

# **Pickleball-**

## **The Sun City Festival Way**

### **Module 3: Advancing from 2.5 to 3.0 Coach's Guide**

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## **Preamble**

The plan is for there to be 2 coaches working with 8-10 players on 2 courts for each module (consisting of four weekly 1½-hour lessons). For explanations and demonstrations, the two coaches can bring the 8-10 players together on one court. For drills and activities, each coach can take half of the players to separate courts. “Eight” is the natural number of players for most drills and games on two courts, but we will normally register 10 to allow for an absence or two at any particular lesson. Extra players should be rotated into the drills and games so that each player gets equal time and attention.

Coaches should read the Module 3 Player’s Guide to be aware of the content provided to players. The skills and abilities we hope to develop over the four lessons are listed in both the Player’s Guide and the Coach’s Guide.

## **Skills and Competencies at the 3.0 Level**

### **Overall Objective**

- To raise the player’s skills from the 2.5 level to the 3.0 level

### **Individual Skills and Shot Execution**

In addition to the skills specified in Modules 1 & 2 for 2.0 and 2.5 ratings, a 3.0 level player:

- Can consistently dink while changing direction from cross-court to down-the-line forehand & backhand;
- Makes 60% of dink shots--forehand down-the-line or cross-court; backhand down-the-line or cross-court;
- Makes 50% of forehand and backhand 3<sup>rd</sup>-shot drop shots from the transition area;
- Makes 40% of forehand and backhand 3<sup>rd</sup>-shot drop shots from the baseline;
- Makes 60% of forehand and backhand punch volleys (from the NVZ line to at least mid-court depth);
- Executes 40% of overhead-smash returns of lobs while demonstrating proper sideways turn and arm position;
- Serves and returns serves (from both “deuce” & “ad” courts) such that 60% bounce in the deep third of the court;
- Executes 40% of offensive lobs from the NVZ line.

Continued ...

## **Positioning and Game Strategy**

In a doubles dinking game, a doubles team:

- Shifts sideways as a team following movement of the ball in order to better defend against down-the-line and between-player return dinks or punch shots;
- Communicates on balls that both players can reach;
- Defers to the forehand on balls coming between partners;
- Maintains position close to the NVZ line except to retrieve lobs;
- Targets opponent's feet or backhand side;
- Demonstrates patience, moving opponents from side-to-side with cross-court shots to create openings and make opponents shots more difficult.

In doubles match play, a player:

- Consistently serves and returns serves deep (to the back  $\frac{1}{3}$  of court);
- Employs a drop shot on at least 50% of third shots;
- Demonstrates improved control of the direction, depth, and height (at the net) of volleys and ground strokes (forehand and backhand);
- Normally hits the ball to the deeper opponent (preferably at his/her feet) if the opponents are at differing distances from the net;
- Demonstrates a beginning ability to react quickly to and take advantage of attackable balls, especially at the NVZ line;
- Employs an offensive lob at opportune times when dinking;
- Communicates with partner on balls near the center line (deferring to the forehand);
- On balls that will land near the sideline or baseline on partner's side of the court, assists partner by shouting "Good!" or "Out!" or "Bounce it!" if it appears that the ball will land inbounds, out-of-bounds, or very close to the line, respectively;
- Demonstrates good court and position awareness by not hitting balls that would otherwise land out of bounds, and not hitting balls that would be better taken by his/her partner.

## **Lesson 1: Intentional Dinking; Offensive Lob**

The mechanics of all basic shots except the offensive lob have been covered in Modules 1 and 2. The emphasis in Module 3 is primarily on improving the consistency and accuracy of shots, and on improving game strategy.

The Player's Guide for this Lesson discusses considerations and tactics to make dinking purposeful—that is, intentionally choosing angles and targets that make it more difficult for opponents to return shots.

