

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 4 Player’s Guide to be aware of the content provided to players. In Module 4 there is very little explicit coverage of the mechanics for various shots—these have been presented in Modules 1, 2, and 3. If you have not previously coached in Modules 1, 2, and 3, you can go online to the Player’s Guides for any of those modules and view each module’s opening Contents page to locate various topics.

Skills and Competencies at the 3.5 Level

Overall Objective

- To raise the player’s skills from the 3.0 level to the 3.5 level

Individual Skills and Shot Execution

With improved shot execution, a 3.5 level player:

- Makes at least 14 out of 20 dinks in the windshield wiper dinking exercise;
- Makes 70% of backhand cross-court dink shots;
- Makes 60% of forehand down-the-line 3rd-shot drop shots from transition area;
- Makes 60% of forehand cross-court 3rd-shot drop shots from transition area;
- Makes 60% of backhand down-the-line 3rd-shot drop shots from transition area;
- Makes 60% of backhand cross-court 3rd-shot drop shots from transition area;
- Makes 40% of forehand 3rd-shot drop shots from the baseline;
- Makes 40% of backhand 3rd-shot drop shots from the baseline;
- Makes 70% of forehand punch volleys with depth and direction control;
- Makes 70% of backhand punch volleys with depth and direction control;
- Executes 60% of overhead smash returns of lobs while demonstrating proper sideways turn and arm position;
- Serves (from both “deuce” & “ad” courts) such that 80% bounce in the deep ⅓ of the court;
- Returns serves (from both “deuce” & “ad” courts) such that 80% land in the deep ⅓ of the court;
- Executes 60% of offensive lobs from the NVZ line.

Continued ...

Positioning and Game Strategy

In a doubles dinking game, a doubles team:

- Is able to dink consistently while changing shot direction from cross-court to down-the-line, both forehand & backhand;
- Shifts sideways as a team according to ball movement in order to better defend against down-the-line and between-player return dinks;
- 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 returns 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 70% of third shots;
- Based on the early trajectory of a partner's third-shot drop attempt, either rushes to the NVZ line or remains in the backcourt to defend a punch volley or smash;
- 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 improved 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: Strategic Dinking; Hitting & Defending the Offensive Lob

Lesson Plan:

- 1) For a **warmup drill**, divide the players between the two courts and have them in pairs do the “**windshield wiper dinking**” drill that was introduced and described in Item 2 of Lesson 2 in the Coach’s Guide for Module 3. Each pair starts at the center line and continues dinking as they sidestep in opposite directions to the sidelines, then return back through the middle and on to the other sidelines, and finally back to the center line. Cycle twice through the players (changing partners for the second set).

- 2) **Dink Volley Drill:** Remind the players that they should volley an incoming dink shot if they can contact the ball at a point at least 18 inches above ground and 18-to-24 inches in front of their body.

Two (or even three) pairs of players can simultaneously work on the drill on each court. While maintaining position “tight” to the NVZ line, each pair should dink volley back and forth trying to accumulate as many consecutive dink volleys as possible. After two minutes, players shift clockwise one position and dink volley for another 2 minutes. Coaches should encourage players to hit dink volleys low enough that the shot would not be “attackable” in actual competition. Finally, one more player shift and a third two-minute drill.

- 3) **(Forehand) Offensive Lob Drill:** Gather players on one court. The two coaches should demonstrate hitting a forehand offensive lob (in the context of a dinking situation). Point out the greater margin of error for a cross-court lob vs. a straight ahead lob.

Then split between the two courts. A coach should feed dinks to a player’s forehand for the player to hit a lob. (The coach should raise his paddle overhead to try to block each lob attempt.) Allow a player 3 lob attempts and then the next player steps up. Idle players can shag balls.

After one cycle through the players, have the players work in pairs on their offensive lobs. One player should feed and the other lob for 2 minutes. Then change roles for the next 2 minutes. (Two pair can be on a court hitting lobs at the same time.) After the 4 minutes are up, change partners and repeat (for another 4 minutes).

Continued

- 4) **Defending Against the Offensive Lob:** Gather the players at one court. To demonstrate **defending the short lob**, both coaches occupy diagonally opposite positions at their NVZ lines. One coach should hit a short cross-court lob over the other coach. The latter demonstrates turning and gliding one or two steps back to get in a position to hit an overhead return.

