

Pickleball-

The Sun City Festival Way

Module 2: Advancing from 2.0 to 2.5 Coach's Guide

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Preamble; Skills and Competencies at the 2.5 Level

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

Overall Objective

- To raise the player’s skills from the 2.0 level to the 2.5 level.

Individual Skills and Shot Execution

In addition to the skills specified in Module 1 for a 2.0 rating, a 2.5 level player:

- Demonstrates a simple pendulum swing on forehand and backhand dink shots;
- Demonstrates proper side-step movement while dinking at the NVZ line;
- Makes 50% of forehand down-the-line (i.e., within 2 feet of the line) dink shots;
- Makes 50% of forehand cross-court dink shots;
- Makes 50% of backhand down-the-line (i.e., within 2 feet of the line) dink shots;
- Makes 50% of backhand cross-court dink shots;
- Makes 40% of forehand 3rd-shot drop shots from the mid-court (transition) area;
- Makes 40% of backhand 3rd-shot drop shots from the mid-court area;
- Makes 50% of forehand punch volleys (from the NVZ line to at least mid-court depth);
- Makes 50% of backhand punch volleys (from the NVZ line to at least mid-court depth);
- Executes 20% of overhead returns of shallow lobs (to mid-court) while demonstrating the proper sideways turn (and retreat if needed);
- Serves (from both “deuce” & “ad” courts) such that 40% land in the deep ⅓ of the court;
- Returns serves (from both “deuce” & “ad” courts) such that 40% land in the deep ⅓ of the court.

Positioning and Game Strategy

In a doubles dinking game, the player:

- Steps in and out of the NVZ at the appropriate times;
- Demonstrates proper side-step movement to reach the ball;
- Returns to the proper ready position after making a dink shot;
- Attempts both forward and cross-court backhand dink shots;

In doubles match play, the player:

- Attempts deep (to back ⅓ of court) serves and returns of serve.
- Promptly advances to the NVZ line after returning a serve, but stops the advance if the third shot of the rally comes back before s/he reaches NVZ line;

- Other than on the return of serve, advances and retreats side-by-side with partner;
- Attempts to anticipate and move to the best position to make a groundstroke or volley;
- Attempts third-shot drop from the back 1/3 of the court;
- Communicates with partner on balls near the center line; defers to partner's forehand;
- Demonstrates court and position awareness by not hitting balls that would otherwise land out of bounds.

Lesson 1: Dinking; Introduction to the Drop Shot

In the Player's Guide we explain the rationale for teaching dinking first.

Lesson Plan:

1. Without a ball, one coach should demonstrate the pendulum swing for the **forehand (straight ahead) dink**. (**Note to coaches:** We will sometimes perform "demo's" without a ball because, when a ball is part of the demo, observers tend to focus more on the movement of the ball than on body mechanics.)
2. Have the players face the coaches and mirror the stroke as the coaches repeat it a few times.
3. Next one of the coaches should hand-feed the ball over the net for the other coach to demonstrate all the elements of the forehand dink (including the return to the ready position). Repeat 3 or 4 times. Point out that a player can step into the NVZ to take an opponent's short dink shot after it bounces, but should quickly step out after the shot.)
4. **Drill:** Send 6 players to one court and 4 to the other court. Organize the players in pairs as in Fig C-2.1 for 6 players. Each "P" represents a player. The players then practise dinking to each other's forehand. Critique and correct the players' mechanics. After 2 minutes, change partners and continue for another 2 minutes.

