



Key Points from the
[Kitchen Domination](#)
course





WELCOME & COURSE INTRODUCTION



Welcome & Introduction

Welcome to the **Kitchen Domination** course! Being successful in Pickleball (especially at the higher levels) means being successful at the Kitchen. The kitchen is what makes our game of Pickleball unique and if you can learn to use the kitchen to your advantage, more wins are sure to follow for you!

In the following lessons, you're going to learn:

- * why it's strategically important to play from the kitchen line whenever possible
- * how to get to the kitchen as the serving team and as the returning team
- * kitchen squares and triangles
- * playing at the kitchen with your opponents back
- * playing at the kitchen when your opponents are up at the kitchen line as well
- * the kitchen as a reset area
- * drills to improve your play at the kitchen line
- * and more...!

We're excited you're joining us in this course, and we know it will help to improve your pickleball in measurable ways. Take notes, rewatch the content , and (most importantly) take what you're learning out on the court!

See you in the next lesson!



Introduction to the Kitchen

- The Kitchen is the space on the court from the net to 7 feet out on the court
- The Kitchen is also referred to as the No Volley Zone (NVZ)
- You may not take a ball out of the air while any part of your body is in the Kitchen
- When you place a shot that bounces in your opponents' kitchen, you have temporarily neutralized any advantage they might have had and essentially 'reset' the point
- The extra time the bounce in the kitchen buys you allows you to recover or to advance closer up to the kitchen yourself
- As such, an 'attackable' ball should not be hit into the opponents' kitchen. Hitting into the kitchen allows you to maintain Neutral or get to Neutral (from Defense). If you're in Offense (or have a chance to get to Offense) take advantage of it!
- Because of the two-bounce rule, the Returning team has the opportunity to get to the kitchen line as a team first and have the advantageous position



GETTING TO THE KITCHEN



Maintaining Your Advantage as the Returning Team

- As the Returning Team, you and your partner have the positional advantage on the court due to the two-bounce rule
- Look to keep Dominating when you're up at the kitchen line and your opponents are back
 - Make the Serving Team 'earn' their way up to the kitchen line
 - Create offense with Power, Placement, and/or Spin
- Many players will hit their 4th-shot as a 'neutralizing' shot and this can cause them to lose their advantage
- Try to keep the deepest opponent back by hitting in front of their feet
- When you get an opening, take it!
- Taking time away from your opponents is not as important as hitting the 'best' shot you can. Hitting a poor volley is much less effective than hitting a well-placed drop, drive, or offensive lob
- The surprise element is part of what it means to 'Dominate'

Why this is important – As the Returning Team, you have the opportunity to get on offense first. When you're the serving team, you have to earn your way up to the kitchen line, so leverage your positional advantage as the Returning Team to keep the Serving team from getting points. Side Out!

Getting to the Kitchen as the Returning Team

- This game is about getting to the kitchen FIRST. There is no medal for 2nd place.
- The further back the returner starts, they can come up (move forward) on any serve. Momentum will take them toward the kitchen line
- Think of the return of serve as an 'approach shot' to put pressure on your opponents



- The approach shot is ideally followed by a volley. The approach shot itself should not be thought of as a winner
- You are approaching the net as you're hitting your return
- Move forward as the ball travels and stop when it bounces
- If your pace is slower, you may want to hit a higher, arcing ball to give yourself more time to get (as close as you can) to the kitchen line
- Remember the 3 Rs...Ready, Read, React
- Unforced errors and lack of patience are often reasons why the receiving team doesn't win the point
- The up player on the return team should move and get the opposition thinking about a possible poach
- Advance to the kitchen on balls that bounce
- Returning team = "Hit and Go"
- Serving team = "Wait and See"
- As the Returning Team, don't hit balls to your opponents that are short in the court that they can advance on. Hit to their feet, if they're back, and work to keep them back

Why this is important – Half you your team, as the Return Team, should be at/near the kitchen line. As the returner, you want to join your partner there so that you have the advantageous position and improve your odds of winning the point and getting a side out.

