

The Importance of Kitchening

By Martin Shapiro

I often run into a reluctance on the part of novice players to attempt to kitchen an opponent's disc in tournament play. They haven't yet developed their kitchen shot to the point where they feel confident that they likely won't miss or kitchen themselves instead. So they take a different tack such as putting up a scoring disc or developing a hide, which will at least get them some gain. How important is it to be able to kitchen? Does the risk of missing the kitchen shot or self-kitchening instead justify taking the different tack?

The simple answer is:

IF YOU NEED TO KITCHEN YOUR OPPONENT, ALWAYS TAKE THE RISK.

To apply this strategy rule, a player must be able to determine when there is a need to kitchen. The corollary to this rule is: THERE IS NEVER A NEED TO KITCHEN WHEN YOUR OPPONENT IS NOT AHEAD IN THE GAME (**see definition of 'Ahead' below).

CourtShuffleboard.com scope note: The examples in this article are rooted in tournament strategy, including common Florida 75-point play. Whether a kitchen attempt is necessary depends on the score, game format, hammer sequence, court conditions, and the risks of the available shots.

WHEN KITCHENING MATTERS

The ability to kitchen is essential to correct strategy. It must become an integral part of your game as you will often lose your matches if you can't kitchen. At some point in many games you will get behind, either by making a mistake, by being outplayed or by bad luck (or in the case of a 75-point game, Yellow is already behind at the start of the game). To gain the lead, kitchen play usually needs to be activated. You usually can't gain the lead simply by scoring your hammers. You either have to score extra discs or kitchen your opponent. When you are not ahead, every frame you must try to achieve one or the other until you are ahead. And the further behind you fall or the closer the end of the game approaches, the more urgent your need to play kitchen (set kitchen bait and attempt to kitchen at any opportunity).

Does this mean that there is a 'need' to kitchen whenever your opponent is ahead? Not necessarily. Early in the game and when it takes just one extra scoring disc to gain the lead, you have time to get ahead without taking the extra risks of playing kitchen. But if you are further behind or it is getting late in the game, the need to kitchen becomes prevalent and you must play kitchen whether or not you have yet developed your kitchen game.

The novice player may not yet be good at making a kitchen shot. This does not mean that it is better to do something else. If the need exists to make a kitchen, then that must be the strategy employed. It becomes the most likely path to winning the game regardless of the potential of success or failure at making the shot. In other words, if you need to kitchen to win, you can't win by not playing kitchen. It is worth the risks.

Keep in mind that no player always makes the kitchen shot. If you miss, don't take it as a loss as that just becomes a psychological impediment to your success, both in the current game and the next games. Take it as practice for your next kitchen shot, which will have a higher chance of success since you have become more practiced at it.

WHEN YOU ARE AHEAD

On a final note, when you are ahead, don't make a kitchen shot unless the risks are very minimal. You don't need to kitchen your opponent to win, so it isn't worth the risks. If it's your hammer shot and your opponent has an open scoring disc that you can easily use as a backstop to making your hammer score and you have little risk of self-kitchening and won't lose your lead if you end up leaving your opponent's disc short of the kitchen in scoring, well sure, you can make the hammer shot which gives you your hammer score at kitchen speed to kitchen your opponent as well. Or if you need to clear your opponent's scoring disc anyway and your disc will become a hidden score when you do and it's still early in the game when you will have plenty of time to recover if things go awry, then okay, it's not a bad choice to make that kitchen shot. Or you are clearing and your disc is going off the board anyway and there isn't much chance that you will leave the opponent's disc in scoring by mistake and it isn't late in the game where one mistake can make the difference between winning and losing, then go ahead and make that kitchen shot. Just consider the level of risk versus the level of reward. You don't need the kitchen to win when you are ahead, so the reward isn't as great when you succeed in kitchening. Look for opportunities to kitchen with little risk to you, but don't take a kitchen shot just to boost your ego. Take it when it makes sense; don't take it when it doesn't.

Definition of "Ahead"

The definition of 'Ahead' is: "Have the mathematical advantage in scores in the expectation to win the game. The math takes into account current recorded scores on the scoreboard, any currently scoring discs, and the expectation that every player scores their current and future hammer shots but no additional discs." Having a current recorded score on the scoreboard does not always mean that you are ahead. See my "Which Color is Ahead" article for details.