For **deeper lobs**, point out the dangers (particularly for old folks) of backpedalling in an attempt to get to the ball. For reasons of both safety and effectiveness, the defenders need to coordinate both their communication and their movement as described on page 5 of the Player's Guide and mostly repeated here. In Figure M-4.1, player P1 has hit a deep lob (red arc). As early as possible, P4 shouts "Yours!" and/or P3 shouts "Mine!" and P3 hustles to intercept the ball in P4's backcourt. Meanwhile, P4 moves to the position vacated by P3. If P3 can get under a high lob, s/he can hit an overhead smash. Otherwise P3 should run beyond the ball's bounce-point and hit a drop shot to the opponents' NVZ or a deep lob to their backcourt. Properly executed, either shot gives P3 time to rush (green arrow) to the spot vacated by P4.

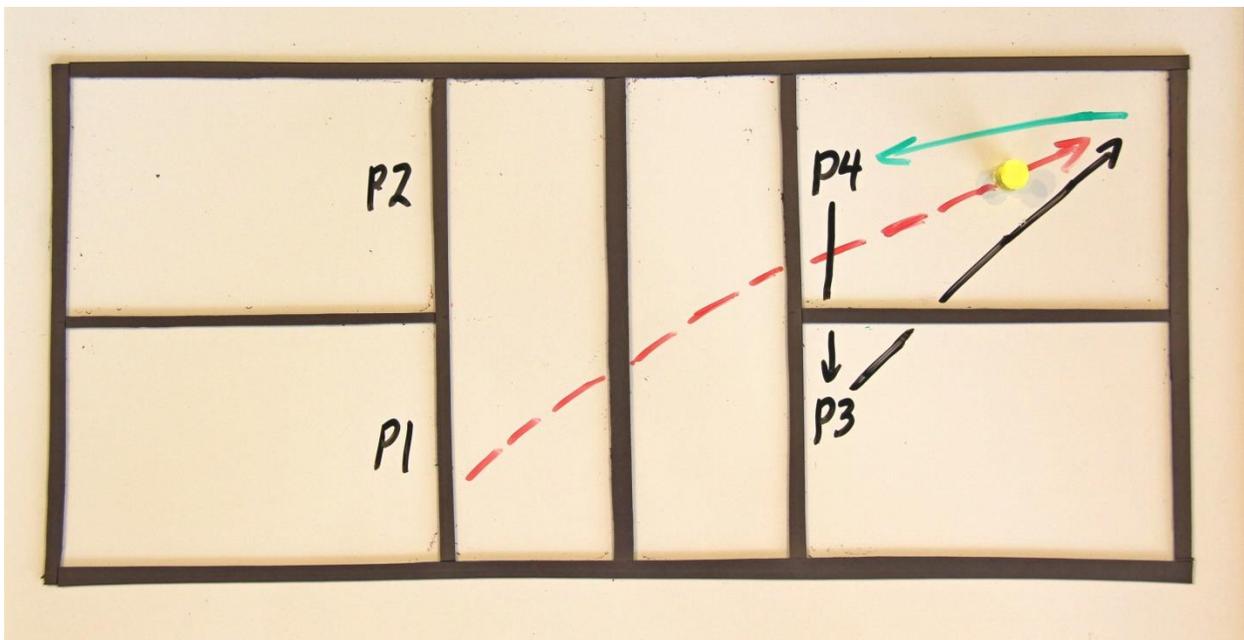


Figure M-4.1: Defending a Deep Lob

As a **demonstration**, the two coaches should take on the roles of P3 and P4. P3 should dink with P1, setting up a forehand offensive lob by P1. The coaches react as dictated by the depth of the lob. After 3 or 4 repetitions, demonstrate defending when P2 lobs to P3's backcourt.

- 5) **Drill: Defending Against the Offensive Lob** Half of the players go to each court and take up dinking positions. Start dinking to P1's forehand. P1's second or third shot should be an offensive lob to P3's backcourt. P3 and P4 react and defend as appropriate for the depth of the lob. Then the players rotate one position clockwise and the new player in position P1 hits the lob. Keep rotating players but always lob from position P1. (Continue for 5 minutes).