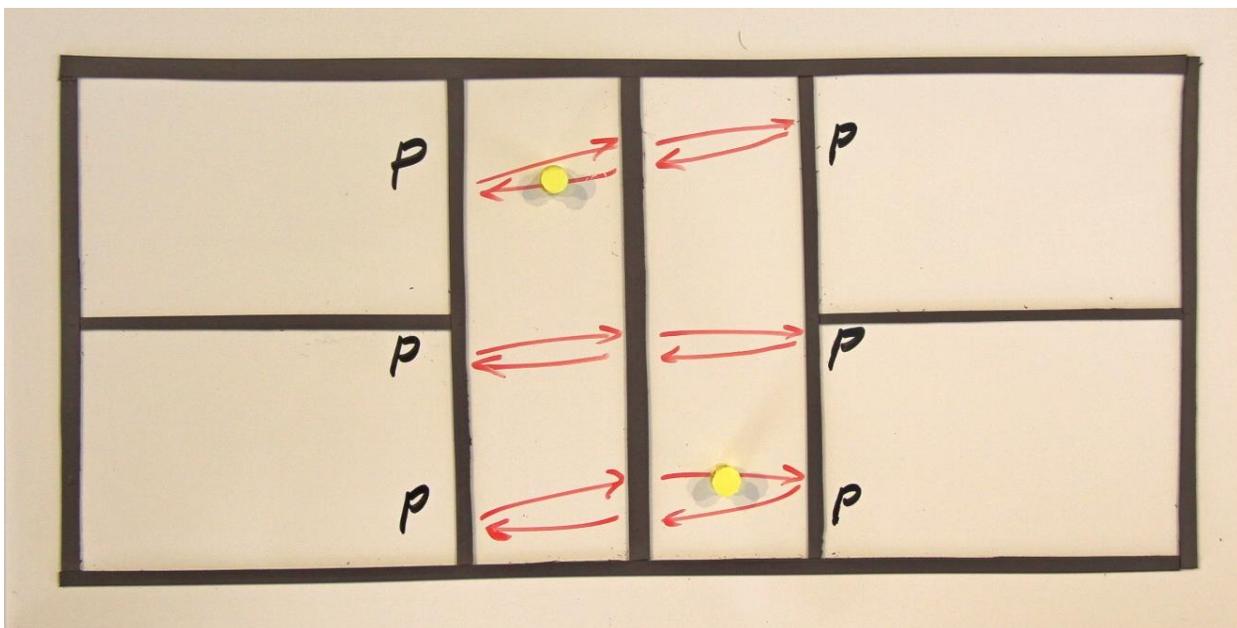


Fig C-2.1: Forehand Dinking Drill

5. Repeat items 1 through 4 for the **backhand (straight ahead) dink**.
6. One coach should hand-feed the ball for the other coach to demonstrate (i) the **forehand cross-court dink**, and (ii) the **backhand cross-court dink**.
7. **Drill:** Divide the players between the two courts (5 to each court). Two pair can simultaneously practise cross-court dinking. (Fig C-2.2) Shift players clockwise one position every couple minutes so each works on both forehand and backhand (and the 5th player enters the rotation). (10 minutes total time if 5 players.)

