

Pickleball

The PEM Way

2.0 Lesson: Advancing from 2.0 to 2.5

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Introduction

Two coaches will work with four players in two courts for each lesson (consisting of four weekly 1 ½-hour sessions)

For explanations and demonstrations, the coaches can bring all players together on one court. For drills and activities, each coach will take half the players to separate courts. In the event there are extra players, everyone should be rotated into the drills and so that each player gets equal time and attention.

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 Beginner Training, for a 2.0 player to achieve a 2.5 rating, the player will:

- Demonstrate a simple pendulum swing on forehand and backhand dink shots;
- Demonstrate proper side-step movement while dinking at the NVZ line;
- Make 50% of forehand and backhand forward or cross-court dink shots
- Make 50% of forehand and backhand punch volleys from the NVZ line to at least mid-court depth;
- Execute 40% of overhead shots while demonstrating the proper sideways turn;
- Place at least 50% of serves from "deuce" & "ad" courts in the deep half of the court;
- Place at least 50% of return of serves from "deuce" & "ad" courts in the deep half 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 serves and returns of serve to the deep half of the court;
- Promptly advances to the NVZ line after returning a serve, or split steps if the third shot comes back before s/he reaches NVZ line; 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 deep half of the court;
- Communicates with partner on balls near the centerline; defers to partner's forehand;
- Demonstrates court and position awareness by not hitting balls that would otherwise land out of bounds.

Session Summary

Session 1:

1. FH dinking down the line
2. BH dinking down the line
3. Cross-court dinking, FH & BH
4. Precision dinking
5. Dinking game

Session 2:

1. FH ground stroke, coach feed
2. BH ground stroke, coach feed
3. FH & BH ground stroke to each other, coaches correct shot mechanics
4. Serve
5. Return of serve and advance to NVZ

Session 3:

1. Drop shots from transition zone
2. Drop shots beginning from transition zone and progressing to baseline
3. Modified game with drop shots required
4. Punch volley
5. Block volley

Session 4:

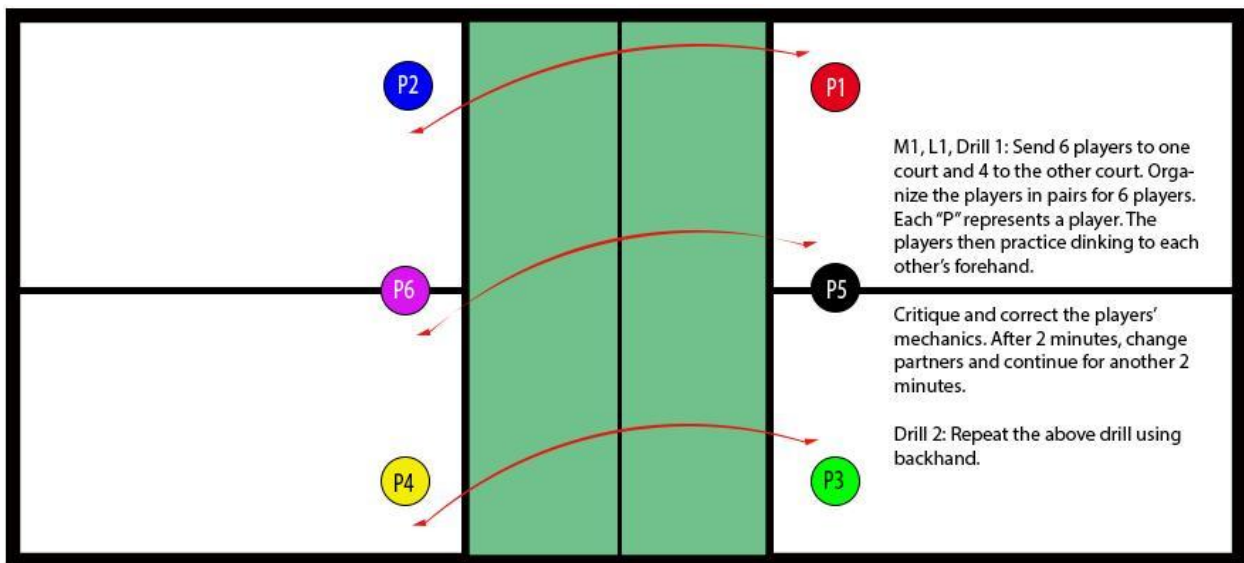
1. Lob and lob footwork
2. Overhead smash
3. Modified game with drop shots required

