

JUNIOR PICKLEBALL DEVELOPMENT

Pre- and Post-play exercises/stretching.

Back strain, and hamstring and shoulder pulls are the most common injuries in pickleball.

They usually occur when reaching or twisting for a return shot set up by not moving to the ball. • Warming Up: Spend 10 to 15 minutes before playing to get your heart pumping.

Walk briskly or jog, ride a bike to the courts, sidestep around the perimeter of the courts, trace large circles with the arms while walking, etc. Then, once the muscles are warmed up, perform a few stretches for specific muscle groups.

- Foot and ankle stretch: Sitting on the ground with both feet straight in front, point the toes and hold (3 reps of 10 secs each). Then flex the ankle upward (3 reps of 10 secs each).
- Calf and Achilles stretch: Stand about 3 or 4 feet from a wall and lean forward with arms outstretched on the wall. Extend one leg backward, pressing the heel to the ground and bend the other knee; change legs (3 reps of 10 secs each).
- Quadriceps stretch: Stand about 3 or 4 feet from a wall. Extend one arm to the wall.

for support and grasp the opposite foot with the other hand. Pull that leg back.

toward the buttocks and hold (3 reps of 10 secs each). Repeat with other leg. • Hamstrings stretch: Stand with legs straight. Bend over at the hips, keeping knees.

straight and try to touch the toes. Do not force it; let your body relax downward. • Arm and shoulder stretch: Stand with feet shoulder width apart. Raise arms straight.

out to the side, palms up. Pull arms backward as far as comfortable (squeezing

shoulder blades together) and hold. (3 reps of 10 secs each). • Cool down after playing by walking and/or gentle stretching. If you feel pain in any

muscles or joints take it easy and ice.

Sample Drills

1. Devote approximately 10 to 15 minutes to each beginner drill.
2. Try to organize students into groups according to relative skill level.
3. Consider making appropriate drills into mini games to add excitement and an element of competition.
4. Keep as many students busy as possible; shoot for a ratio of no more than four.

students per teacher. 5. Teachers should control the timing, so each student gets approximately the same

amount of drill practice.

6. Be positive even if a student cannot complete a drill successfully.

Ball Control

1. Tap the ball into the air off the paddle with the palm up. Then palm down; then alternating. Go for a personal best.

2. Two players stand 8 to 10 feet apart and hit the ball back and forth without it hitting the ground (volley). Gradually move back to 14 feet (i.e., NVZ distance).

Footwork

1. Train the feet to take small steps by doing quick steps in place (One teacher suggests 30 steps in 10 seconds). Then do the same with side-to-side steps.

2. Two players at each NVZ line. Without a paddle, players toss balls to each other and catch them off the bounce with both hands. Players move their feet in short steps so their bodies are square to the ball when caught and balanced over both feet on the toes. No reaching.

Dinks

1. Two students line up on opposite sides of the net behind the NVZ line and gently hit the ball directly over the center of the net to land inside the NVZ. After a few minutes they switch to hitting diagonally (cross court) into the NVZ. Make sure they step back out of the NVZ each time they step in to hit the ball.

2. Two students begin dinking at the center of the court. Each move to their left while continuing to dink, turning direct across dinks into progressively longer crosscourt dinks. When each reaches the respective sideline, reverse direction, and dink back to the center and continue to the opposite sideline. Try to dink to each sideline and back to the center. Start again from the center after a fault.

3. One player on each side of net at the NVZ line. Each player has a ball. At the count of three, each player drops the ball and hits a soft dink over to practice partner. The goal is to keep both balls in play as long as possible. (J. Jessen)

4. Dink game: Play a regular game, except serve from the NVZ line into the crosscourt NVZ. The serve return and every subsequent ball must land inside the NVZ and be dinked back. Landing outside the NVZ or into the net constitutes a fault and the serve passes to the second server on the team or to the opposing team.