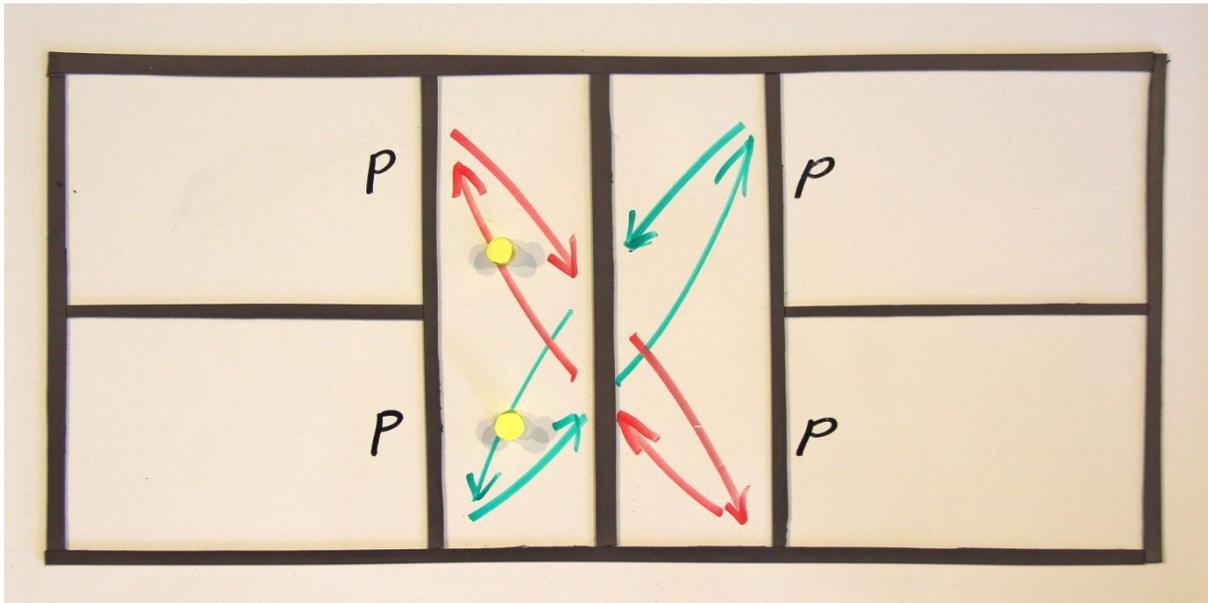


Fig C-2.2: Cross-Court Dinking Drill

8. **Drill:** Next players dink with a player directly across the net. But now they should dink to the two corners of the opponent's "kitchen". In Fig C-2.3, the black P players aim for the opposite black X's, and the **red P players** for the opposite **red X's**. (2 minutes with each of 2 partners.)

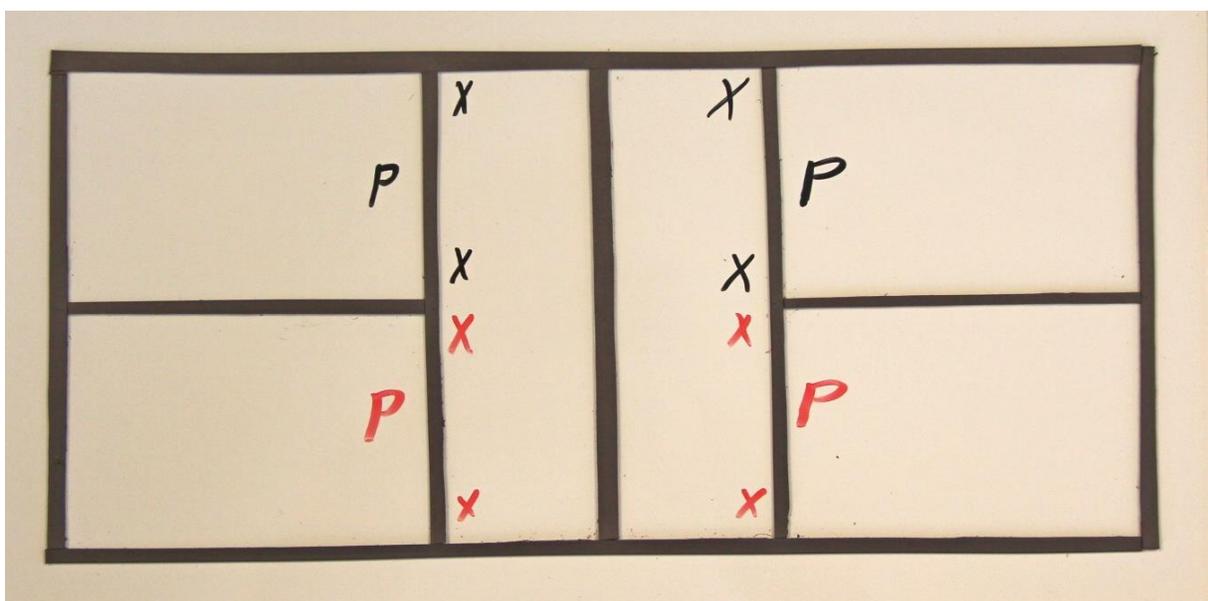


Fig C-2.3: Precision Dinking Drill

9. **Game Play: The Dinking Game.**

Doubles format on each court. Players must hit only dinks that land in the opponents' NVZ until the ball is hit out of bounds or into the net. Games to 5, win by 1. The server calls out the score and changes sides as in a normal game. Players rotate one position clockwise after each game. A 4-player group plays 3 games, each with a different partner; a 5-player group plays 4 games with a different player sitting out each game. (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.) Encourage players to:

- Return to the ready position after making a dink shot;
- Return to the NVZ line if they step back to hit the ball;
- Force opponents to move from side to-side by hitting cross-court dinks and by dinking to both their forehand and backhand sides;
- Communicate with partner on shots landing near the (extension of the) center line;
- On balls that bounce within 1 foot of the (extension of the) center line, defer to the partner whose forehand is closer to the centre line.