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Session 1: Dinking

Session Plan:

1. **Demo:** 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. **Mirror:** Have the players face the coaches and mirror the stroke as the coaches repeat it a few times.
3. **Demo:** 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 on the bounce, but should quickly step out after the shot.
4. **L2 S1 Drill 1, Forehand Dinking:** Split players into two courts and organize them into pairs as in the figure below for 6 players. Each “P” represents a player. The players then practice dinking to each other’s forehand. Critique and correct the players’ mechanics. After 2 minutes, change partners and continue for another 2 minutes.

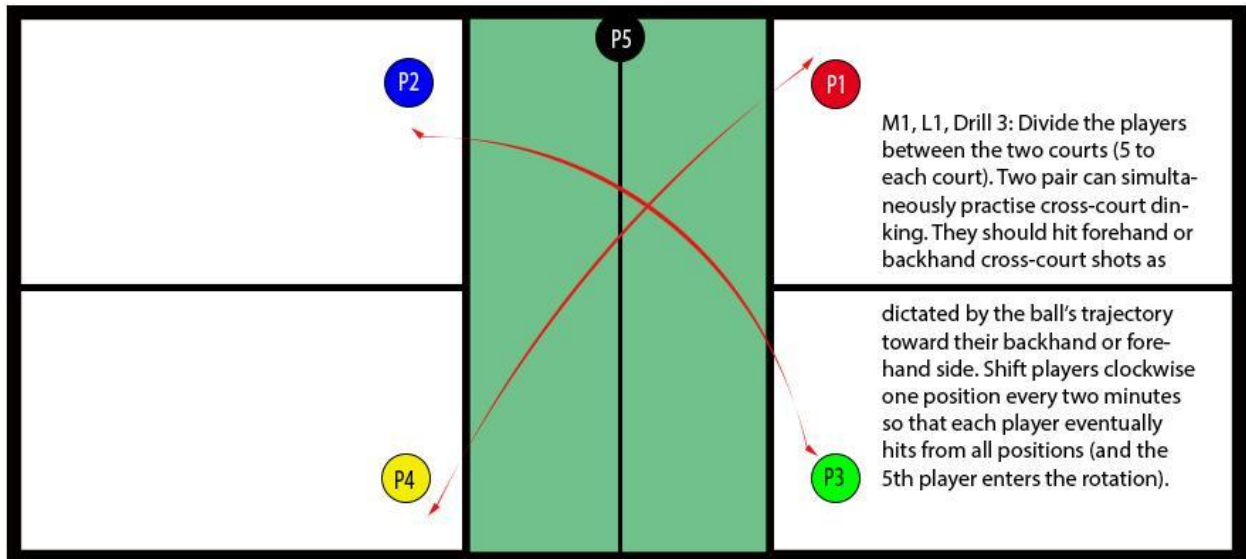


L2 S1 Drill 1: Forehand Dinking Drill

5. **Drill 2:** Repeat items 1 through 4 for the **backhand (straight ahead) dink**.
6. **Demo:** 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. **L2 S1 Drill 3, Cross-Court Dinking:** Divide the players between the two courts (4 to each court). Two pairs can simultaneously practice cross-court dinking. They should hit forehand or

