

Pickleball: What is The Kitchen?

Many sports use strange terms that may not be widely understood by others, and pickleball is no exception. Pickleballers are heard referring to 'the kitchen' while playing. This term can be a cause for confusion among players who have never heard it. The kitchen is simply another word for the 'non-volley zone' or NVZ on either side of the net.

Although nobody seems completely sure where the term 'kitchen' originated, there are theories that the term is borrowed from the game of shuffleboard. In shuffleboard, the kitchen is the area behind the primary scoring zones called the "10-off" area, where 10 points are deducted when landed in. Just like in pickleball, you do not want to land in the shuffleboard kitchen!

Here is some important information regarding the kitchen or NVZ in pickleball:

No Volleying - true to its name, you cannot hit any volleys while standing in this area are considered a fault. Remember a 'volley' is simply a ball hit out of the air that hasn't bounced. The line that marks the non-volley zone is also considered a part of the zone so be sure not to volley if your foot is on the line or if your momentum is going to carry you into the zone right after hitting. It can be very tempting to run all the way up to the net and smash a nice and high shot, but the kitchen was created to prevent this very thing. The 'volley' is considered to be the volley, the follow through, and any momentum resulting from the shot.

Returning Bounced Shots - you may hit a ball in the kitchen if it has first bounced on your side of the court. Many skilled pickleballer players are experts at delivering low 'dink' shots into the kitchen to draw their opponents close to the net. If you step into the area to return a shot, try to get back into a ready position outside of the kitchen right away or your opponent may take advantage of your poor position.

Get To The Kitchen Line – after exchanging groundstrokes during serving and receiving, try to move up to the kitchen line as soon as possible. When you see the opportunity, move up to just behind the line and get a good split step in a central position so you're ready for anything to come your way. If your opponent moves up, keep them on their toes with cross-court and low bouncing 'dink' shots!