10. Gather all players on one court. A coach should demonstrate the mechanics of **drop shot** from mid-court. First demonstrate with a paddle but without a ball. (The mechanics are presented in the Player's Guide.) Have the players face the coach and mirror the coach's mechanics a few times.

11. Next demonstrate the drop shot with one coach feeding the ball from mid-court to the other coach at the opposite mid-court. Repeat 2 or 3 times from increasingly deeper positions.

12. **Drill:** Divide between the two courts. The coach at mid-court feeds 5 balls to a player standing about 5 feet behind his/her NVZ. Cycle once through the players. (Have waiting players shag balls.)

13. **Drill:** Repeat with a player starting 5 ft behind the NVZ, and then taking a small step back after each shot to lengthen the drop shot. Cycle once through the players.

14. **Drill:** If time remains, have players practise drop shots by feeding each other in pairs.

Homework and Videos:

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

- | | |
|---|---------------------------------|
| https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mEI5l8aY3Ho | Improving your dink shot. |
| https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vsyjY2qM4OM | Dinking drills. |
| https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TK6fnPh90IU | Additional dinking tips. |
| https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LudiKnT6WwY | Backhand Dink |
| https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EapzBLduLz0 | Dinking Game Drill |
| https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EAUYwOu9iJ0 | Basic Third Shot Drop |
| https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QuekFbM_sjM | Drop Shot Drill (all distances) |

Lesson 2: Groundstroke; Serve; Return of Serve

The mechanics for each of these shots are presented in the Player's Guide.

Lesson Plan:

1. Briefly review the mechanics of dinking. As a warmup drill, have pairs of players do the "**travelling dinking**" drill. (Use both courts.) When one pair gets halfway across, another pair can start. Once both (or all three pairs) have crossed the court, then they dink back to the starting side. Do two out-and-back cycles of forehand dinking and then two cycles of backhand dinking.