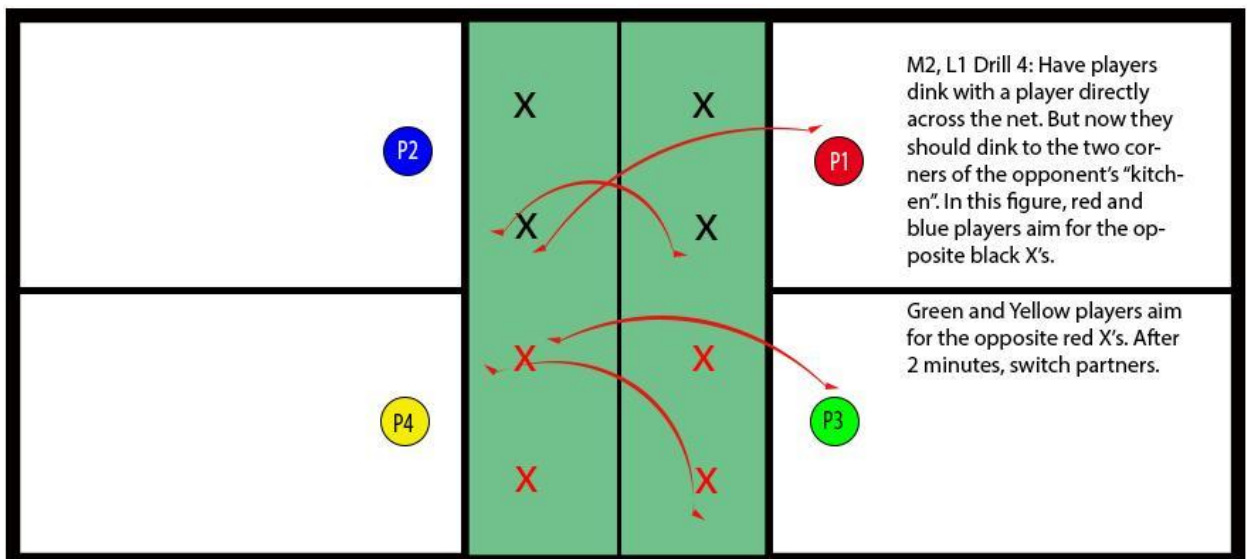
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backhand cross-court shots as dictated by the ball's trajectory toward their backhand or forehand side. Shift players clockwise one position every two minutes so that each player eventually hits from all positions (and the 5th player enters the rotation).



L2 S1 Drill 3: Cross-Court Dinking Drill

8. **L2 S1 Drill 4, Precision Dinking:** 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 the Figure below, red and blue players aim for the opposite black X's, and the green and yellow players aim for the opposite red X's. 2 minutes with each of 2 partners.



L2 S1 Drill 4: Precision Dinking Drill

9. **The Dinking Game:**
Players set up at their NVZ line for doubles play. They must hit only dink shots that land in the

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opponents' NVZ until the ball is hit out of bounds or into the net. Games are to 5, win by 1. Servers call out the score and switch sides after rallies won as in a normal game. A player can serve by bouncing the ball off the ground and hitting the first dink shot. 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. Encourage players to:

- Return to the ready position after making a dink shot;
- Return quickly 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.

Videos: Encourage players to practice between lessons.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mEI5I8aY3Ho> 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