Getting to the Kitchen as the Serving Team

- As the Serving Team, aim your drops into the kitchen triangle on the returner's side of the court
- It may take two soft shots in the same direction (as the Serving Team) to advance up to the kitchen



- Hit the ball with more arc (peaking on your side of the court) vs. flat to give yourself more time to advance up to the kitchen line
- Once both teams are up at the kitchen line, the dinking game begins
- Move the ball around in the kitchen and look for pop-ups that you can attack.
- Hit a ball that bounces to buy yourself more time when in trouble (dink or lob into a reset area)
- Reach in and try to take anything in the back half of the kitchen out of the air to take time away from your opponents
- You and your partner should know your roles (based on where they ball is in the opposition's court) and should never be looking for the same ball.

Why this is important – Your only chance to score points is when you're the serving team. The two-bounce rule gives the advantage to the returning team, but all hope is not lost. Be skillful and deliberate in your shot selection as outlined above to advance up to the kitchen line, get to neutral, and try to take over the point from there by looking for unforced errors from your opponents

Offense Zone

- Here's where you and your partner want to be and where you want to play the most Pickleball
- The Offense Zone (dinking) is what separates the higher-level players from lower-level.
- The goal is to build up a point and patiently wait for the right ball that you can attack (that ball is hit hard and down at either the middle, in front of yourself, or sharply cross-court). Until then, you keep resetting and patiently building the point
- Know where your winner is (normally right in front of you to the opponent with less time).
- When all 4 players are here, the dinking game begins



- When in the Offense Zone, either dinking or volleying, think 'outside-to-outside' and 'inside-to-inside' for best teamwork and results
 - If you don't want to get beat down the middle, don't hit down the middle from the Offense Zone (unless opponents are in Wrong Way Wanda)
- Understand that the receiving team has the advantage of getting to the Offense Zone first due to the two-bounce rule.
 - The serving team has to 'earn' their way up to the kitchen line by hitting NON-ATTACKABLE balls
 - When the receiving team takes the Offense Zone first, the odds are that they will win the point. **This is what makes it so hard to score in this game!**
- Volley as many balls as you can reach. There will be less time for your opponents to react
- You must develop confidence in your overhead if you're going to play from the Offense Zone
- As the receiving team, this is where you want to play 2 against 1
- Whenever you hit cross-court, part of you has to acknowledge that any lobs hit by your opponent are yours to get
- Think above the net (hit down on balls) and below the net (reset)
- When all four players are in the Offense Zone, hold your ground! Don't back up! Keep your paddles out in front, block the hard balls with reflex volleys and respond to dinks with other dinks (reset, neutral, or offensive dinks)
- For those targets, we use kitchen squares
 - 3 reset squares (1,2, and 3) and
 - 3 offensive squares (4,5, and 6)
- You are expecting an attack which you must defend by
 - Attacking back hard (easiest response)
 - Resetting soft, or
 - Lobbing
- High balls should be hit hard (aggressively) for the highest percentage shot either



- straight in front (keeping your team in a good position should the ball come back),
- down the middle to expose a gap between your opponents, or
- sharp cross-court if the middle is covered

Why this is important – Your objective should be to get to here to take the advantage (typically receiving team) or get to neutral as the serving team. Strategy, patience, and comfort level in the Offense Zone is often what separates the higher-level players from the lower-level players. The dinking game occurs when both teams establish themselves here and you need to know how to get the advantage.



DOMINATING BASED ON COURT POSITIONING



Two Up and Two Back

- When you're at the kitchen line and your opponents (one or both) are back, you have to be in an 'Offensive' mindset
- The closer you hit to their feet, the less likely they will hit something that can hurt you. They're reacting
- It's normally easier to find the feet of the deepest player (unless it's a high ball which might make hitting to the feet of the closer opponent easier)
- The strategy should be to play 2 against 1 with the deepest opponent
- Patience and good execution should have you winning in this situation the vast majority of times (if not all)
- When your opponents are in Transition Zone, they are still not yet in Offense Zone...continue to keep them back!
- If an opponent is coming in fast on a ball they shouldn't have approached on (this is done typically by less-skilled players), beat them with a sharp angle
- For higher-skilled players that stop, aim at their feet
- 'Un-attackable' balls are those that bounce in the kitchen (NVZ)
- In this formation, ideally the team up should be hitting down to the team in the back. The team in the back is hitting up to the team at the kitchen line
- Confidence at the kitchen line comes from learning to hit well-placed volleys. Give your opponents fewer angles when possible
- Volleys that aren't outright winners are approach shots that help you build the point for the eventual winning shot
- Wear them down over time

Why this is important – This is an ideal formation if you are the team up at the kitchen line. You have the advantage of position, your opponents are hitting up to you, and you can methodically wear them down until they make an unforced error or you get the winning shot. Have patience here and good things will inevitably happen for you.



