

Pickleball Clinic – Burke Center Pickleball Association at Cove Landing 9am-12 Noon, March 30, 2019

- Written by Andy Forsyth

Main Subject – Third Shot Drop and Dinking, (with practice after instruction)

The Seven main parts to the game of Pickleball.

1. The Serve
2. The Return
3. The Third Shot (Drop, Strike, Attack or Lob)
4. The Dink
5. The Attack, Smash, Slap, Push
6. Defending the Attack
7. The Lob/Return of Lob

Serve – Most of the time (90%) should be in a 5-6 foot circle in the middle of the serving area.

Least chance for error. If you hit it a foot or two outside the target area it will still be a good serve.

The serve should be 1-2 feet above the net, it does not need to be a HARD serve but with a good pace to the serve.

Return – Also the return should be about 1-2 feet above the net with good pace. There are times when a smash type of return can be done, or a high lob. Remember the ball must bounce so if you hit it deep enough, about 3-6 feet from the back line and in the middle it will give you and your partner time to get up to the kitchen area and ready for the third shot from your opponent. The reason for hitting in the middle is to create a decision for the serving team as to who must return the shot. And they may not be able to get to the kitchen fast enough and will give you the advantage.

The Third Shot. Here you have 4 options.

1. A medium to high lob deep. This will keep them back (or at least the one striking the ball) but it does give them an opportunity to hit an attacking shot. So you have to judge whether it is good to do this or not.
2. The other is to attempt a passing shot on the left or right. This can only be done if the return shot is on the far left or right of the court. You don't have to hit a hard smash, just with enough pace to hit it accurately.

Remember with any attack shot whether it be a Hard Smash, or a shot with good pace the ball when hit must be ABOVE the net by at least 3-6 inches (preferably more) to have a high probability of going over

the net and not go out. You must just clear the top of the net by 1-6 inches. The harder you hit it the lower it must be. Any Hard smash going up over the net more than a foot will almost certainly go out.

3. The other is a shot with pace right down the middle. This works best when both opponents are still in the back of the court or moving forward.
4. And the best is the Third Shot Drop. Again the best placement is in the middle because it can cause confusion or if you are able to hit it to an opponent's backhand it will make it a more difficult return for them. And you want it to land in the Kitchen, if possible or just over the line. If they are already at the kitchen however they could take it out of the air so that is why it is important to hit the ball low over the net on the drop, again about 3-6 inches above the net. If you aim for 3-6 inches it will give you a little cushion if you come up an inch or two short.

Proper form is also necessary to hit a successful Third shot drop consistently.

Best is a forehand shot underhanded or slightly to the side. Stiff wrist, Firm elbow. Bend at the shoulder. A floppy wrist or too much bend in the elbow gives away too much control. And proper footwork, keep balanced, flex at the knees not the waist. If you must hit a backhand everything is the same except you must angle the paddle so the ball will go up and over the net in the proper angle.

The Dink – This is perhaps the hardest to master because it requires a LOT of PATIENCE. All too often you see someone hit the Third Shot Drop or a Good Dink and the ball is below the net at its peak and the person hitting the ball tries a Smash or Medium Attack shot. 9 times out of 10 it will go into the net or OVER the back line. The other time the opponent has a chance for a counter smash and then YOU are at the disadvantage. Be patient and wait for the right time to attack. A lot of times they will make a mistake, like hitting it into the net, out of bounds or leave it up too high for you to take a better attack shot in a down angle. When doing this always try to hit it to their feet or down the middle.

Proper form is also essential. Get in a good position to hit the DINK if possible. Set your feet. When striking the ball bend at the knees and push your body up when you strike the ball. With a forehand dink, strike the ball in an upward motion in the desired direction (direction comes a bit later). Then after hitting the ball make sure to get back out of the kitchen if you are in the kitchen and get ready for a return shot, another dink or an attack shot or a lob. If you made a good dink, most likely it will not be an attack. But be ready for anything.

Strategies.

Where should I dink? (Direction of the Dink) There are 3 main places to dink. If at all possible do not dink directly at an opponent, if gives them a chance to hit an attack shot. Do not hit a HIGH DINK outside the kitchen. This is a disaster and a fairly easy attack shot opportunity.

First, You want to dink in the middle area of the kitchen. It can cause confusion as to who should take the dink. Second, if you are on the left side of the court hit the ball to the left of your opponent but not

too close to the out line. Third, If you are on the right side of the court hit the ball to the right of your opponent. Each of these options will depend upon your position on the court and if you can hit to someone's backhand. If they like to switch hands this is good too because they might not make a good switch transition and might mishit it.

The best and most difficult dink is the cross court shot. The good thing about this shot is that if you do hit it a little too high, unless they have really long arms they can't hit it out of the air and it will still land in the kitchen. You want it to land as close to the net as is comfortable (about 6-12 inches from the net) so that it goes over the net and does not fall on your side. If the opponent does return the ball they will have to hurry and get back into position after hitting another dink, otherwise they will be out of position and you will have an opening in the middle.

These dinks can go on for 10-20 shots until someone makes a mistake or leaves it up too high and away from the net for an attack opportunity. When you have this shot just hit it right down the middle or low and at their feet.

The Attack – There is a right time and a wrong time to attack. The wrong time 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. The best time is when the ball is 1-3 feet above the net and in a location that gives you a high probability of success. Hit it accurately and in a downward motion at the opponents feet or middle half of the court and with enough force to get it 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.

The Defense – Defending against an attack goes along with the attack and counter-attack scenario. Instincts and reflexes play a big part and takes a lot of practice to be really good at it.

The Lob and Return of lob – This is a low percentage shot unless you are really really good at it. There are really two main lobs. A high lob and a medium height lob. The high lob ensures it will get over their reach but does give them time to get to the ball and attempt to return it. But it also can go too far and out of bounds as well. If it does not go to the back of the court then the returning team has a great opportunity for an attacking return shot.

The Medium lob unless it is out of reach allows the returning team a great opportunity for an attack shot. If it is successful it doesn't leave them a lot of time to get to it, but it also can go out if hit too long.

The return of lob, just takes a lot of skill, athleticism and luck. You must first get to the ball, get in good position and hit it back over the net. Chances are you will hit it into the net, mishit it, miss it altogether, not get in good position to hit it, misjudge where the ball is, hit it long or leave it up for an easy put away. Good luck with returning a lob. It too takes a lot of practice to be good at it and especially to hit a shot that is difficult to return. Oh yeah you could also hit a return lob. Good luck with that one too.