### **Lesson Plan:**

1. Gather the players on one court. Generate some discussion by asking: "What goes through your mind when a dink shot is hit to you? Do you have any purpose other than not hitting the ball into the net or out-of-bounds?" There may be some good answers (especially from those who have read the Player's Guide in advance). If not, ask: "What makes a dink shot hard to handle?"

Summarize the following items regarding offensive and defensive aspects of dinking:

#### Offensive tactics:

- Target an opponent's backhand side near his/her feet;
- Cross-court dink shots to make opponents hit the ball while on the move;
- Aim cross-court dink shots to make the ball land near the net;
- Reduce net clearance on dink shots;
- Flick the ball at the torso of your directly opposite opponent if his/her paddle is held below his/her waist;
- Forcefully hit "attackable" balls rather than just push or dink them back. An attackable ball is one that can be contacted at point at least 36 inches (think belly-button level or higher) above the court's surface;
- Occasionally hit an offensive lob (to be introduced later).

#### Defensive tactics:

- Hold the paddle at chin or chest level in the ready position;
  - Maintain position "tight" to the NVZ line;
  - Volley dink shots that can be reached comfortably (rather than letting them bounce before dinking);
  - Shift sideways synchronously with partner to protect against down-the-line and through-the-middle shots from the opponents;
  - Defer to the forehand on balls both partners can reach. The forehand player should take balls up to 1 foot inside the backhand partner's side of the court. The forehand player should communicate "Mine!" or "Got it!".
2. **Drill:** Send 6 players to one court and 4 to the other court. Organize the players in pairs across from each other at their NVZ lines. The players then practise hitting backhand dinks shots back-and-forth to the target area low on the opponent's backhand side. Critique and correct the players' mechanics. After 2 minutes, change partners and continue for another 2 minutes.
  3. **Drill:** Divide the players between the two courts (5 to each court). Two pair can simultaneously practise cross-court dinking, aiming for the area low on the opponent's backhand side. Shift players clockwise one position every two minutes, working the 5<sup>th</sup> player into the rotation. (10 minutes total time if 5 players.)

#### 4. **Modified Dinking Game**

We will make a couple changes to the Dinking Game as played in Modules 1 and 2.

- (i) Now only the initial dink serve and subsequent two shots must land in the “kitchen”. (The short serve is difficult—allow the server to bounce the ball in front of him/her and then hit a dink serve after the bounce.) Later shots may land beyond the NVZ line and play should continue.
- (ii) After the first three shots of the rally, other shots may be played to anywhere on the court. The rally continues until the point is won.

But let’s not keep score—in the desire to win, most players are reluctant to try new “stuff” and instead revert to whatever is instinctive for them. After each rally, the serve moves on to the next player. After 3 or 4 minutes; players should shift clockwise one position, working the 5<sup>th</sup> player into the rotation.

After each rally, the coach should comment on what was done well and what could have been done better.

5. **Explanation and Demo:** Gather all players on one court. The appropriate situation for, the purpose of, and mechanics of the **offensive lob** are described in the Player’s Guide. Coaches should review them with the group and demonstrate the mechanics of the offensive lob. At the 3.0 level, we expect players to lob only from their forehand. Point out that lobs to the diagonally opposite corner are less likely to land out of bounds.
6. **Drill:** Divide the players between the two courts. A coach on each court should dink to a player’s forehand. After a couple dinks, the player should lob to the diagonally opposite corner. Give a player 3 lob attempts--then the next player moves in. The just-finished player should shag balls. Cycle twice through the players.
7. **Drill:** Two pairs of players on each court can simultaneously practice offensive lobs. One player of a pair acts as the feeder for the other player to hit forehand offensive lobs. If both pair are lobbing to the same end of the court, the 5<sup>th</sup> player (if any) can help recover balls. After 5 lobs, shift one position clockwise working the 5<sup>th</sup> player into the rotation. (Allow 10 minutes total time.)