Both Teams at the Kitchen

- Look for the bounce to give you and your partner the opportunity to start playing 2 against 1
- Your goal here should be to defend and not miss
- You are on the lookout for a pop-up that you can attack
- You do this by moving the ball around and trying to get your opponents off-balance and in trouble
- We discuss triangles and squares later in the course. These will help you with your strategy here at the kitchen
- These will help you make good decisions and not get beat

Why this is important – This situation is going to happen from time to time. As the Serving Team you have 'earned' your way up to the kitchen line and now you've gone from Defense to Neutral. This is where the dinking game begins, and you have to feel comfortable working from here and looking for pop-ups that you can attack or an opportunity to put the other team on Defense (with a well-timed offensive lob, for example)

Drills - Inside to Inside and Outside to Outside

- Drill to work on discipline of staying cross-court without missing and not hitting attackable balls
- The lines that make the triangles used for defining inside and outside in the kitchen are perfect for aligning your shoulder and ball path when hitting in this drill
- Start the drill by hitting into the middle and then work your way to the outside triangles
- Step back with one foot or use a cross-over step depending in the depth of the ball from your hitting partner
- Go back to the middle after a while and practice hitting both forehands and backhands
- In a match, if someone goes to the middle from outside, you need to make them pay for it



Why this is important – It's important to get comfortable dinking at the kitchen line but also knowing where to dink. It needs to become instinctual that you're hitting outside-to-outside and not outside-to-middle unless there's a clear winner. You'll put your team in a bad situation. Drilling this will help reinforce this so that you're thinking about it less during a match and just hitting the right shots as habit.



DIAMONDS, TRIANGLES, & SQUARES



Kitchen Triangles & Diamonds

- These are targets we use based on where the ball is and where we are
- There are 4 triangles on your opponents' court – 2 in the kitchen and 2 deep triangles near the baseline
- The area in the middle of the court formed by the outsides of the triangle is the diamond. In most cases, you are looking for balls that your opponents hit here to take advantage of, and you are looking to avoid hitting to the diamond in your opponents' court.
- Build a point through the triangle targets on the court
- Hit 'outside to outside' and wait for your opponents to hit inside
- A ball hit to your 'inside' on the court should be considered an Opportunity!
- The deep triangles on the court are hit by lobs, not drives
- In general, triangles are always hit by SLOW BALLS
- Build the point through the outsides
- Hitting to the middle of your opponents' court is ok if you are attacking (dictating the point)

Why this is important – Think of the triangles and diamonds as your map on the court, showing you where it's safe and where there's danger. Know the locations on your opponents' court and use them to hit shots that won't get you in trouble. Also be aware of when your opponents hit the 'danger' areas on your court and be ready to take advantage and put the ball away!

Kitchen Squares

- Squares 1, 2, and 3 are resets you aim for when you're in trouble
- Squares 4, 5, and 6 are where you are dictating points



- In between them is the 'neutral' line that you can aim for when in trouble so that you don't overshoot and give your opponents an attackable ball
- When you're in trouble, don't give your opponents a volley to hit
- Hitting the 1, 2, and 3 squares is easier when hitting from YOUR 1, 2, and 3 squares
- Straight ahead is generally better than trying to create a longer angle across the court
- When you're in trouble, you don't want to hit a ball that puts you in more trouble on the next shot
- Look out for getting yourself into **Wrong Way Wanda!**

Why It's Important – The kitchen is not just a area of the court 7 feet from the net. It can also be thought of as made up of smaller sections where hitting to them takes on a more offensive or defensive posture. It also helps you understand, as a Blocker and as a Workhorse, what areas of the kitchen are yours to defend

