



I'm an Overthinker in Pickleball.

What's Really Going On?



If you are an overthinker in pickleball, the problem is probably not that you lack intelligence. It may be almost the opposite.

You may be using too much of the wrong kind of intelligence at the wrong time.

You are probably the kind of player who wants to do things correctly. You pay attention. You listen to instruction. You remember tips. You have gathered a whole toolbox of good advice: bend your knees, watch the ball, keep your paddle up, get to the kitchen, don't pop it up, hit to the smart target, move your feet, stay calm, be patient, don't attack too early, don't be passive, don't miss the return, don't miss the serve.

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That is a lot of furniture to carry into one point.

So when the ball is coming, your mind starts working overtime. It is not just watching the ball. It is conducting a committee meeting.

- Where is she going?
- What shot should I hit?
- Should I attack this?
- Is he about to speed it up?
- What if I pop it up?
- Don't miss.
- Don't be stupid.
- Get ready.
- Watch the ball.
- Move your feet.
- Keep the paddle out front.
- Be calm.

By now, your mind is sprinting ahead of the ball, trying to solve a point that has not happened yet. The ball is here, but your attention is somewhere else. It is out in front of the play, peeking around corners, rehearsing trouble.



In Fluid Motion Factor terms, you have left the present and moved into the future.

Instead of being connected to the ball, you become connected to the opponent. The other player becomes the star of the show. You get attached to them “like an umbilical cord,” always guessing, reacting, predicting, tightening, and second-guessing.

That makes the game feel bigger than it really is.

- The court feels bigger.
- The opponent feels more dangerous.
- The ball seems faster.
- The shot feels heavier.

A simple dink becomes a small legal proceeding. A return of serve becomes a referendum on your character. A ball floating into your strike zone somehow turns into a riddle from the pickleball sphinx.

And then your body, which actually knows a great deal, starts to feel late, tight, and over-managed.

What is happening is that your prefrontal cortex, the brain’s bossy CEO, has stepped onto the court with a clipboard. It wants to supervise everything. It wants to prevent mistakes. It wants to make sure you do this correctly. It wants meetings, reports, updates, forecasts, and maybe a laminated five-point improvement plan.

But pickleball is too fast and fluid for that kind of micromanagement.

Your deeper athletic systems already know a great deal. They know how to move. They know how to time the ball. They know how to adjust the paddle face. They know how to soften the hand. They know how to react at the kitchen. They know things faster than the verbal mind can explain them.

That is the strange part.

The part of you that can talk about the shot is often slower than the part of you that can hit it.

When your conscious mind tries to control the whole operation in real time, it interrupts the very intelligence you need. It adds instructions at the moment when your body needs space. It tightens the hand when the hand needs feel. It clutters the mind when the ball needs to be seen simply.

That is why you can know how to hit a shot and still dump it into the net.

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You did not forget how to play. You got in the way.



What Am I

Misunderstanding?



You are probably misunderstanding the role of thinking during the point.

You may believe that more analysis creates better play. You may think that if you can just figure everything out quickly enough, you will make fewer mistakes. You may believe that good players are constantly calculating, diagnosing, and predicting.

But during the point, more thinking often creates more interference.

That does not mean strategy is useless. Strategy matters. You can notice patterns. You can decide to return deep. You can recognize that someone dislikes backhand dinks, speeds up too early, struggles with low balls, or gets impatient in long rallies. You can make tactical choices.

But most of that belongs between points, before points, or after points.

When the ball is coming, your job changes.

Now the job is much simpler:

- See the ball.
- Acknowledge the ball.
- Let the body respond.

The misunderstanding is that you think you need to control the shot with your mind. But the shot is not improved by adding more instructions at the last second. Often, those instructions make your hand tighter, your feet later, and your swing more careful.

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And careful is not the same as clear.

Careful often has fear inside it. Careful tries not to miss. Careful steers. Careful pokes. Careful holds the paddle a little too tight and then wonders why the ball jumped.