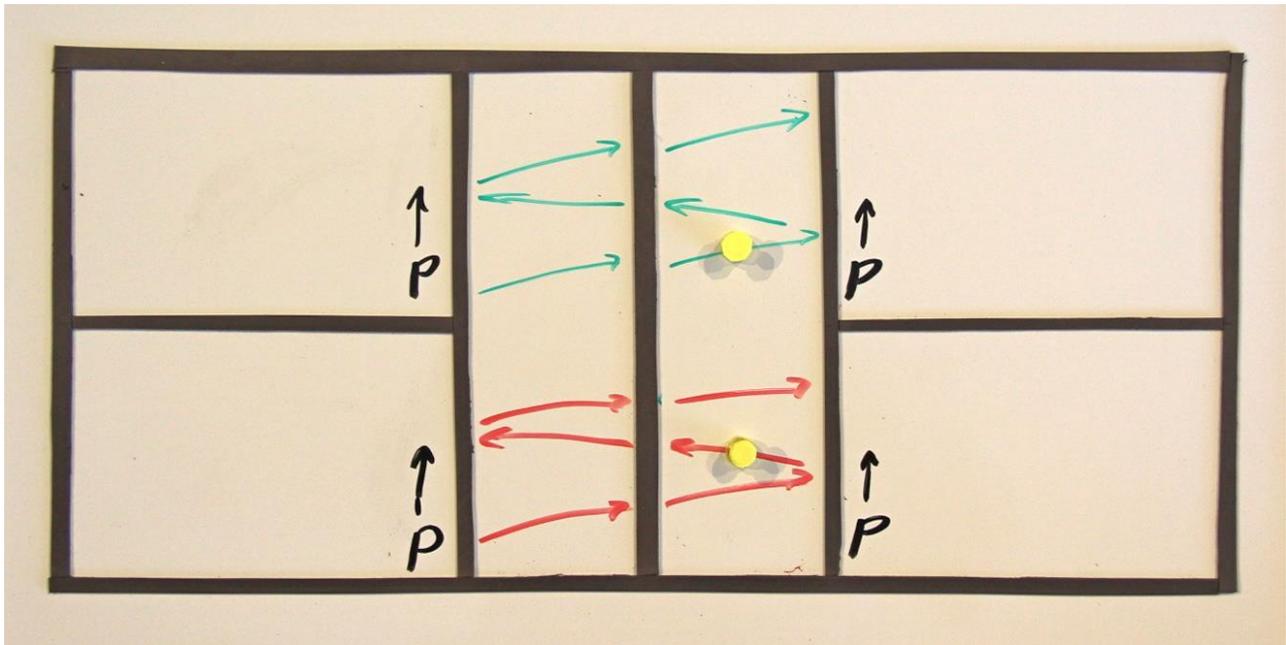


Fig C-2.1: Travelling Dinking Drill

2. Without a ball, one coach should demonstrate the **forehand groundstroke**. The mechanics of the shot are listed in the Player's Guide.
3. Have the players face the coaches and mirror the stroke as the coaches repeat it a few times.
4. Next one of the coaches should feed the ball for the other coach to demonstrate all the elements of the forehand groundstroke. Emphasize the importance of projecting the ball's early trajectory and quickly moving to the optimal spot for hitting the groundstroke. Repeat 2 or 3 times.
5. **Drill:** Divide players between the two courts. Each coach feeds the ball for a player in the backcourt to hit it back using a forehand groundstroke. Three shots for each player. (After hitting 3 balls, a player shags for the next player.) Critique the players' mechanics. Cycle through the players at least twice.
6. Repeat Items 2 to 5 for the **backhand groundstroke**.
7. **Drill:** Next have the players hit groundstrokes (forehand and backhand) to each other from opposite backcourts. Two pairs can be hitting simultaneously on a court. Interrupt the drill to make suggestions on improving shot mechanics. Don't forget to rotate in any extra player. (3 minutes straight ahead hitting & 3 minutes cross-court hitting.)

8. **The serve.** Demonstrate the mechanics of the serve, first without hitting the ball, and then hitting the ball. Emphasize that the forehand groundstroke mechanics can be used for the serve--just toss the ball out from the body in such a way that, as you shift weight from the back to the forward foot, you make contact with the ball on the forehand side a little in front of the forward knee. The Player's Guide presents the rationale for hitting relatively soft serves that bounce in the opponents' backcourt.
9. **Drill:** Have 4 players go to the 4 serving locations on a court. Give a ball to each diagonally opposite pair to practise serving back and forth. (Both balls can be going simultaneously.) After one minute, have players shift positions clockwise and continue serving. Repeat until every player has served from each of the 4 serving locations. Remind them that their serves should land in the deep half of the court.
10. **The Return of Serve** One coach should serve to the other coach. The latter should demonstrate the three components of the return of serve:
 - Reacting quickly to the serve and moving to an optimal spot to hit a groundstroke (preferably on the forehand side);
 - Hitting a soft arching deep groundstroke; and
 - Promptly advancing to join his/her partner at the NVZ line.
11. **Drill:** Divide the players between the two courts. A coach will be the server on each court. Now have the players in turn hit a return of serve including the swift advance to the NVZ line. (Then the player should shag the next player's return of serve before returning to the line of waiting players.) Cycle through the players 4 times, switching the serving side halfway through. Encourage soft arching deep returns of serve. (Landing in the deep half of the court is good enough at the 2.5 level.)

12. **Game Play:** Regular Match Play

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.

