

Build Better Court Awareness for Smarter Advanced Pickleball Play

At the advanced intermediate level, most players already have a reliable serve, return with purpose, sustain dink rallies, and handle a reasonable amount of pace. Improvement starts becoming less about learning another basic shot and more about recognizing what the point is giving you before your opponent does.

That's where stronger court awareness can change the game.

Advanced intermediate players should be reading more than the ball. Partner position, opponent balance, open space, contact height, and the quality of the previous shot all provide information about what is likely to happen next.

At [Voxl Pickleball](#), we believe better pickleball comes from pairing reliable fundamentals with smarter decisions. When your mechanics are already dependable, reading the rally sooner can help you play with more control and less unnecessary movement.

The right [pickleball paddles](#) can support that progression by giving you the consistency and feel needed to focus on positioning, patterns, and shot selection instead of worrying about unpredictable equipment.

Court Awareness at the Advanced Intermediate Level

At this stage, court awareness is no longer just knowing where everyone is standing. It's understanding what those positions allow each player to do.

An opponent at the kitchen who is balanced and contacting the ball above net height presents a very different threat from one reaching low and wide. A partner pulled toward the sideline changes the space you need to protect. A successful reset can completely change who controls the rally.

Advanced intermediate players should begin processing these situations as connected sequences.

The goal is to recognize pressure, opportunity, and likely responses early enough to make a better decision before the ball reaches your paddle.

Read the Quality of Contact, Not Just Court Position

Position matters, but it doesn't tell the whole story.

An opponent established at the kitchen may appear to have the advantage, but that advantage can disappear if they're reaching below net height or contacting the ball late.

On the other hand, a player several feet behind the kitchen may still be dangerous if a high ball gives them enough time to drive aggressively.

Strong court awareness means reading the quality of the opponent's contact.

Watch whether they're balanced, stretched, moving backward, reaching across the body, or setting up comfortably.

Those details can help you determine whether the next ball is likely to be defensive, neutral, or aggressive.

That information should influence whether you hold your position, prepare to defend pace, or look for an opportunity to apply pressure.

Move With Your Partner Instead of Guarding a Zone

At the advanced intermediate level, doubles teams should move as a connected unit.

If your partner gets pulled several feet toward the sideline during a crosscourt dink exchange, staying frozen in your original position can open the middle. If one player advances while the other remains several feet behind, the space between them can become an easy target.

Effective doubles positioning changes with the ball.

Both players generally need to shift toward the side where the ball is located while maintaining enough spacing to cover the middle and outside angles.

The goal isn't to split the court into two permanent halves.

It's to protect the most likely shots together.

That coordinated movement becomes increasingly important as opponents get better at recognizing gaps.

Anticipate Without Overcommitting

Advanced intermediate players should be gathering information before the opponent hits.

Paddle angle, contact point, body position, balance, and previous shot patterns can all narrow the range of likely responses.

A player reaching across the body may have fewer directional options. Someone contacting the ball late may struggle to create a sharp angle. An opponent who repeatedly speeds up from the same position may become easier to anticipate over time.

Anticipation should give you a head start, not lock you into a guess.

Overcommitting can be just as costly as reacting too slowly.

The goal is to shade your positioning toward the more likely response while remaining balanced enough to handle another option.

That small positional advantage can make fast exchanges feel much more manageable.

Recognize Attackable Balls Earlier

At this level, one of the biggest differences between players is how quickly they recognize an attacking opportunity.

A higher ball may create an opening, but height alone isn't enough.

You also need to consider your balance, contact point, distance from the ball, opponent positioning, and whether your partner is prepared for the rally to speed up.

An attackable ball is one you can pressure without giving away control.

A ball above net height may still be a poor choice if you're reaching or moving backward.

Likewise, strong positioning may allow you to apply pressure to a ball that another player would need to reset.

Better court awareness helps you recognize that difference sooner.

Know When to Reset Instead of Force the Point

Advanced intermediate players often understand how to attack but can still lose points by attacking at the wrong time.

When your team is stretched, moving backward, or contacting the ball from below net height, forcing pace can give the opponents an easier finish.

A controlled reset can change that.

Resetting is a way to neutralize pressure and rebuild your position.

A well-placed soft ball into the kitchen can force the opponents to hit upward and give your team time to recover.

That doesn't mean playing passively.

It means recognizing when continuing to attack from a weak position is less effective than bringing the rally back toward neutral.

The ability to switch between offense and defense is a major part of advanced intermediate play.

Read When a Speed-Up Is Coming

Faster hands exchanges become more common as competition improves.

Advanced intermediate players should begin recognizing the cues that often appear before a speed-up.

A rising dink, an opponent taking the ball out of the air, a paddle moving into a more aggressive position, or a ball drifting too high can all signal that the pace may change quickly.

The earlier you recognize a possible speed-up, the better prepared your paddle can be.

That doesn't mean assuming every higher ball will be attacked.

It means staying ready for the rally to change tempo.

A compact paddle position and balanced stance can make the difference between reacting under control and getting caught with a late swing.

Recover Based on the Shot You Just Hit

Recovery at this level should be intentional.

You don't always need to return to the exact same spot after every shot.

A wide crosscourt dink can pull an opponent toward the sideline and shift the likely angles of the next ball. A high defensive return may require you to prepare for pressure. A successful reset may create an opportunity for both partners to move forward.

Your shot changes what the opponent can do next.