#### 8. **Modified Dinking Game**

If time permits, return to the dinking game as played in item #4, but add the offensive lob to the shot options. Again, no scorekeeping. To reduce the possibility of players falling or colliding in an attempt to retrieve a lob, impose the rule that it is the responsibility of a player to attempt to “cross over” and retrieve a lob hit to his partner’s backcourt.

After each rally, the coach should comment on what was done well and what could have been done better. Play out the remaining time for this lesson at this activity.

#### **Homework and Videos:**

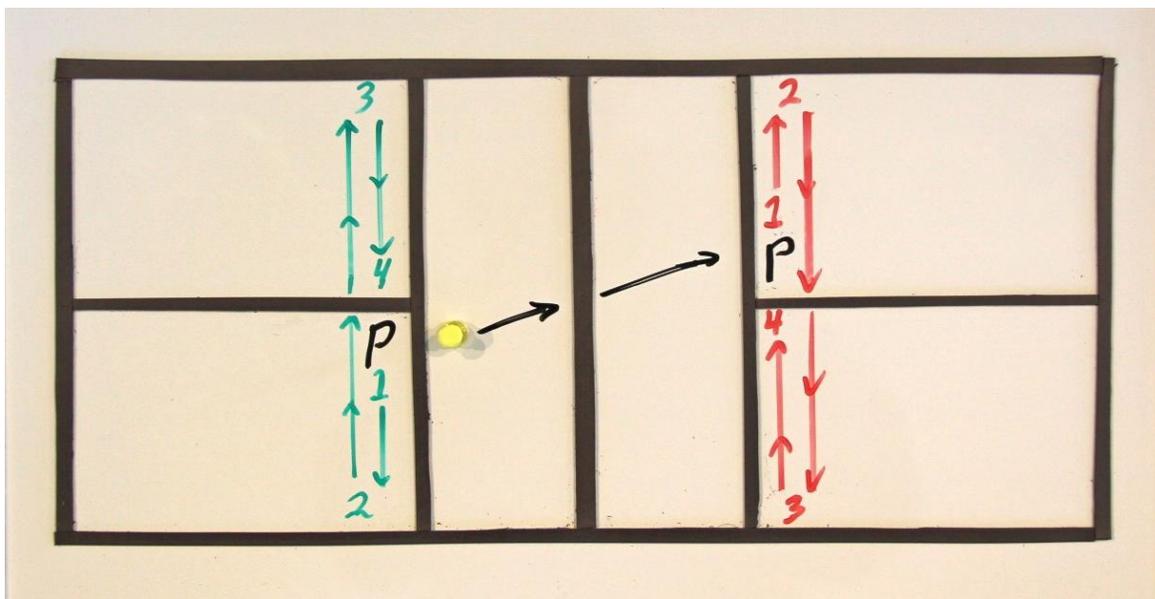
Encourage players to practise between lessons. The following URLs are included in the Player’s Guide. They provide reinforcement and ideas for drills.

<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mEI5l8aY3Ho&amp;t=20s">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mEI5l8aY3Ho&amp;t=20s</a>	Improve Your Dink Shot
<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EapzBLduLz0">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EapzBLduLz0</a>	Dinking Game Drill
<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YSKyY4jvyMl">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YSKyY4jvyMl</a>	Pickleball Lob
<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Nv-uBitJ52c">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Nv-uBitJ52c</a>	Offensive Lob Drill
<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qdv1kT0q0pQ">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qdv1kT0q0pQ</a>	Defending the Lob

## Lesson 2: Drop Shots; Overhead Smash

### Lesson Plan:

1. As a **warmup drill**, have pairs of players do the “**windshield-wiper dinking**” drill. (Use both courts.) See Figure C-3.3. A pair starts dinking at the middle (Positions 1) but then move in opposite directions toward Positions 2, dinking all the while. Continuously dinking, they reverse direction moving steadily to the opposite sidelines (Positions 3). Finally, they continue to dink while returning to the center (Positions 4). Note that it is natural for right-handed players to hit forehand dinks when to the right of the center line, and backhand dinks when to the left of center. Cycle twice through the players so that each player goes twice, but with different partners.