Serves & Returns

1. Four players stand behind the baseline at each service court and serve to the diagonally opposite court. The receivers catch the balls and serve them back. Have teams switch odd/even sides after a few minutes and serve to the other service court.
2. Using chalk or plastic hoops, mark target serving areas near the baseline on one side of the court. Two students position behind the baseline in the left and right serving areas on the opposite side of the court. Students attempt to serve into the targets. After a few minutes, students switch sides. Target areas indicate the backhand sides of right-handed receivers or vice versa to practice serving to left-handed receivers.
3. Four players (two teams) position themselves behind the baseline at each service court and serve to the diagonally opposite court. The receiver returns the ball to the serving team and moves to the NVZ line opposite his/her partner. The serving team returns the ball with an appropriate 3rd shot and follows it to the net. Repeat the sequence 3 or 4 times and then the serve passes to the opposite team.

Groundstrokes

1. If more than one court is available, divide students into teams of 4 or fewer to each teacher. Teacher hits ball to student at center of baseline, who returns it with forehand groundstroke (3 times) and then backhand groundstroke (3 times). Student then goes to back of line and next player hits.
2. Four students, positioned behind the baseline, two at each end of the court. Using one ball, hit groundstrokes from baseline to baseline, keeping a rally going as long as possible.

Volleys

1. Two teachers line up behind the NVZ line and feed (throw or hit) balls to a student

standing behind the opposing NVZ line. Students volley balls back into the NVZ on the feeders' side. After several volleys the next students move in to practice.

2. Four students, two positioned behind each NVZ line. Each volleys back and forth with the student opposite, trying to keep the ball off the ground for as long as possible. Try for 20 in a row.

3. Two teams (four students), two positioned behind each NVZ line. Using one ball, teams volley back and forth with the team opposite, trying to keep the ball off the ground for as long as possible.

Lobs

1. Two students stand behind the baseline at one end of the court. Using a hopper of balls, each practices lobbing balls deep into the opposite court. Two more students collect the lobbed balls in another hopper and lob from the other end.

2. Two teachers line up behind the NVZ line and toss or hit groundstrokes to two students at the opposite baseline. The teachers then raise their paddle hands high over their heads and the students attempt to lob over their outstretched arms.

3. Four players, two positioned behind each NVZ line begin dinking. At a signal from the teacher, the player who is about to play the ball lobs over the head of the student opposite and into the backcourt. Players on the receiving side quickly decide who will try to get to the ball SAFELY and attempt to return it.

4. Play a game (to 5, 7 or 11) using only lobs, including the serves. Any lob that lands in the NVZ is a fault or loss of point.

Overhead Smashes

1. Two teachers line up mid court on each side of the centerline with a student at the NVZ line opposite each. They alternate throwing or hitting high, lofted underhand balls to the students, who smash them back away from each teacher. After a few lobs the next students move in to practice.

2. One or two players stand at the baseline on opposite sides of the centerline and one or two more line up at the opposing NVZ line. The player(s) at the NVZ hit a groundstroke to the baseline player(s), who lob it back over the net. The player(s) at

the NVZ line then attempt to smash it back to the baseline player(s), who lob it again... and so on. Players change places after a few minutes.

Drop shots

1. Two students stand behind the baseline with a hopper of balls. They bounce the ball and hit a drop shot.
2. Two teachers stand on one side of the court with a supply of balls and hit groundstrokes to two students positioned in the middle of the opposite court. The students return the balls over the net as a soft drop and gradually move backward until they are returning drop shots from their baseline.
3. A version of the above has students alternate between hitting drops and hard groundstrokes to get a feel for the difference in stroke.
4. 3-D Drill (Deep-Deep-Drop) Follow a deep serve by a deep return and then a player on the serving side executes a drop for the third shot.

Junior drill: Developing the soft game. (Submitted by John Jessen, Ambassador, Brevard, North Carolina)

Purpose: To teach Juniors the importance of the "soft game" and that you do not hit every ball hard.

Drill:

1. Take four large boxes filled with candy and place them on the teacher's side of the net on the NVZ line.
2. Have four students line up across the NVZ line in the ready position with paddles up.
3. Feed balls to students, who try to return balls to hit or land in the box. Vary the feed so they all must be in the ready position at all times during the drill. Balls are fed quickly.
4. A student hits the box = 1 piece of candy; ball in the box = 2 pieces of candy.
5. Do the drill until every student has earned some candy.

Results: Students gain understanding of ready position, paddle up, anticipation, touch and control verses power.