Start over again with the player in position P2 making the forehand lob to P3's backcourt. Rotate players after each lob and continue for 5 minutes.

6) **Game Play: The Dinking Game.**

Remind players of some important elements of intentional strategic dinking (because we want players to employ them in our “dinking game” activity).

- Target an opponent’s backhand side near his/her feet;
- Dinking cross-court provides a great “margin of error” and often causes opponents to hit the ball from an awkward position while on the move;
- Forcefully hit “attackable” balls rather than just push or dink them back;
- Volley dink shots that can be comfortably reached;
- Quickly return to the ready position after making a shot;
- Occasionally hit an offensive lob ;
- Shift laterally “in sync” with your partner according to the movement of the ball;
- Communicate with partner especially on incoming dinks near the center line and on opponent’s lobs.

The rules for our “dinking game” today are:

- Only the initial dink serve and the subsequent two shots must land in the “kitchen” (although they may be volleyed before they bounce);
- After the first three shots of the rally, any shot can be made to any location on the court;
- “Electric” or “rally” scoring—a point is awarded to the team that wins each rally.
- Serve passes to the next (clockwise) player after each rally. The first team to serve in a game gets only one serve.
- Game to 11, win by one.

Coaches should watch for “teachable moments”—instances of improper positioning or movement, missed opportunities, inadequate communication, or poor shot selection (rather than merely inaccurate shots). A coach should pause play (at the end of the rally) and try to elicit from the players their thoughts about where and why a rally went “off the rails” for one team. We’re looking for the sort of causes listed in the first sentence of this paragraph rather than instances of “Joe made a crummy drop shot” or “Cynthia popped up her dink shot”.

Play additional games as time permits, changing partners for each new game.

Homework and Videos

Encourage players to practise and drill between lessons. The following URLs are also listed in the Player’s Guide.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gdv1kT0q0pQ>

Defending the Lob

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1NhvH07dvwQ>

Shot Options for Returning a Lob

Lesson 2: Drop Shots; Changing the Pace of the Ball

Lesson Plan:

1. For a **warmup drill**, divide the players between the two courts and have them in pairs do the “**windshield wiper dinking**” drill that was introduced and described in Item 2 of Lesson 2 in the Coach’s Guide for Module 3.
2. **Drop-Shot Drill** Divide the players between the two courts. Configure 4 players on each court as in Figure M-4.2, **but** with P3 and P4 at their mid-court. P3 should feed a low-speed shot to P2’s backcourt for P2 to hit a drop shot to P3’s backhand side. Similarly and at the same time, P4 feeds P1 for P1 to hit a drop shot to P4’s backhand side. After 5 shots, reverse roles with P1 and P2 feeding P4 and P3, respectively. After another 5 shots, players should switch sides (not ends) and repeat. If there is a 5th player at a court, work him/her into the drill. Before concluding, each player should attempt at least 20 drop shots.