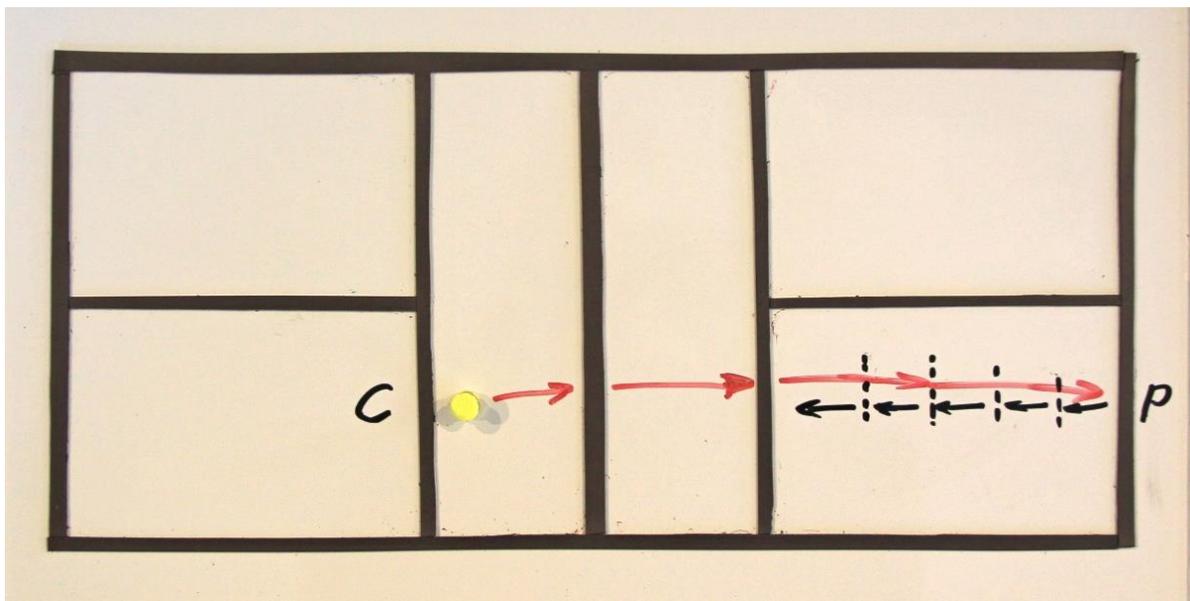
**Fig C-3.3:** Windshield-Wiper Dinking Drill

2. **Drop-Shot Demo:** The mechanics of the drop-shot were covered in Module 2, but there will be players in your group who have not taken Module 2. The technique for the drop shot is repeated in the Player’s Guide for this module. A review and demonstration by the coaches are probably warranted.
3. **Drop-Shot Drill:** In this drill, players increase the length of their drop shots in stages. Player #1 at the NVZ line feeds Player #2 positioned 5 feet behind the other NVZ line. Player #2 returns a drop shot. After 5 drop shots from this distance, Player #2 retreats to 10 feet from his/her NVZ line and attempts 5 more drop shots. Finally Player #2 attempts 5 drop shots from his/her baseline. The two players then reverse roles. Two pairs can be on a court at the same time. Rotate the 5<sup>th</sup> player into the drill. The coach should correct any faulty shot mechanics.

4. **Drop-Shot Drill.** This drill develops the skill of advancing from the baseline to the NVZ line in stages by hitting progressively shorter drop shots. A coach should demonstrate as in Figure C-3.4. The coach (C) feeds the player (P) at his/her baseline. The player hits a drop shot and advances 3 or 4 feet, stopping to take a second feed, and so on in continuous play arriving at his/her NVZ line after 3 or 4 stops along the way.

