

## -Stepping In with Your Forehand



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.

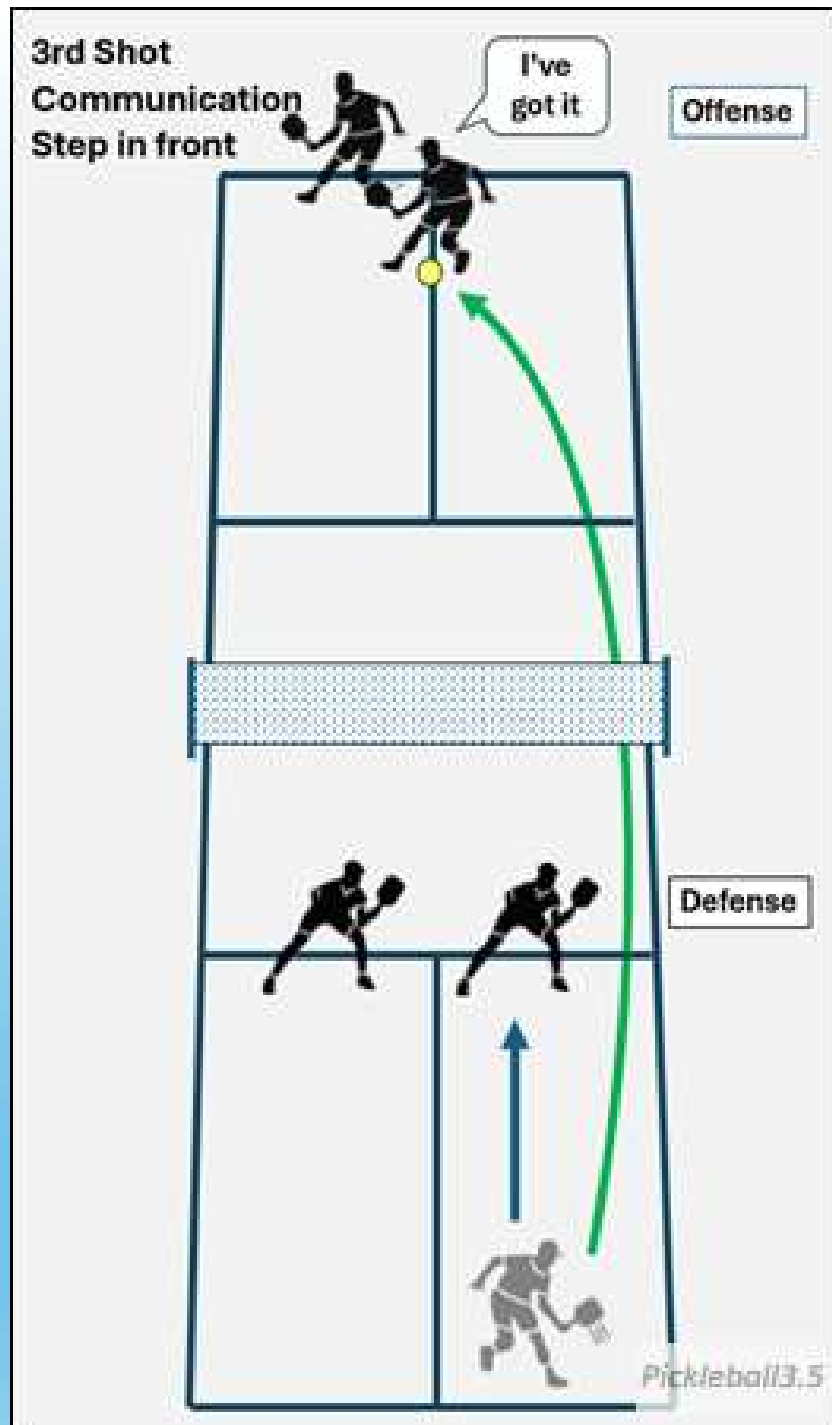
## **Why Forehand Dominance Matters**

Let's break it down:

- **Your Opponent's Strategy:** They aim for the server's backhand, expecting a weaker response.
- **Your Response:** Instead of allowing the server to take it, their partner steps in to use their forehand, which is often more powerful and controlled.

This move requires trust and communication. Without it, confusion can arise, and your partner may feel as though their role is being diminished.

The illustration below shows the player with their forehand in the middle stepping in front and communicating they will hit the third shot.



## The Scenario: Stepping in to Play the Third Shot

Picture this:

- The serve is returned up the middle, slightly toward the server's backhand.
- The server's partner, positioned with their forehand in the middle, steps in front of the server to take the shot.
- With a quick, decisive call—"I've got it"—they play their forehand hitting a drop shot or drive.