Clear is different.

- Clear sees the ball.
- Clear knows the situation without drowning in it.
- Clear lets the body hit.



You may also be making the opponent too important. You are trying to read them, outguess them, avoid their strengths, protect against their next move, and solve their intentions.

But the opponent is not the thing you hit.

You hit the ball.

That sounds almost too obvious to mention, but overthinkers often lose this truth. They become so interested in the opponent's possible next shot that the current ball becomes secondary. Their attention stretches across the net, attaches itself to the other player, and then the ball arrives almost like an interruption.

That is backwards.

The opponent matters, but the ball comes first.

You do not win the point by mentally living on the other side of the net. You play better by becoming more available on your own side. Your body needs you here, not wandering around in the opponent's intentions with a flashlight and a clipboard.

Why Does Overthinking

Feel So Responsible?



One reason overthinking is so sticky is that it feels responsible.

- It feels like you are trying.
- It feels like you are paying attention.
- It feels like you are being serious about improvement.

That is why it can be so hard to give up. Nobody wants to feel careless. Nobody wants to feel as if they are just hoping the ball goes in. So the overthinker says, "If I stop thinking, won't I play worse?"

But the goal is not to stop all intelligence.

The goal is to use the right intelligence at the right time.

Before the point, you can have a simple intention.

- Return deep.
- Keep the ball low.
- Dink crosscourt.
- Give yourself margin.
- Make them hit one more ball.

But once the point starts, the intention has to become lighter. It cannot be a pile of verbal commands. It has to become a direction, a feel, a simple organizing idea.





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The body does not need a speech. It needs a signal.





What Should I Do Instead?

Start by making the game smaller.



Not smaller in ambition. Smaller in attention.

Instead of trying to play the whole rally in advance, come back to the ball in front of you. Not the ball you fear. Not the shot they might hit. Not the mistake you made two points ago. Not the winning shot you hope to hit three shots from now.

This ball.
This bounce.
This contact.
This moment.

That is where your game can actually happen.

In FMF terms, you are trying to move from mental control to bodily connection. You are not trying to become blank. You are not trying to hypnotize yourself. You are not trying to manufacture confidence by chanting slogans at your nervous system like a desperate sports psychologist trapped in a hallway.

You are simply returning your attention to the place where the body can function.

The ball.
Acknowledge it.

Let it come into your awareness without grabbing at it. Let your eyes receive it. Let your body organize around it. Let the shot happen from connection rather than command.

This is where “soft eyes” matter. If your eyes get narrow, tense, and target-obsessed, your body often follows. Your hand gets tight. Your timing gets rushed. Your attention jumps away from contact and starts chasing the outcome.

But if your vision stays softer and wider, you give yourself a better chance to stay in the whole situation without clamping down on one piece of it. You can still see the opponent. You can still see space. But you are not mentally lunging across the net.

- You are here.
- You are available.
- You are with the ball.



What's the One Key Correction?

Make the game simpler.



Do not make the opponent the star of the show.

That is the correction.

You do not need to become less intelligent. You need to stop using your intelligence to interfere with your own body.

Stay on your side of the net. Stay with your body. Stay with the ball. Let the game become smaller, quieter, and more immediate.

The point is not a puzzle you have to solve three shots in advance.

It is this ball.

This bounce.

This contact.

This moment.

A good cue for you would be:

YOUR CUES

! *Ball first. Simple game.*

! *Not them. This ball.*

That cue brings you back from the future. It takes the opponent off the stage. It reminds you that your body cannot hit an imagined shot, an anticipated threat, or a feared mistake.

It can only hit this ball.

So give your body that chance.

Let the opponent be part of the game, but not the center of your attention. Let strategy exist, but do not let it crowd the moment of contact. Let intelligence guide you, but do not let the bossy CEO take over the swing.

You are not trying to become passive.

You are trying to become present.



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And in pickleball, that is often where the better shot has been waiting all along.

