

Our focus for this instruction on Pickleball is the Attack and Defense
Also known as the Counter-Attack.
(written by Andy Forsyth)

There is a right and a wrong time to initiate an attack in Pickleball.

To understand when the right time is you first need to understand all the different possible attack methods and especially when NOT to attack. The most important thing is to control your shot and placement. Do NOT over strike the ball. Unless you become very good at it and can control the shot it will usually result in a loss of the rally.

The wrong time to attack is when the apex of the ball after it bounces is only 2-3 inches above the net or lower and especially when the ball is below the net. The only things that can happen are that the ball is hit into the net or goes out. Unless it is a perfect shot it is not the right time to make that shot. Instead hit a dink or just touch the ball with enough on it to go over the net by a few inches and down the center of the court or down the line either on the left or the right.

The best time to initiate an attack when the ball is 1-3 feet above the net or higher and in a location that gives you a high probability of success. Hit it accurately and in a downward motion at the opponent's feet or the middle part of the court and with enough force to get the ball past them. It DOES NOT have to be hit at 150 mph. If you do then YOU might hit it out because you don't have full control of the shot.

When in an attack and counter-attack hitting contest you have to be alert and rely solely on your instincts and reflexes. This too takes a lot of practice if you want to be proficient at it.

NOTE: When the ball is a high lob you can hit it out of the air but be sure to aim down and at their feet or center area of the court. If you over hit you will either hit it into the net or it will sail too long and go out. If you decide to let it bounce first, the best attack shot is right down the middle, with good pace and not too hard because it will only be about 3-6 inches above the net at the apex of the bounce. Do not over hit it.

If the ball is more than 6 inches above the net then that is another good time to initiate an attack shot. Be sure to hit it in a downward motion and towards their feet.

And still another possible attack opportunity is if the ball is above the net but less than 6 inches you must be confident that you can hit a good attack shot and in a downward motion aiming at the opponents feet and/or between them. The best shot for this type of attack is a soft push or dink type shot. Accuracy and placement is more important than power. Drop it to the left or right of them and out of reach. This will force them to have to move and makes it more difficult to return the ball.

So here are the 4 main and best attack shot opportunities.

1. A hard drive shot, the ball should be more than 6 inches above the net preferably more.
2. A medium drive shot. the ball should be at or above the net. Aim slightly above the net, well placed and not too hard of a shot.
3. A soft dink type shot (its really a push) to the left or right of the opponent just out of their reach and at their feet.
4. An overhead shot at a steep downward angle driving it at their feet.

These are the basic shots, more advanced attacks will be discussed later.

Defense of the attack.

You must be in position on your side of the court just a few inches from the Kitchen facing the opposing team. You must be in a set position to be ready to defend any attack or to return a dink or deep high lob. Feet about shoulder width apart, knees slightly bent and paddle in a ready position in front of your body. Ready to respond to a shot directly at you, to the left or to the right.

When the ball is struck at you try to return it as best you can and if you can control where you hit it then that is best. Most likely it will be a volley so try not to pop it high up so they can smash it back at you. Return it back to them with enough force to make it a difficult return. Hit it low and at their feet and even dink it over the net and then the whole dinking process will start over.

There are other important things to remember as well. If your teammate gets pushed to one side or the other when the opposition hits the ball wide then the middle of the court is now wide open. You must move over to cover that area. The rule of thumb is about a 6-8 foot distance between you and your partner. This makes it harder for them to get it past you in the middle. Again more advanced details about the strategies of where to place the ball, when and why will be discussed in another lesson.

And one last thing. In order to be proficient in the skill sets of Pickleball or any sport for that matter you need to practice all aspects of the game. So for most skills in Pickleball you usually need someone to practice with. You can practice some skills by yourself but it is best with a partner. There is an old adage that goes "Practice makes perfect" however if you practice wrong then you will most likely play wrong too. So as one of my high school coaches told us "Perfect Practice makes Perfect". So try to practice "perfectly" your skills at least once a week for an hour. If you practice regularly you will begin to improve much faster.

Look for future training lessons on how to practice Pickleball shots and improve your game.