Players can line up at the baseline and the front-of-the-line player step to the baseline as soon as the preceding player reaches the NVZ. Cycle through the players for 10 minutes. The player should volley a drop shot if the feed gets to him/her at a comfortable volleying height.

At this level, the drill may end up being too much of a “Gong Show” if we have a player instead of a coach doing the feeding. (You can give it a try, but it may not work out.)



**Fig C-3.4:** Advancing to the NVZ Line in Stages

5. **Demo:** The circumstances that call for an **overhead (smash)** and the mechanics of the shot are presented in the Player's Guide. Gather all players at one court to review the footwork and mechanics for the overhead smash. Demonstrate with one coach hitting a medium-length cross-court lob from his/her NVZ line to the forehand side of the other coach starting from his/her NVZ line. The latter retreats two or three steps from his/her NVZ to hit the overhead shot.
6. **Drill:** Split the group between the two courts. Each coach should feed a shallow cross-court lob to a player's forehand side for each player to perform just the footwork (without hitting the ball). Cycle through the players 3 times correcting their footwork when needed.
7. **Drill:** Next the coaches should hit shallow cross-court lobs for each player to retreat and smash. Give each player 3 lobs. Cycle through the group 2 times. Idle players can shag balls.

## 8. **Modified Play:** Third-Shot-Drop Game

In this game, a rally begins with Team A at their NVZ line and Team B about 5 feet in from their baseline. The coach feeds the ball from Team A's backcourt so that it bounces 2 or 3 feet in front of one of the Team B players who **must** hit a good drop shot **and** immediately advance to the NVZ line. If the drop shot fails to land in Team A's NVZ **or** a Team B player is slow to get to his/her NVZ line, the rally ends and Team A wins the point. Otherwise, the rally continues with no restrictions on shots.

Time permitting, a group of four plays 3 games to 7 (win by 1). A group of five plays 4 games to 6 (win by 1). After each game, players rotate one position clockwise so that every game is with a different partner and no player sits out more than one game.

At the end of a rally revealing a "teachable moment" concerning shot selection, improper movement or positioning, missed opportunity, inadequate communication, etc., the coach should pose questions that get players to analyze their own play, diagnose where a mistake was made, and identify what should have been done.

### **Homework and Videos:**

Encourage the players to practise between lessons. The following URLs are included in the Player's Guide. They provide follow-up reinforcement and ideas for drills.

<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4n0wVXVO8o4">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4n0wVXVO8o4</a>	Third Shot Drill
<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N3Xocq7oNy8">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N3Xocq7oNy8</a>	Returning the Third Shot Drop
<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y3QNj6qjZCY">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y3QNj6qjZCY</a>	Improve Your Third Shot Drop
<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QuekFbM_sjM">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QuekFbM_sjM</a>	Drop Shot Drill (all distances)
<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OdjEBqih_2Q">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OdjEBqih_2Q</a>	Keys to Overhead Smash

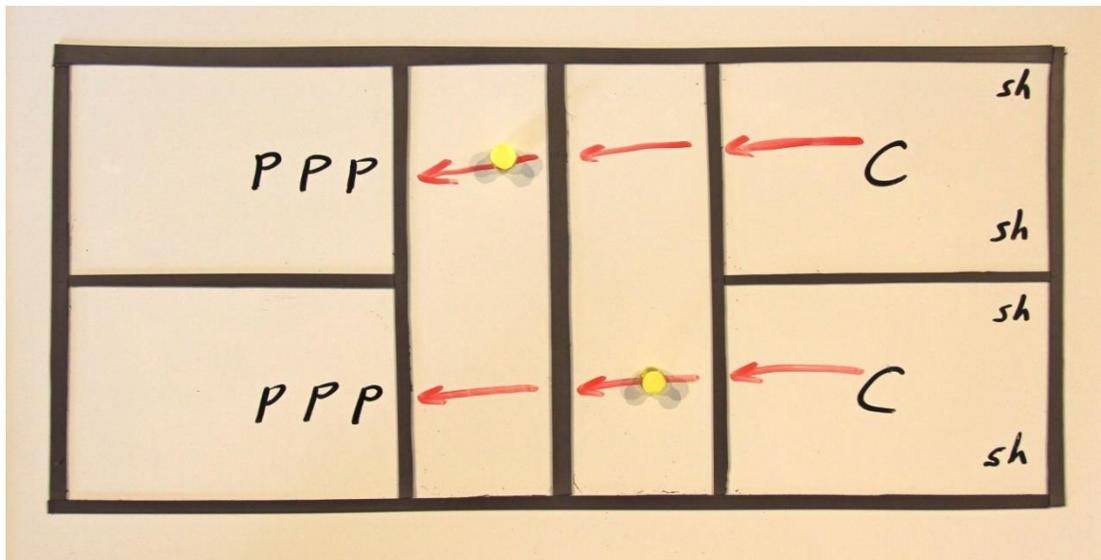
### **Lesson 3: Ground Strokes; Volleying**