The coach should remind players that, in an official IPTPA ratings assessment, the Certified Ratings Specialist puts more emphasis on (i) players' shot selection (and execution), and (ii) their movement and positioning than on winning the game. Accordingly, remind players to:

- Hit serves inbounds and deep;
- Return serves deep and advance to the NVZ;
- Attempt third-shot drop shots;
- Communicate on balls near the center line;
- Move opponents from side-to-side when dinking.

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.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fK4bFs6RkdI>
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oDD2GY3ywlQ>
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YOASInnqjq0>
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ovaoROTczlY>
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NAwIXA4cWgY>

The Underhand Serve
 How to Hit Great Groundstrokes
 Pickleball Serve-Legal and Effective
 Be at the NVZ; Mistakes & Benefits
 The Soft Return of Serve

Lesson 3: Punch Volley; Overhead; Drop Shot

Lesson Plan:

1. As a warmup drill, have pairs of players do the “**travelling dinking**” drill introduced in Lesson 2. (Use both courts.) Once both (or all three pairs) have crossed the court, then they dink back to the starting side. Do two out-and-back cycles of forehand dinking and then two cycles of backhand dinking.
2. The mechanics of the **punch volley** and the circumstances in which to employ it are described in the Student’s Guide. With one coach feeding the ball to the second coach, demonstrate the **backhand punch volley** (first on balls fed firmly at the body, then on balls fed to the backhand side).
3. **Drill.** Organize players (P), coaches (C), and “ball shaggers” (sh) as in Fig C-1.4. Each coach should hit 5 balls at or to the backhand side of the first player in his line. The first player then replaces a shagger who goes to the back of the line waiting to punch volley. Cycle twice through the players. On the second cycle, the coach should specify a target--his feet or the center gap/alley between opponents.