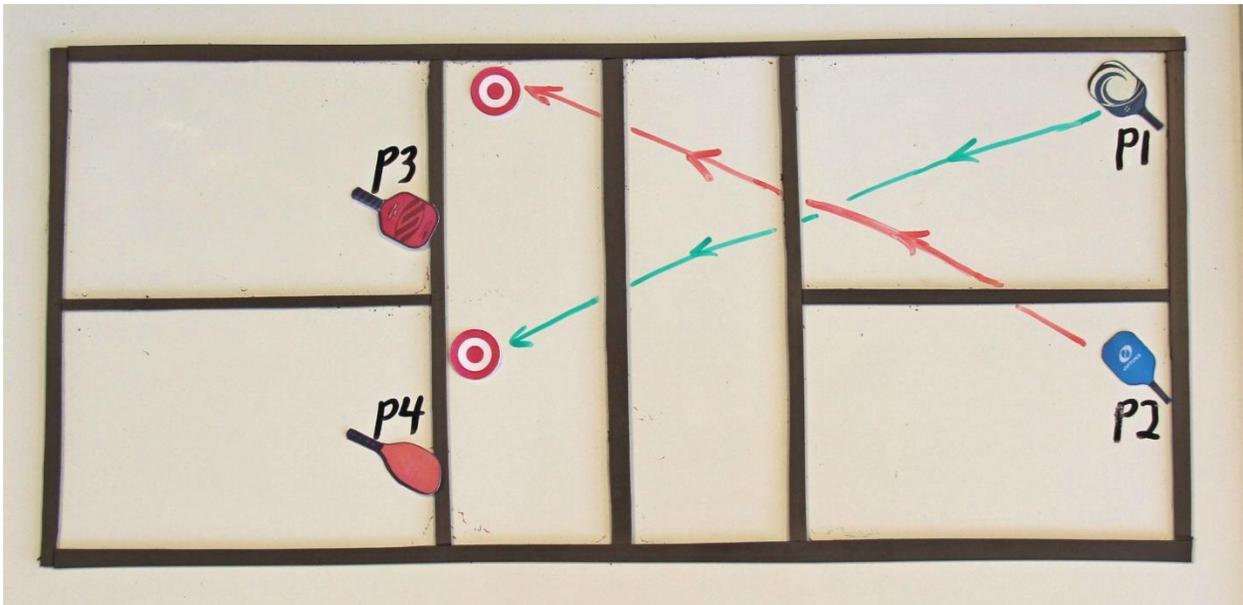


Figure M-4.2: Targeting the Drop Shot

3. **Drop-Shot Drill** Now we want to drill on drop shots with partners judging and communicating (as described in the Student’s Guide for this lesson) on whether to rush to the NVZ based on the early trajectory of the ball. Do the usual serve, return-of-serve, third-shot drop sequence and play out each rally. Aim for an opponent’s backhand on the drop shot. Do not keep score. After a player has 2 serves; serve passes clockwise around the court to the next player. After one cycle (8 serves in all), players shift one position clockwise and do another cycle of 8 serves. (Rotate in the 5th player, if any. Repeat if necessary so that every player has served at least 4 times.)

Continued

4. **Changing-the-Pace-of-the-Ball Drill** A player at his/her NVZ should hit firm (but not real hard) shots for an “opponent” to attempt a drop volley back to the “kitchen” from a position 3 feet inside the baseline. After 5 shots, the “opponent” moves 3 feet close to the NVZ and the change-of-pace drop volley drill is repeated for another 5 shots. Then move another 3 feet closer to the NVZ and repeat a third time. The two players then reverse roles and repeat the entire drill. Two sets of two players can be drilling simultaneously. Change partners and repeat if time is available--reserve 30 minutes for Item 5 (Game Play).

5. **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 so that it bounces 2 or 3 feet in front of one of the Team B players who **must** hit a good drop shot. (Team B then advances to their NVZ line.) If the drop shot fails to land in Team A’s NVZ, it’s a point for Team A. Otherwise, the rally continues with no restrictions on shots. The coach hits to a different player to start each rally.

Time permitting, a group of four plays 3 games to 7 (rally scoring, 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.

Homework and Videos:

Encourage players to practise and drill between lessons. The following URLs are also listed in the Player’s Guide.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EHpSYw_MsG8 Taking Pace Off a Hard-Hit Ball

<http://www.pickleballchannel.com/PB411-Pace-Off-Ball-Scott-Moore>

Defending by Taking Pace Off the Ball

Lesson 3: Punch & Blocking Volleys; Defending Smashes; **Sizing Up Opponents**

Lesson Plan:

1. For a **warmup drill**, divide the players between the two courts and have them in pairs do the “**windshield wiper dinking**” drill.
2. **Punch/Blocking Volley Drill** From a deep mid-court position, the coach hits 10 firm shots to a player at the opposing NVZ line. Before each shot, the coach indicates the type and placement of the player’s return volley--for example, “punch to my feet”, “deep punch down the center”, “blocking volley”, “punch to my partner’s feet”.

After going through all 4 or 5 players, hopefully players can then drill each other with 2 pairs hitting simultaneously (5 balls to each pair; 5 shots before reversing roles). The fifth player (if present) can retrieve balls and then rotate in after 10 shots.

3. **Defending Smashes Drill** The Player’s Guide suggests that, if a player can safely backpedal, s/he and her/his partner should start to backpedal the moment they realize that they have hit a high shot that an opponent can smash from mid-court or close to the NVZ. But to preclude the risk of injury in this drill, we want to avoid backpedaling more than one or two steps.