The mechanics/technique for groundstrokes, punch volleys, and blocking volleys are described in the Student's Guide.

#### **Lesson Plan:**

1. **Warmup drill:** Have pairs of players do the “**windshield-wiper dinking**” drill introduced in Lesson 2. (Use both courts.) Cycle twice through the players so that each player goes twice, but with different partners.
2. **Demo:** Gather the players at one court for a coach to demonstrate the mechanics of the forehand groundstroke—first just the body movement and form without a ball, and then hitting forehand groundstrokes on feeds from the other coach.
3. **Drill:** Divide players between the two courts. Have the players hit straight ahead forehand groundstrokes to each other from opposite backcourts. Two pairs can be hitting simultaneously on each court. Every two minutes, players should shift one quadrant clockwise so that they exchange groundstrokes with a different player. Rotate in the 5<sup>th</sup> player (if any). Ideally, we want players to develop enough control and consistency to continuously hit groundstrokes back-and-forth to each other. Interrupt the drill to make suggestions on improving shot mechanics. After 6 minutes, begin the next drill.
4. **Drill:** Next have the players hit cross-court forehand groundstrokes to each other from opposite backcourts. Two pairs can be hitting simultaneously on each court. Every two minutes, players should shift one quadrant clockwise so that they exchange groundstrokes with a different player. Stop after 6 minutes.
5. **Demo:** Gather the players at one court for a coach to demonstrate the mechanics of the backhand groundstroke—first just the body movement and form without a ball, and then hitting backhand groundstrokes on feeds from the other coach.
6. **Drill:** Divide players between the two courts. Have the players hit straight ahead backhand groundstrokes to each other from opposite backcourts. Two pairs can be hitting simultaneously on each court. Every two minutes, players should shift one quadrant clockwise so that they exchange groundstrokes with a different player. Rotate in the 5<sup>th</sup> player (if any). After 6 minutes, begin the next drill.
7. **Drill:** Next have the players hit cross-court backhand groundstrokes to each other from opposite backcourts. Two pairs can be hitting simultaneously on each court. Every two minutes, players should shift one quadrant clockwise so that they exchange groundstrokes with a different player. Stop after 6 minutes.
8. **Demo:** With Coach A at mid-court hitting firm chest-high shots to opposing Coach B at B's NVZ line, B demonstrates the **backhand punch volley**--first against firm shots hit directly at B's chest, and then against balls hit firmly to B's backhand side. Point out preferred targets for the punch-volley return—low on backhand side or down-the-middle. Then demonstrate the **forehand punch volley** against balls hit firmly to B's forehand side.

9. **Drill.** Organize players (P), coaches (C), and “ball shaggers” (sh) as in Fig C-3.5 on the next page. Each coach should hit 5 balls straight at or to the backhand side of the first player in his line. The first player then replaces a shagger who in turn goes to the back of the line waiting to hit punch volleys. Cycle twice through the players. On the second cycle, the coach should specify a target area such as low on his/her backhand side or through the center gap/alley between coaches.