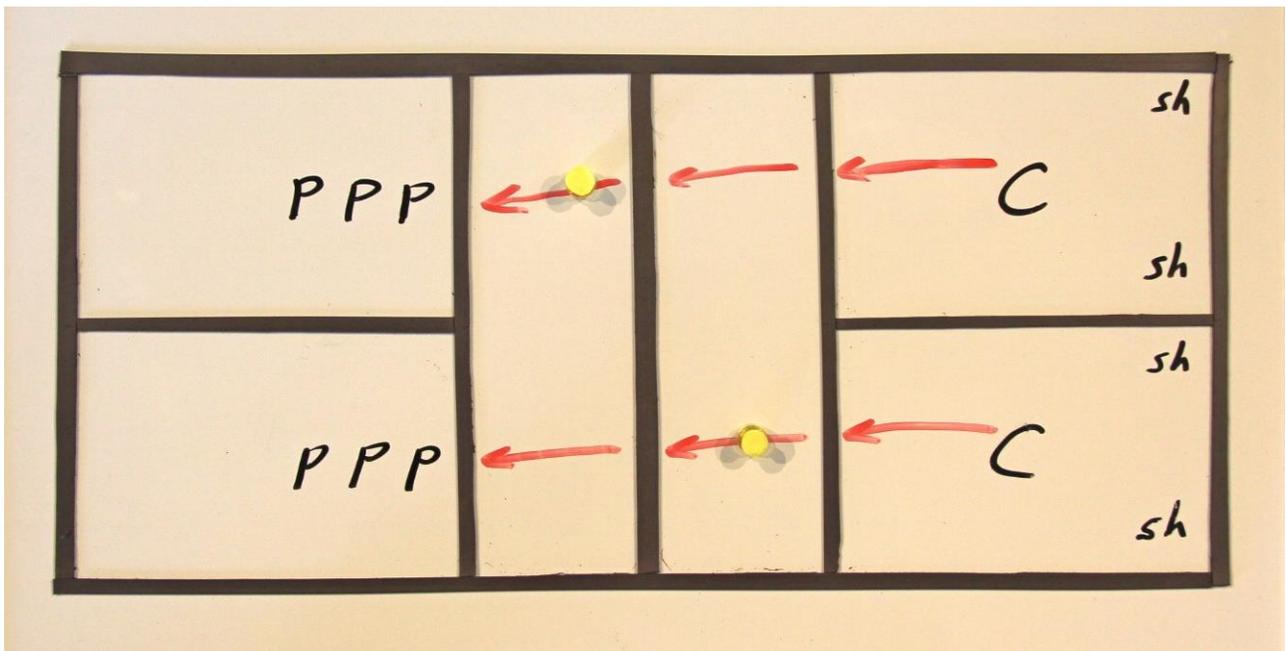


Fig C-1.4: Punch Volley Drill

4. Next the two coaches demo the forehand volley (at the NVZ line).
5. **Drill.** Repeat Item 3 with the coaches hitting to the forehand side of the players.
6. Coaches demonstrate the blocking/drop volley with one coach hitting hard shots from the backcourt to the other coach at the NVZ line.
7. **Drill.** Coaches move to the backcourt in Figure C-1.4 and hit firm shots for players to attempt the drop volley. Hit 5 shots (forehand and backhand sides) to each player.
8. The circumstances that call for an **overhead (overhead smash)** and the mechanics of the shot are described in the Student’s Guide.

Note: At the 2.5 level, we only expect a player to smash relatively shallow lobs (no deeper than mid-court) to his/her forehand side. (Even then, we're expecting a low % success rate.)

9. With one coach feeding the ball to the second coach, demonstrate the footwork to move from the NVZ line to mid-court and be in position to hit the ball (but don't hit the ball). Repeat twice.
10. **Drill.** Both coaches can simultaneously feed balls for the players in pairs to preform just the footwork (without hitting the ball). Cycle through the players 3 times.
11. With one coach feeding the ball to the other coach, demonstrate both the retreat and the mechanics of the smash.
12. **Drill.** Divide between the two courts. The coaches lob the ball to mid-court on the player's forehand side for the player to smash. Cycle through the group 3 times.
13. Review the purpose and mechanics of the **drop shot** (introduced in Lesson 1).
14. **Drill:** Divide players between the two courts. A coach at mid-court feeds 5 balls to a player standing about 5 feet behind his/her NVZ. After each ball, the player takes a small step back to lengthen the drop shot. (Have waiting players shag balls.)
15. **Drill.** Repeat Item 14. This time, have the player direct his/her drop shots toward a second player at the opposing NVZ line. The latter player should hit a punch volley or overhead on any attackable ball, or a dink shot return of a good drop shot.
16. **Drill.** Players set up as though for a normal game. Only three shots in each rally—the third shot must be a drop shot followed by a prompt advance to the NVZ. No scorekeeping. Serve keeps rotating. After each player has served, players move one position clockwise (allowing the 5th player if any to rotate in). (10 minutes)
17. **Game Play:** Regular Match Play
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 shift one position clockwise so that every game is with a different partner and no player sits out more than one game.

Remind the players that they should try to incorporate all the elements they have learned—deep serves, deep returns of serve followed to the NVZ, third-shot drop shots, punch volleys, dinking, and scorekeeping. Interrupt play to correct technique or positioning.

Homework and Videos:

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

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

Pickleball Blocking Basics

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QuekFbM_sjM

Drop Shot Drill (all distances)

Lesson 4: Skill Assessment

On page 4 of the Player's Guide for Module 1, it states that Festival's modules for teaching pickleball ...

“have been intentionally designed to align with the International Pickleball Teaching Professional Association's (IPTPA) skills criteria for each skill level. A player able to demonstrate most of the skills and strategies listed for any of our modules will be able, we are confident, to pass the formal ratings assessment for that level conducted by a Certified Rating Specialist (CRS) from the IPTPA.”

Accordingly, in this 4th and final lesson of Module 2 we will approximate the assessment procedure that would be carried out by a CRS from the IPTPA. We conduct this assessment for the following reasons:

- With the intention of raising the overall standard of pickleball play at SCF, our Pickleball Club concurs with the IPTPA's philosophy of establishing rigorous consistent uniform arms-length assessment of player skill-level ratings outside of (but consistent with) the USAPA's tournament-based ratings system.
- It is the Club's hope that many members will choose, at some point in the future, to undergo a formal rating assessment by the IPTPA. Therefore, it is appropriate that we plant the idea of undertaking a future assessment, and that we develop in our members a growing comfort with the assessment process.
- The Club's Executive and volunteer coaches want to know if the design and content of each module substantially achieve that module's objectives.
- Presumably most players wish to know, at least informally, (i) whether their play has attained the level intended for the module, and (ii) whether they are ready to advance to the next module in the progression.