When to Use Squares and Triangles

- Use triangles to construct a point. You can aim for the triangles from anywhere on the court
- Squares are used as targets only when we're up at the kitchen line (NVZ)
- To dominate at the kitchen, it's important to have a solid dinking game
- As you strive to become a better player, respect the bounce in the kitchen from your opponents and respond with a bouncing ball. Don't try to attack until your dinking game is solid
- Match shots hit to your 1, 2, and 3 to your opponents' 1, 2, and 3
- DON'T match 4, 5, and 6 to 4, 5, and 6 because that's offense on offense

Why this is important – Keep these targets in mind from anywhere on the court. Kitchen squares when you're up dinking and triangles (kitchen and



deep) from anywhere on the court. This will help with your accuracy, help get you out of trouble by resetting, and keep you from getting too aggressive on your shots that will lead to hitting your opponents' paddles and prematurely ending the point!

Reset Areas - The Kitchen

- The entire kitchen is a reset area and a go-to target when in trouble.
- Anytime you drop into the kitchen, you have bought some time and temporarily brought your team to neutral
- Within the kitchen we have three triangles
 - Two outside and one in the middle
 - Outside to outside triangle, middle to middle are the safest shots
 - If you're outside then going middle, you won't know which opponent will be hitting it, and thus what role you have.
- Kitchen squares 1,2,3 are reset areas and 4,5,6 are more for offensive/dictating shots.
- The kitchen area is a level separator.
- It's a chess game at the higher levels vs. 'don't miss it' at the lower levels.
- Because closer to the net post the net is higher, you need to get comfortable with the steepness.
- Reset allows you to become the Blocker and have the little 'V' of court coverage.
- Learn to reset into the kitchen area from all over the court

Why this is important – Because no volleys can be taken there, a well-placed shot into the kitchen, is a great way to reset a point. Closer to the net (squares 1, 2, and 3) will do this more effectively than deeper in the kitchen (squares 4, 5, and 6). Getting comfortable at the kitchen line is a big level-separator vs. less-skilled players.



MAINTAINING OFFENSE



How to Dominate Against Bangers

- There is some common misunderstandings out there about what the objective should be when playing against hard-hitting 'bangers'
- Bangers will tend to attack their opponents (up in the Offense Zone) from their position in the Defense Zone
- Don't bring the bangers at the baseline in with shots that are short in their court. Keep them back
- Don't surrender and hit soft against hard shots from your opponents
- As you get more skilled, you can try some soft shots (hitting drop/reflex volleys)
- Drop/Reflex volleys require advanced skills and shouldn't be your first choice
- Ricocheting the ball back hard and fast will help to 'neutralize' the attack from bangers
- You can eliminate the hard shot cross-court from the bangers because that shot will go out
 - As a result you and your partner can move over to the center of the court more
 - And you should be taking most of your volleys as backhands (better control)
- Block the shot back toward the center of the court so as not to hit it in the net or hit it out
- If the banger tries to hit the same hard shot on a ball from mid-court, it is going to go out!
- Maintain your offense by hitting hard back
- In preparation, have your paddle up above the level of the oncoming ball
- The middle ball is always covered by the cross-court player (Workhorse) on defense and the down-the-line is covered by the Blocker

Why this is important – You are going to come up against hard-hitting 'banger' opponents at some point and you need to know how to play successfully



against this style. Don't fall into the trap of trying to hit softly against opponents who are driving hard shots from the baseline. Hit hard back, and use the Blocker and Workhorse roles and responsibilities to position yourself to defend 100% of your court (and let balls that should go out...go out!)

Maintaining Offense Against a Drop

- Observe how good the drop is and keep in mind the objective to keep the deepest opponent back
- Don't aim down-the-middle because a good drop below the net, when hit down-the-middle, can be intercepted (poached) by the other opponent!
- Know where your opponents are on the court – have the advanced up toward the kitchen line (NVZ)
- Drive down the middle (or lob) if they run in too far (overrun)
- Don't hit the ball short in your opponent's court – you're inviting them to advance up to the kitchen line
- Keep whoever is back, back! Even if it means passing up an opportunity like Wrong Way Wanda...build the point
- You're still dominating and in great position
- Placement over Power!