## Communicating When You Step In

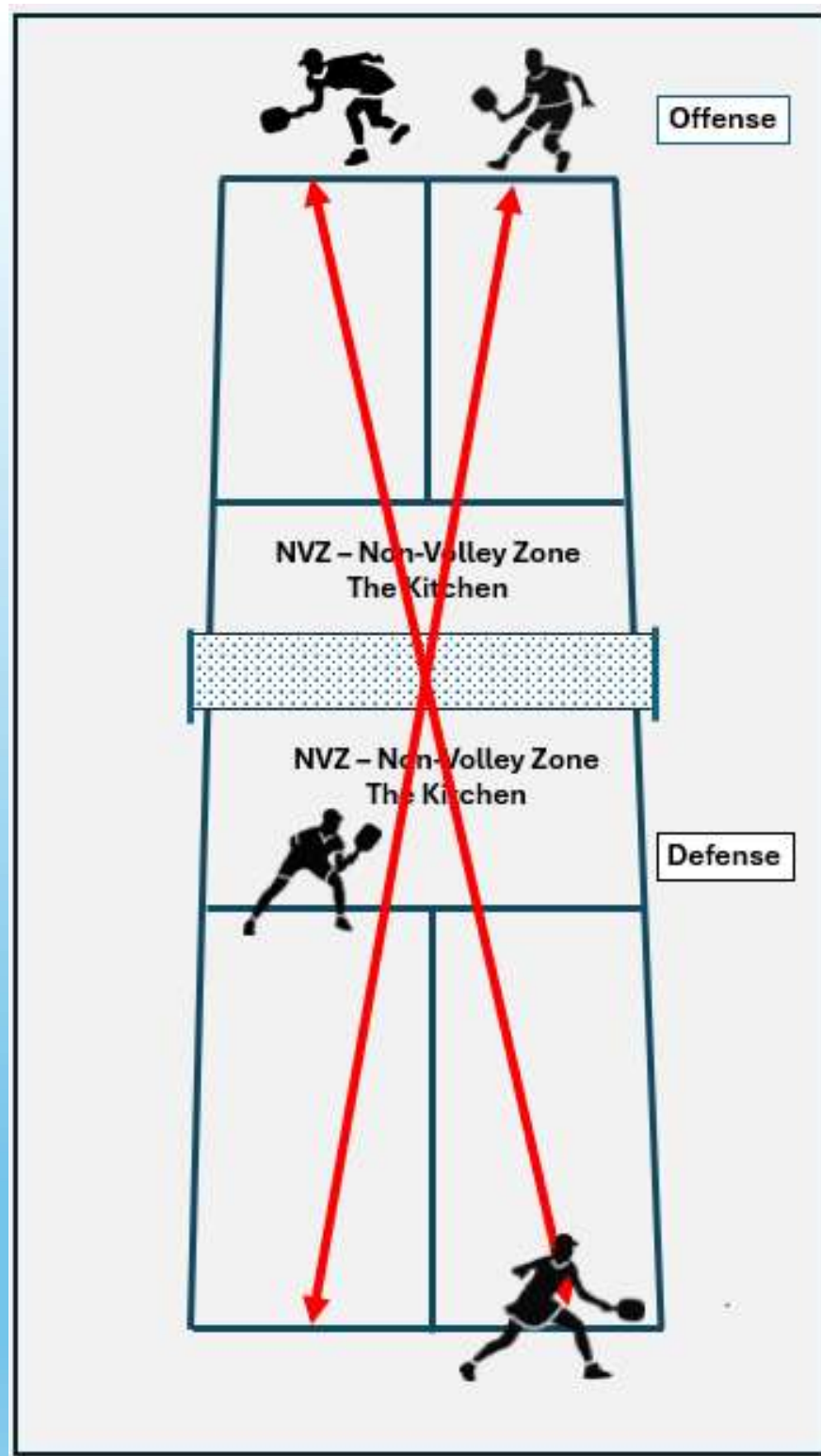
When stepping in front of your partner to take the third shot, clear communication is key. Here's how to handle it effectively:

- **Call It Early:** Say "I've got it!" confidently as soon as you decide to step in.

- **Explain When Needed:** If your partner seems surprised, clarify that the forehand was the stronger option in that moment.
- **Build Trust:** Frame it as a team strategy rather than an individual decision.

To make this approach work smoothly, you and your partner should discuss and practice it together.

The illustration below shows the X for the “Respect the X” strategy.



## **Respecting the X: An Alternative Approach**

While stepping in for a forehand is often a strong play, there's another strategy to consider—**Respecting the X**.

The idea behind “Respect the X” is that each player should cover their side of the court based on natural positioning rather than stepping in to take over. Instead of always prioritizing a forehand in the middle, you trust your partner to take the shot that comes to their side.

When is this the better approach?

- **If the server's backhand is solid and they are comfortable executing the third shot.**
- **If stepping in would disrupt positioning, leaving the court exposed.**

- **If your opponent is expecting you to step in and is prepared to counter.**

Choosing between stepping in and respecting the X depends on experience, communication, and how well you and your partner understand each other's strengths.



## Summary

As you refine your game, knowing when to step in and when to stay put is essential. A strong forehand can be a great advantage, but respecting court balance and communication is just as important.

By practicing both strategies—stepping in when it's the best play and trusting your partner when the situation calls for it—you'll become a more adaptable and effective doubles player.

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