The IPTPA skill assessment has three main components:

- ✓ Individual shot execution;
- ✓ Modified dinking game;
- ✓ Regular match play.

Lesson Plan on next page

Lesson Plan:

1. Each coach takes half the group to separate courts. Record the players' names on the Scoresheet for Module 2. The column titled "Standard" is the score a player should attain or exceed. In actual IPTPA assessments, exceeding the standard on some shots will help offset instances of falling short of the standard on other shots—it is the aggregate score that really matters.
2. As a warmup have players do the "**travelling dinking**" drill as in Lessons 2 and 3.
3. Score each player on his/her "**forehand dink down-the-line**" (meaning the dink should land in the kitchen within 2 feet of the sideline). The coach will need to track both the running total of feeds and the number of successful returns. Don't count any instances in which your feed is not "nice". You do not have to stop after each dink—you can maintain continuous dinking if returned dinks are good. Record the number of successful returns from 8 good feeds. (Have waiting players help with confirming your count and recording the scores.)
4. Score each player on the **forehand cross-court dink**, and so on for **backhand down-the-line dink** shots and **backhand cross-court dink** shots.
5. Score the players on 10 **drop shots from the transition area** ("no-man's land"). Don't count any instances in which your feed is not "nice". You can maintain continuous feeding if the returned shots are good. Record the number of successful returns from 10 good feeds.
6. Score the players on 6 **backhand punch volleys** and then 6 **forehand punch volleys**. Hit your feeds from quite deep in the court. Aim at the player's body or backhand side for the backhand punch volley, and then at his/her forehand side for the forehand punch volley. Again, count only results from good feeds. At the 2.5 level we don't expect any particular depth or direction of the punch volleys.
7. Score the players on 5 **serve**s from each of the "deuce" and "ad" sides. Give each player a couple warmup serves before starting the official count. To be counted as a "good" serve, the ball must land inbounds and in the deep third of the court.
8. Score the players on 5 **returns of serve** from each of the "deuce" and "ad" sides. The coach should serve to the players. To be counted as a "good" return of serve, the ball must land inbounds and in the deep third of the court.

Continued

9. **Modified Dinking Game** Two teams start at their NVZ lines. The coach puts the ball into play for each rally by tossing it into the NVZ from the sideline. To be good, a shot must land in the opponents' NVZ. Rotate the coach's "serve" clockwise to a different player at the start of each rally. The game is to 4 points with rally scoring (that is, a point is awarded to the winner of each rally).

If there are 4 players in the group, play two more games to 4 points. Change partners so that each player has a different partner every game.

If there are 5 players in the group, play three more games to 4 points. Work the extra player into the rotation—no player should sit out more than one game. Change partners so that each player has a different partner every game. (It will end up that four players play 3 games and one player plays all 4 games.)

The coach should point out and correct:

- NVZ violations;
- Failure to return to the proper ready position after making a dink shot;
- Failure to vary dink shots: forward & cross-court, forehand & backhand.

In an actual IPTPA Assessment, a group consists of 4 players, all seeking the same rating. The CRS scores each player on both the proficiency of his/her dinking game and the total points his/her teams wins in 3 dinking games.

10. **Regular Match Play** Four players play three regular games to 7, each game with a different partner. If there are five players in a group, play five games to 5 (win by one point). Each player sits out one game. Play with a different partner each game.

The coach should point out and correct:

- Failure of the server to call out the correct score;
- Failure to advance to the NVZ line after returning a serve;
- Failure to attempt drop shots;
- NVZ violations when volleying;
- Poor positioning;
- Incorrect in/out line calls.

In an actual IPTPA Assessment, the CRS scores each player on both the quality of his/her play and the total points each his/her teams wins in the three games.