**Fig C-3.5:** Punch Volley Drill

10. **Drill.** Repeat Item 9 with the coaches hitting to the forehand side of the players for them to hit forehand punch volleys..
11. **Demo:** Next demonstrate the **blocking volley** with one coach hitting hard shots from the backcourt to the other coach at the NVZ line.
12. **Drill.** Coaches move to the backcourt in Figure C-3.5 and hit firm shots for players to attempt the blocking volley. (Shaggers should move to the sidelines at the NVZ.) Hit 5 shots (forehand and backhand sides) to each player. Cycle twice through the players.
13. **Match Play with Compulsory Third-Shot Drop**  
This is normal doubles play with one change—the third shot in a rally must be a drop shot. If the drop shot fails to land in the opponents’ NVZ, the rally ends, and it becomes “2<sup>nd</sup> server” or “side out”. Otherwise, the rally continues with no restrictions on shots. Remind players to use an offensive lob or punch volley or blocking volley when appropriate.

Time permitting, a group of four plays 3 games to 8 (win by 1). A group of five plays 4 games to 6 (win by 1). After each game, players rotate one position clockwise so that every game is with a different partner and no player sits out more than one game.

At the end of a rally revealing a “teachable moment” concerning shot selection, improper movement or positioning, missed opportunity, inadequate communication, etc., the coach should pose questions that get players to analyze their own play, diagnose where a mistake was made, and identify what should have been done.

**Homework and Video:**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=44LOdN0KG00>

Pickleball Blocking Basics

## **Lesson 4: Volleying Dink Shots; Diagnosing and Correcting Errors**

### **Lesson Plan:**

1. **Warmup:** Direct the players through the on-court warmup routine (dinking, then drop shots, then groundstrokes) described in the Player's Guide.
2. **Warmup drill:** Have pairs of players do the “**windshield-wiper dinking**” drill introduced in Lesson 2. (Use both courts.) Note that it is natural for right-handed players to hit forehand dinks when to the right of the center line, and backhand dinks when to the left of center. Cycle twice through the players so that each player goes twice, but with different partners.
3. **Explanation & Demonstration:** The coaches should **explain** both defensive and offensive reasons why players should, as much as possible, maintain position tight to the NVZ line. (An offensive lob is the most common shot to force an opponent off the NVZ line.) Next coaches should **demonstrate** how dink volleys help players (i) hold position at the NVZ line, and (ii) avoid having to handle dink shots that would otherwise land at their feet.
4. **Demo & Drill:** Coaches should demonstrate the dink-volley drill in which two players at their NVZ lines continuously exchange low-net-clearance volleys. Challenge pairs to set the class record for the highest number of consecutive volleys. After two minutes, change partners and repeat for another two minutes.
5. **Match Play:** The final topic in this lesson is **Diagnosing and Correcting Errors**. In the Player's Guide, some causes and remedies are suggested for a few common problems that many players encounter. To the extent coaches wish to deal with these matters, they are probably best handled in the context of regular doubles play. When, for example, there is an occurrence of a miss-hit, or an easily attackable ball is hit into the net, or a ball is popped up when it shouldn't happen, then stop play at the end of the rally and pose the question: “Why did fill-in-the-blank happen?”

Divide the players between the two courts. Four players play 3 regular games to 11 (win by 1 point). Play each game with a different partner. If there are five players in a group, play 4 games to 8 (win by one point) with a different player sitting out each game. Play with a different partner each game.

Even though there is no penalty for not making a third-shot drop shot, don't let players revert to a “banging” game. Encourage them to attempt third-shot drops. At the end of a rally revealing a “teachable moment” concerning shot selection, improper movement or positioning, missed opportunity, inadequate communication, etc., the coach should pose questions that get players to analyze their own play, diagnose where a mistake was made, and identify what should have been done.

## **That's it! Thanks coaches!**