Why this is important – A drop into your kitchen is typically a great shot from your opponents. They are attempting to neutralize the point. You still have the advantage and are working to maintain it. Depending on how good the drop is, you'll have a number of options. The focus here is to keep the advantage by keeping at least one opponent back in the court.



Maintaining Offense Against a Drive

- As always, but especially with a drive, it's important to try to read what shot is coming from your opponents (as you'll have less time to react)
- Be ready for the worst (least time to prepare) scenario which is a fast, hard ball (drive)
- The partner cross-court from the ball (the Workhorse) should pinch the middle and take most of the drives that come across the net (other than a down-the-line)
- When the ball is coming hard, you don't want to:
 - pop it up
 - spray it
 - miss it
- Volley the ball back just as hard as it's coming. Don't try to take pace off of it
- The majority of volleys should be taken as backhands

Why this is important – You have less time to react with a drive, so it's important that you're ready. Hit hard on hard. You do not want to give up the advantage here by popping it up, spraying the ball wide, missing into the net, or hitting short shots that bring your opponents up closer to the kitchen. Keep your positional advantage.

Maintaining Offense Against a Lob

- If your opponents are lobbing back because you hit a return deep in the court to them, it should not be a surprise. It's a defensive lob and you should be ready and take it out of the air
- Don't let the lob bounce and lose your offense
- Hitting overheads makes it harder for your opponents to hit more lobs!



- If your opponents have a short ball where they could more easily hit a variety of shots, you have to be prepared for a drive or a good drop and the lob might be a surprise (offensive)
- If this happens, remember it's just one point and you'll be more prepared for that the next time it occurs
- Think "What would i do if I were in their position" to help with your preparation
- When you're dominating, you will want to take your own lobs (vs the Workhorse in defensive situations) to keep the ball from bouncing and keep your advantage
- Learn what your opponents look like when they drive, drop, and lob to help you better prepare for what is likely coming

Why this is important – In most cases, you should be expecting a lob (like from a deep return) and it shouldn't come as a surprise. In rare circumstances, you might get be by a surprise lob because you were prepared for a different shot, but learn from that and you'll be more prepared next time.



DRILLS & CONCLUSION



Play the Long Game

- When you have the positional advantage up at the kitchen line (and your opponents are back), the deck is stacked in your favor to win
- Put your partner in a good position to protect you and win the point
- Hit to the opponent cross-court when you've gone back behind your partner

Drills to Help You Dominate

- Great situational practice is one team at the kitchen line and the other team at the baseline
 - The team at the baseline works on how to hit shots to advance up to the kitchen line
 - The team at the kitchen line is working on maintaining their offense (dominating)
 - As the team at the baseline, advancing is important, but getting every ball back is more important
- You can put some cones to make an imaginary line halfway up the court of the team on defense (at the baseline)
 - The team in offense has to hit every ball past the imaginary line (or in the case of overheads, the ball should be struck by the team in defense past that line)
 - It's a cooperative drill where all four players will get better
- The team at the kitchen should practice hitting in front of themselves vs. cross-court
- You can play to 5 with rally scoring and then rotate players clockwise to give everyone a chance at offense and defense
- Variations include having the team in defense drive 3 straight shots and then are allowed to advance up when possible
- Practice with a Purpose!



- Hit the winning shot in front of yourself, hard and down
- The next variation of the drill would be to move the team back in Defense Zone up into the Transition Zone to start
 - The team in Transition Zone is defending and getting comfortable in an otherwise uncomfortable area of the court
 - The team in Transition Zone will be hitting mostly soft balls (dinks and half volleys) back to the team at the kitchen line
- The team in the Offense Zone is still trying to keep the deepest opponent back

Conclusion

- When you're returning serve, your mindset has to be 'Dominate!' You should win the majority of the points
- The return does not have to be great, but the 4th shot is where you will begin your domination (smart and well-placed shot)
- Get to the kitchen first (be aggressive and not passive as the return team)
- Dominate the kitchen and win more matches!