, but resilient players don't let it shake their confidence. Instead, they see every match as a fresh start, reflect on what went wrong, identify areas for improvement, and come back with a clear game plan.

They are also adaptive. If an opponent starts exploiting a weakness, they adjust their approach, whether that means changing shot selection, altering court positioning, or shifting their mindset to stay one step ahead.

## **Resilience Test**

Do you give up when you're down by many points in a game, or do you keep fighting? I see players stop playing with focus and literally throw in the towel when they're losing by a lot. One of the best feelings I've had playing pickleball is coming back from a big deficit—think 8-1 or a game that seemed out of reach. Coming back in these situations is a sign of resilience and mental toughness. If you tend to check out when the score isn't in your favor, challenge yourself to fight until the very last point.

## **Staying Focused Under Pressure**

When the pressure is on—like at game point—resilient players don't let distractions take over. They tune out negative thoughts, ignore the scoreboard, and focus entirely on their next shot. This ability to stay composed under pressure is

what often separates good players from great ones.

## **Final Thoughts**

Building resilience in pickleball doesn't happen overnight, but it develops through experience and mindset. It's about learning to replace negative self-talk with productive adjustments and recognizing that while you can't control every point, you can control how you respond.

The best players aren't the ones who never make mistakes, but the ones who recover from them the fastest.

So, the next time you find yourself in a tough match, ask yourself: Are you letting frustration control your game, or are you using resilience to turn things around?

## -Pickleball Partner Etiquette

---

Content for this section is not included in the sample. Visit [Pickleball35.com](https://Pickleball35.com) to purchase the complete eBook for \$9.99.

## -The Split Step

---

Content for this section is not included in the sample. Visit [Pickleball35.com](https://Pickleball35.com) to purchase the complete eBook for \$9.99.

## -Defending Drop Shots

---

Content for this section is not included in the sample. Visit [Pickleball35.com](https://Pickleball35.com) to purchase the complete eBook for \$9.99.

## -Who's Taking the Third Shot?

---

Content for this section is not included in the sample. Visit [Pickleball35.com](https://Pickleball35.com) to purchase the complete eBook for \$9.99.



## -The Power Player Challenge \*\*

As I've played over the years, I've faced all types of opponents, each with their own unique style of play. From my perspective, there's no right or wrong in pickleball, every style deserves respect. Whether you prefer a soft game with drop shots to advance to the net, as I do, or rely on powerful drive shots to overwhelm your opponents, your style is your own.

I often play with friends who are aggressive players, relying heavily on drives and rarely using drop shots. Dink rallies tend to be shorter with them, sometimes so short I wonder why I bothered running to the kitchen in the first place. I occasionally joke that they need to slow their game down, but they just shrug and say, "*Why mess with what works?*" I win some, I lose some, but I always enjoy the challenge, and the occasional laugh.

Playing a softer, more strategic game is great, but to advance, you'll eventually have to face power players. Rather than shying away from them or labeling them, embrace the challenge. These aggressive players rely on relentless drives to

dominate, and their fast-paced style can feel overwhelming. But here's the good news: even though many come from tennis and look like they were born with a racquet in hand, they're not unbeatable. If you play a softer game, stick to your game plan and force them into a slower, more strategic game, one they're less comfortable with.

---

## How to Counter Power Players

### Defense:

- **Strong Serves and Returns:** Hit deep, lofted serves and returns to give yourself time to prepare for their serve returns and third-shot drives. Aim for their backhand and hope they have to use it. Watching them struggle with it can feel oddly satisfying.
- **Block and Volley:** Punch or volley their third-shot drives back to their backhand side; otherwise, expect another forehand drive coming your way. If they're very deep on the court, use soft blocks to drop the ball just

over the net. Mastering this skill can end points quickly but requires precision to avoid drawing them in.

- **Read Out-of-Bounds Shots:** Watch for signs they're overhitting, such as a big backswing or attempting to drive a low ball while moving forward. A drive shot angled upward, even if it's just above the net, may fly long thanks to their powerful swing or forward momentum. With practice, you'll instinctively know when to step aside and let them hand you the point.
- **Avoid the Shake and Bake:** Power players will drive the third shot right at you and attack forward looking for anything coming back at them. Block their drive down and away to prevent them from rushing the net to finish the point.

## **Offense:**

- **Drop Shots and Resets:** Hit consistent drop shots to their backhand. A low, well-placed drop can force errors or draw them into the

soft game they prefer to avoid. Even a less-than-perfect drop can challenge them when they're reaching and volleying with their backhand. Be ready for aggressive responses to high drops, defend and hit a fifth-shot drop back at them. Keep dropping until one lands, then move in.

- **Drive the Third Shot:** If they send a short return, drive the ball quickly to keep them back. If they hit an aggressive return drive from deep, drive it back at them. Their return drive reaches you quickly, giving them less time to advance before your third shot, turn their own speed against them.
- **Net Play:** Once at the kitchen, dink patiently to their backhand. Avoid their forehand, as they'll try to speed up play. Be prepared for aggressive responses; they often consider most shots attackable, even ones they should leave alone.

## Key Strategies:

Stick to your soft, strategic game. Don't change your style to match their aggressive play.

Stay patient and composed. Frustrating their power game forces them into mistakes.

Focus on slowing the game down; after all, the soft game is often their Achilles' heel.

## **Mindset: Embrace the Challenge**

Playing against power players can sometimes seem daunting, but it's a valuable opportunity to grow. Their fast-paced style will test your patience, sharpen your defensive skills, and improve your ability to adapt under pressure.

Some advanced players shy away from power players, feeling that their fast-paced style isn't "real" pickleball or that points end too quickly. However, there's no one right way to play pickleball, and learning to counter different styles, including aggressive, drive-heavy players, makes you a better, more versatile player.

Take on power players as a challenge. Instead of avoiding them, embrace the opportunity to face their aggressive style head-on. When you figure out how to frustrate their strategy and pull them

into your game, the satisfaction of overcoming their brute force will make every victory that much sweeter.

By using drop shots, smart positioning, and consistent defense, you'll turn their aggression into frustration and walk away with a hard-earned victory.

## -Popular FaceBook Quotes \*\*

---

**Good sportsmanship goes a long way in building pickleball relationships. A simple 'nice shot' or 'great point' works.**

**The best players aren't the ones who never make mistakes, but the ones who recover from them the fastest.**

END OF SAMPLE

If you liked this Sample, visit [Pickleball35.com](https://Pickleball35.com) to buy the full eBook.

Thank You for supporting Pickleball35.com.