Where you recover should reflect that.

Instead of treating recovery as an automatic return to a default position, think about what response your shot is likely to create and which part of the court becomes most important to protect.

Protect the Middle Without Giving Away the Line

The middle is a common target in competitive doubles because hesitation between partners creates easy opportunities.

That doesn't mean both players should crowd the center.

Court coverage changes based on where the opponent contacts the ball.

When the ball moves toward one sideline, both partners can usually shift toward that side because the opponent's available angles change. When the ball becomes more central, middle coverage becomes more important.

The position of the ball should influence the position of the team.

This allows players to protect the middle while still respecting the outside angle.

Small adjustments can remove a surprising amount of open court.

Hold the Kitchen Line When the Situation Allows

Advanced intermediate players should be comfortable maintaining kitchen-line position instead of giving up ground unnecessarily.

Backing away can create more time to react, but it also gives opponents more space and makes it harder to take the ball early.

If you're balanced and the opponent is contacting the ball from a neutral or defensive position, holding the line can preserve your advantage.

There will still be situations where moving back is necessary.

A powerful attack, lob, or difficult ball may require defensive footwork.

The important distinction is whether you're moving because the rally demands it or simply drifting backward out of habit.

Identify Opponent Tendencies as the Match Develops

Advanced intermediate players should be collecting information throughout the match.

Some opponents drive most third shots. Others favor drops. One player may consistently speed up through the middle, while another looks for the sideline whenever a ball sits high.

Those tendencies matter.

Repeated behavior makes future shots easier to anticipate.

If an opponent favors a particular pattern, you can become more prepared for it without assuming it will happen every time.

You may also notice weaknesses.

A player may struggle with low backhand dinks, lateral movement, hard balls into the body, or resetting from transition.

Court awareness includes recognizing those patterns and allowing them to influence strategy.

Understand Who Has the Advantage in the Rally

One of the most useful advanced intermediate skills is recognizing which team currently controls the point.

If your team is established at the kitchen while the opponents are deep, you usually have positional advantage.

If you're defending from transition while the opponents control the line, the situation is different.

Shot selection should reflect who has the advantage.

When you're ahead in the rally, maintaining pressure may make sense.

When you're under pressure, the priority may shift toward neutralizing the point rather than forcing an aggressive shot.

Recognizing that balance helps prevent low-percentage decisions.

Read Rally Patterns Instead of Individual Shots

Advanced intermediate players should begin seeing common sequences rather than treating every ball as unrelated.

A third-shot drop may lead to movement toward the kitchen. A drive may produce a block that creates a fifth-shot opportunity. A crosscourt dink can eventually open the middle. A reset from transition can create the chance to advance.

Understanding the sequence makes the next shot easier to anticipate.

This is one reason stronger players often seem to have more time.

They aren't waiting for every shot to fully develop before reacting.

They're using the previous shots to narrow what is likely to happen next.

Use Consistent Equipment to Focus on Strategy

At this level, players are sensitive to small changes in ball flight, bounce, and timing.

A worn or warped ball can introduce enough inconsistency to interfere with anticipation and pattern recognition.

Our [premium outdoor pickleballs](#) are designed for consistent outdoor performance, helping players focus on positioning, timing, and shot quality rather than unpredictable ball behavior.

Reliable equipment creates clearer feedback.

That makes it easier to tell whether a rally broke down because of strategy, execution, positioning, or decision-making.

Build Better Awareness Through Realistic Court Repetition

Court awareness becomes stronger when the spacing and angles feel familiar.

Repeated play around regulation dimensions helps reinforce how quickly the kitchen closes, how much space can open between partners, and how different ball positions affect available angles.

Our [portable pickleball net](#) provides regulation net dimensions in a portable format for use on an appropriate playing surface.

The more familiar those dimensions become, the less attention you need to spend consciously judging distance.

That leaves more mental space for reading your partner, opponents, and the developing rally.

Turn Court Awareness Into a Competitive Advantage

At the advanced intermediate level, improvement often comes from recognizing the right decision a little earlier.

You already know how to hit the core shots. The next step is understanding when to attack, when to reset, when to hold your ground, where to recover, and what your opponents are likely to do next.

That's what stronger court awareness provides.

Read pressure instead of position alone. Move with your partner. Watch for attack and speed-up cues. Pay attention to opponent tendencies. Let your own shot influence where you recover.

Those decisions can make the game feel slower even as the competition gets faster.

At VOXL Pickleball, we build equipment for players who want to keep progressing as their game becomes more strategic and competitive. Explore our paddles, balls, and court gear to find equipment that matches how you play, or [contact us](#) if you have questions about choosing the right setup.

Related Questions

How can advanced intermediate players avoid overanticipating?

Use opponent cues and rally patterns to narrow the likely options, but stay balanced until the shot is confirmed. Anticipation should improve reaction time without turning into a guess.

What should players watch during a crosscourt dink rally?

Pay attention to contact height, opponent balance, paddle position, partner spacing, and whether either player is beginning to create an attackable ball.

Why is partner positioning so important at the 350 level?

Opponents at this level are more capable of recognizing and attacking gaps. Coordinated movement helps reduce open space through the middle and keeps both partners involved in the point.

When should an advanced intermediate player give up the kitchen line?

Moving back can make sense against a strong attack, lob, or other ball that requires more reaction time. Players should avoid retreating automatically when the situation doesn't require it.