

Drills - Dinking

Information for all Dinking Drills

Whenever you are practicing your dinks, you should try to make all balls bounce in front of the no-volley line, and they should be short and low enough that the player you are practicing with couldn't kill the ball if he/she wanted to do so. While you will probably have to step into the no-volley zone to hit a lot of the dinks, you should immediately step back behind the no-volley zone line before the opposing player hits the ball.

If you and your partner can't keep the ball going more than 2 or 3 hits, then don't try to keep the ball too low or too short. It's more important as a beginner to keep the ball going so you can gradually get the feel of how hard to hit. Just keep practicing as often as you can.

The Short Dink - all skill levels

Both players start by standing in the middle of the court and dinking the ball back and forth nicely to each other for 3 minutes. If you have 4 players, simply have each pair of players stand in the middle of their half of the court and each pair use their own ball.

Both players hit cross court dinks back and forth from one side to another trying to hit fairly sharp angles to each other. Do this for 3 minutes and then do another 3 minutes cross court in the other direction. Do not try to avoid backhands while doing these drills as you need to begin developing your backhand dinks even if they don't work very well in the beginning. Again, if you have 4 players, simply have each pair of players hit cross court in the opposite direction.

Both players dink the ball down the line on one side of the court for 3 minutes and then 3 minutes down the line on the other side of the court. With 4 players, each pair uses a different sideline.

If you have 4 players, you should do this additional drill which is to use only 1 ball and dink back and forth between all players trying to practice all the above directions while doing so. Try to hit 1/2 of the balls back to the player that hit it to you and 1/2 of the balls back to the other player so you are practicing all directions again. The more advanced players can spend more time on this drill and less time on the others. Don't forget to practice this from both the left and right sides of the courts so both you and your partner practice both forehands and backhands.

The 3/4 Court Dink - Intermediate and Advanced skill levels

To practice this with 4 players, have 2 players stand at the no-volley zone line and the other two players stand at about 3/4 court position on their side of the net. The two players at 3/4 court try to hit soft dinks while the two players at the net position try to hit the ball back nicely so they can try another dink. After a little while, reverse positions and practice for an equal amount of time. This might take quite a few practice sessions or one, but eventually you will get the feel of how hard to hit to make a good dink. This works just as well with either 2 players or 4 players and don't forget that you can practice cross court dinks as well as down the line dinks with this drill just as you did in the short dink drills.

The Baseline Dink - Advanced skill level

To practice this with 4 players, have 2 players stand at the no-volley zone line and the other two players stand just behind the baseline on the other side of the net. The two players standing just behind the baseline try to hit soft dinks, while the two players at the net try to hit the ball back nicely and near the baseline. After a little while, reverse positions and practice for an equal amount of time. This works just as well with either 2 players or 4 players and don't forget that you can practice cross court dinks as well as down the line dinks with this drill just as you did in the short dink drills.

Dinking Game - all skill levels

To help you concentrate and have some fun while learning the dink, you can play a game with four players where everyone has to dink and you lose the point if the ball lands behind the no-volley zone line. You can still play to 11 points, but you must start the point nicely to each other for this game to work.

You could also play this game with 2 players, but you would have to agree to use only 1/2 of each side of the court for this to work. You can decide whether to practice this from down the line sides or cross court sides.

Drills - Game Variations

Dink - No Lob Game (New)

If playing singles, use only 1/2 of the court. If playing doubles, use the full court. Start the game with a dink serve which must land inside the no volley zone. The ball must be hit over the net at least 4 times including the dink serve. Beginning with the 5th hit, you can win a point with a dink or a kill shot, but you cannot lob. In singles, the ball must remain within the half court, and the dink serve does not have to be cross-court in doubles. Just like the regular game, points can only be won by the serving team.

Dink - Lob Game (New)

This game is played exactly the same as the game above, except that you can also lob beginning with the 5th shot.

No Volley Game

Played like a regular game of Pickleball except that you may not hit a volley. I've only seen this game played in singles which involved too much running for me to try. However, it was obviously great ground stroke practice for those that I've seen do it. It should work for doubles also but would involve less running.