Deploy 4 players—one pair at each mid-court. From various locations on the court, the coach hits a high shot for a player on the opposite side to smash. The other pair defends the smash—they can take a step or two back if the smash is coming from near the opponents’ NVZ. The defenders should try to hit a deep lob or, if the smash is weak, hit a change-the-pace drop to the opponents’ kitchen.

Continue the drill for 10-15 minutes. Make suggestions to improve smashes and lobs. Point out that it is often more effective for the person hitting the smash to take some force off his/her smash and angle the smash toward the diagonally opposite sideline. If the shot is executed reasonably well, even a swift defender is unlikely to run down the ball.

4. **Game Play: Regular Match Play**

A group of four plays 3 games to 7 (normal scoring; 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.

Coaches should watch for “teachable moments”—instances of improper positioning or movement, missed opportunities, inadequate communication, or poor shot selection (rather than merely inaccurate shots). A coach should pause play (at the end of the rally) and try to elicit from the players their thoughts about where and why a rally went “off the rails” for one team.

Homework and Videos:

Encourage players to practise and drill between lessons. The following URLs are also listed in the Player’s Guide.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FQa0N5TtSW0>

Blocking 2 Ways

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dLUjiiy6b98>

Returning a Smash

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Llzd3xC1sk4>

Blocking a Smash

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 4 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 encourage members to undertake an IPTPA assessment, and that we develop a growing comfort in our members 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;
- ✓ Drop-shot game;
- ✓ Regular match play.

The lesson plan begins on the next page

Lesson Plan:

1. Each coach takes half the group to separate courts. Record the players' names on the Scoresheet for Module 4. The column titled "Standard" is the score a player should attain or exceed. (In our "shot execution" component, we do fewer repetitions of some shots than in an actual IPTPA assessment, but the percentage standards are the same.) In an IPTPA assessment, 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 "**windshield wiper dinking**" drill.
3. The IPTPA Assessments for skill levels 3.5 and 4.0 actually use the windshield wiper dinking exercise to evaluate a player's dinking skills. On separate courts, a coach should perform the exercise with each student. Enlist waiting players to assist in the count—some counting total dinks and others counting successful dinks (landing in the kitchen within easy reach of the coach). If the dinking goes "haywire" at some point, stop and confirm the current "count". Then resume from where the count left off (but do not count the player's first dink to allow the player to re-establish a rhythm.)
4. Score the players on **drop shots from the transition area** ("no-man's land"). Record the number of successful returns from 5 good feeds to the player's forehand and then 5 feeds to his/her backhand. Don't count any instances in which your feed is not "nice". You can maintain continuous feeding if the returned shots are good.
5. Score the players on **drop shots from the baseline**. Record the number of successful returns from 5 good feeds to the player's forehand and then 5 feeds to his/her backhand. You can maintain continuous feeding if the returned shots are good.
6. Score the players on 10 **backhand punch volleys** and then 10 **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. Before each feed, specify the player's shot placement (direction and depth). Again, count only results from good feeds.
7. Score the players on **overhead smashes** of 5 lobs to mid-court on a player's forehand side. Players should start from the NVZ line and retreat a couple steps to make the smash.
8. Score the players on 5 **offensive lobs** from the NVZ line. The coach should dink to the player's forehand side. Off the second or third dink, the player should hit a lob that passes over the coach's paddle extended at arm's length overhead and lands in the back half of the court.
9. 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.
10. 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.

11. **Modified Play:** Third-Shot Drop 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 so that it bounces 2 or 3 feet in front of one of the Team B players who **must** hit a good drop shot. (Team B then advances to their NVZ line.) If the drop shot fails to land in Team A's NVZ, it's a point for Team A. Otherwise, the rally continues with no restrictions on shots. The coach hits to a different player to start each rally.

A group of four plays 3 games to 7 (rally scoring, win by 1). A group of five plays 4 games to 5 (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.

In an actual IPTPA Assessment, a group consists of four players, all seeking the same rating. The coach should remind players that the Certified Ratings Specialist (CRS) will score each player on both the proficiency of his/her play and the total points his/her teams wins in three games. The CRS will be watching:

- (i) players' shot selection (and execution);
- (ii) players' movement and positioning;
- (iii) communication between players; and
- (iv) strategic play.

12. **Regular Match Play** Four players play 3 regular games to 7, each game with a different partner. (If there are five players in a group, play 5 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.