

-Pinching the Middle



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.”**

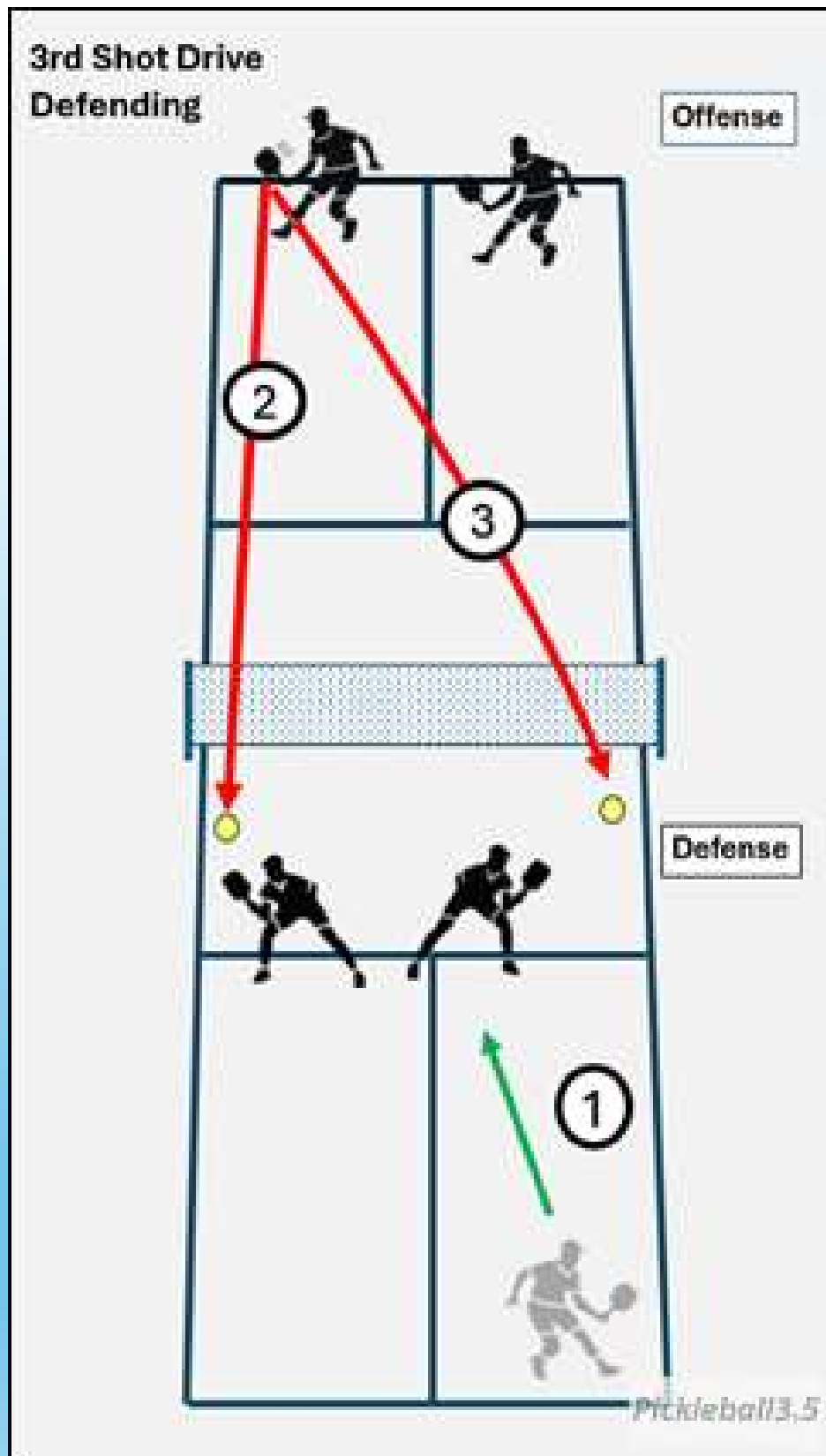
Think of it like squeezing a tube of toothpaste—if you leave gaps, things are going to get messy fast.

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 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”.

[Back to Table of Contents](#)