Two Player Game - Singles Variation

Played the same as a normal game of singles except both players can only hit inside the half of the court their opponent was standing in when the serve was made! This is an excellent game for practicing doubles skills when you either have two players that can't run well, or you want to practice for doubles but only have two players.

Three Player Game - variation #1

In this three-player game, each player will take turns serving and trying to win points against the other two players. However, each server will get two service turns instead of one and will serve from the right side when they have an even number of points and from the left side when they have an odd number of points.

When calling the score before each serve, the server should call their score first, then the score of the opposing player on the left, and then the score of the opposing player on the right.

After a player has finished their service turn, all players should rotate with the server going to the left hand return of serve position on the opposite court, and the player he replaces now taking the right hand return of serve position, and the remaining player now becomes the server on the opposite side of the court.

In this game, it is usually very difficult for the serving player to score points since they are playing against two players. Several of our players have used this variation and had a lot of fun, but these were players who were able to run fairly well. If you don't move well, or are primarily a doubles player, then the next variation should be more fun and better practice for you.

Three Player Game - variation #2

This three-player game is played exactly like variation #1 above except that the returning team can only hit to the half of the court that the server has served from. This gives the serving player just as good a chance to win the point as if he had a partner. More importantly, it means that he can practice his dinks and lobs just as he might in a regular game of doubles. This is the variation I like most because I'm primarily a doubles player and this lets me practice those skills.

Note: It usually takes a little while for the returning team to remember they must hit to the court where the server is!

Drills - Groundstrokes

When performing these drills, work on trying to have long rallies and trying to place the ball deep and near the corner of your opponent's court. Hit the ball firmly, but do not try to hit so hard that your practice partner can't return the ball. Give yourself enough margin of error on your shots so that you are keeping most of them inside the lines.

Drills For all Players

These drills are the easiest because you are hitting the ball back to where it came from and are doing so without being on the run. However, after doing all 4 drills you will have practiced forehands and backhands both cross court and down the line from both sides of the court. These drills can be done with two players as described, or you could do them with 4 players keeping two balls going in opposite cross court directions or opposite sidelines.

- Player's practice hitting cross court balls to each other from the right side of their respective courts.
- Player's practice hitting cross court balls to each other from the left side of their respective courts.
- Player's practice hitting down the line on the right side of the court.
- Player's practice hitting down the line on the left side of the court.

Drills For Advanced Players

These 4 drills are much more difficult and are intended for advanced players who still move well on the court. They would be especially good for people trying to improve their singles game. If you have bad knees, bad ankles, bad feet, or etc., then don't do them. Each drill gives one of the players practice on hitting while running and the other player practice in changing the direction of the ball while standing still which is harder than returning the ball back in the direction it came from. If only one player moves well, then only do the drills where he is the player to run.

- Player A stands on the right-hand side of his court and alternately hits the ball down the line, cross court, down the line, cross court, etc. Player B will be running from side to side and hitting every ball right back to player A.
- Player B stands on the right-hand side of his court and alternately hits the ball down the line, cross court, down the line, cross court, etc. Player A will be running from side to side and hitting every ball right back to player B.
- Player A stands on the left-hand side of his court and alternately hits the ball down the line and then cross court. Player B will be running from side to side and hitting every ball right back to player A.
- Player B stands on the left-hand side of his court and alternately hits the ball down the line and then cross court. Player A will be running from side to side and hitting every ball right back to player A.

Drills For Advanced Players who move well

In this drill, both players are constantly on the run and changing the ball's direction every time they hit the ball. If you have bad knees, bad ankles, bad feet, or etc, then don't do this one. This is only for two advanced players who both move well and are injury free. This is a great for singles players.

- Players practice at about 3/4 speed with one player hitting every ball down the line, and the other player hitting every ball cross court. Then reverse the process so that the person who hit down the line before is now hitting cross court with the other player hitting every ball down the line. Both players are running in this drill.

Drills on Changing Direction of the Ball (for 3 or 4 players)

This is a little harder than the first 4 drills because players must change the direction of the ball, but it shouldn't involve much movement.

- In this drill, 4 players hit the ball back and forth to each other at a speed where they can keep a long rally going. Each player should return the ball back to the other team in the direction it didn't come from. In other words if you receive the ball down the line, then hit it back cross court. If you received the ball cross court, then hit it back down the line.
- In this drill for 3 players, 2 players on one side of the court both hit to the third player's forehand side while that player alternately hits cross court and then down the line. After everyone has taken a turn by themselves, then do it over again but this time have the player by themselves hitting backhands cross court and down the line while the other players both hit to his backhand.

Advanced! - Changing Direction of the ball while running!

In this drill, Players should hit at about 3/4 speed so the player running from side to side has a little more time to get there. After all, 3 players have taken their turn running from side to side, then start over, but this time have the player running from side to side hit down the line, and the other two players both hit cross court ever time.

☑ In this drill for 3 players, 2 players on one side of the court both hit down the line, while the third player on the other side of the net runs from side to side and hits every ball cross court.

Drills - Overheads

Overhead drills are not going to work very well until the players have first learned to lob well enough to hit a lob to the player practicing overheads! After you can lob well when returning a ground stroke or volley, then you are ready to attempt these drills.

These drills are necessary not only to develop your overhead skills, but also to develop your ability to return an overhead smash with another lob. You will find that if you do these drills your lob will improve as much or more than your overhead improves.

Drill 1 is good for two players. If you have 3 or 4 players, then drill 3 is much better because the player hitting overheads can practice hitting to different areas of the court. That also gives the two players lobbing practice in a more game like situation. Hitting overheads is quite tiring and even with 4 players rotating to the overhead position, everyone should get plenty of practice.

1. Player A stands on one side of the net at the baseline and hits lobs to Player B who hits overheads back at Player A. Player A tries to hit high lobs that land between the no-volley line and 3/4 court. Player B tries to hit overheads back at player A so that it can be lobbed again. Rotate between lobbing and hitting overheads often. **(For 2 players)**

2. Player A and Player B stand on one side of the net at the baseline and hits lobs to Player C who practices hitting overheads to both corners and down the middle. Anytime player C manages to hit 4 overheads in a row successfully, then they can try to put the overhead away after that. All players take turns hitting overheads and should rotate often as overheads can be very tiring. If you have 4 or more players, then one or more players can sit on the bench as part of the rotation. **(For 3 or more players)**

3.In this drill, you have two teams on opposite sides of the net with one team lobbing and one team hitting overheads. Advanced teams should be trying to put their smashes away while the lobbers should be trying to lob high and deep. When possible, however you also should try to be consistent while doing so. More beginning teams should be considerate of what the other team is trying to do when they lob or smash. We should have lots of rallies of 5 or 6 hits for both teams to get the most out of this drill. **(For 4 players)**

Drills - Volleys

.....The simplest volley drill is for either two players or four players to stand at the no-volley line and volley the ball back and forth. Each player should attempt to hit the ball to the other player in a manner that will allow them to keep the ball going. At all levels, the goal should be to keep quite a few balls going between misses.

.....For beginning players, this might mean you are hitting the ball fairly slow and high and possibly even to the forehand. As you improve, you might hit the ball a little firmer and even try to hit to their backhand more often. You will find that all players at all levels will do best if you don't hit the ball right at them.

.....As players improve, you can hit the ball harder at each other and intentionally hit some to the backhand and some to the forehand and some right at the other player. If you are having long rallies, you can get more aggressive. If your opponent is starting to miss too much, then you should slow the ball down until he/she is successful again.

.....With only two players, you should practice not only volleying the ball straight ahead, but also crosscourt using both backhands and forehands. With 4 players you will get to practice both, but you should practice both from the left side and the right side of the court.

.....Remember, the goal is to practice and keep the ball going, not to hit so hard the other player can't get it back! However, you should be noticing any weakness they have in case you ever play them in a tournament.