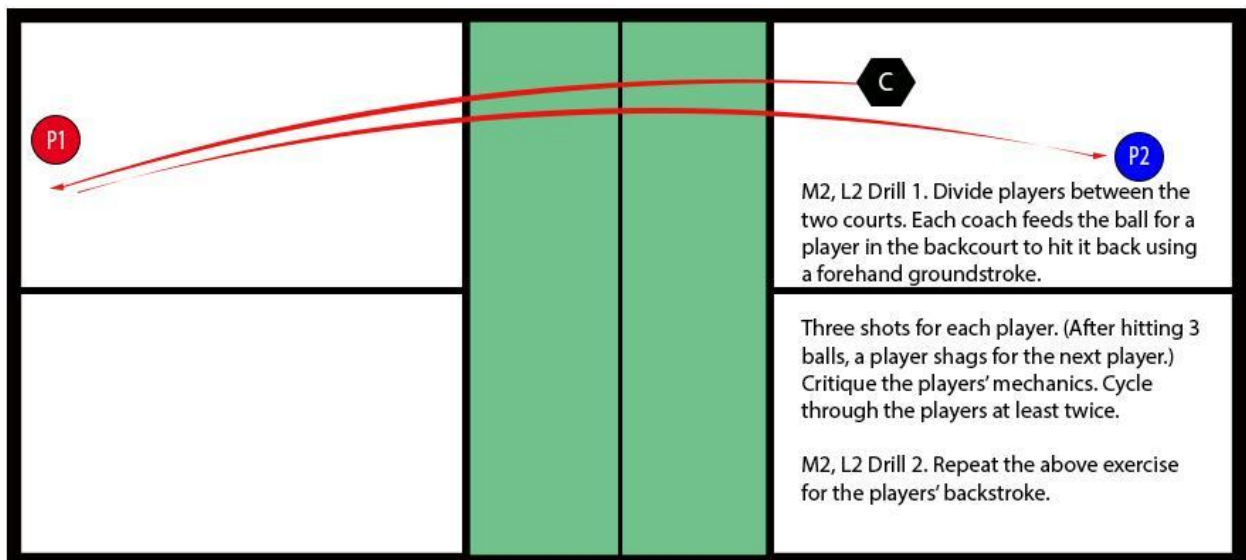
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EapzBLduLz0> Dinking Game Drill

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Session 2: Ground Strokes, Serve, Return of Serve

Session Plan:

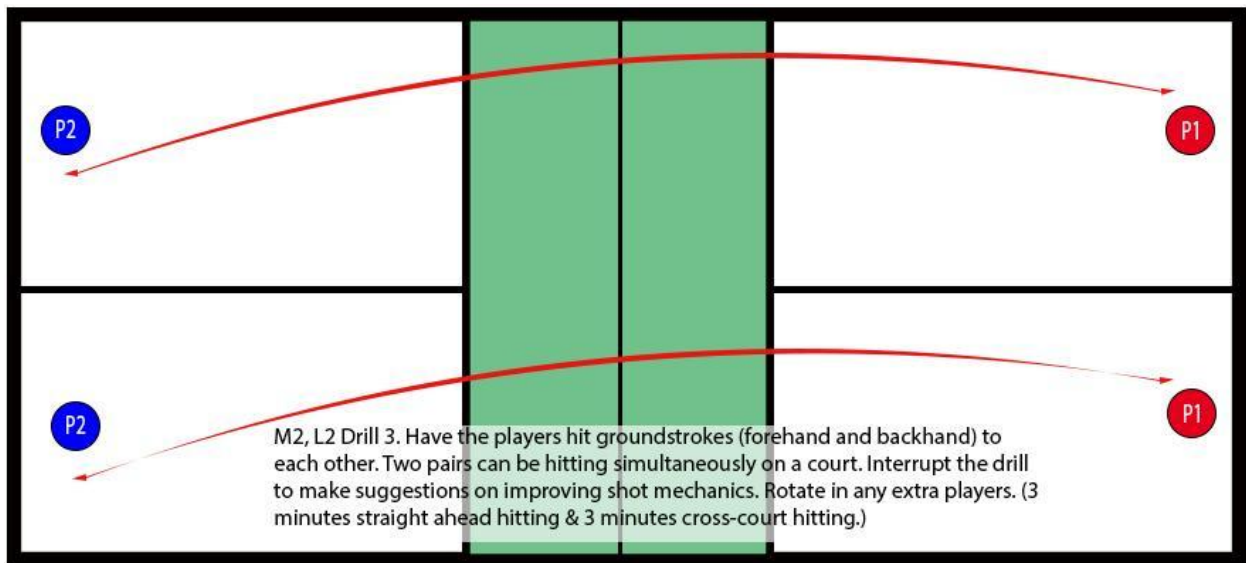
1. **Demo:** Without a ball, one coach should demonstrate the **forehand ground stroke**.
2. **Mirror:** Have the players face the coach and mirror the stroke as the coach repeats it a few times.
3. **Demo:** Next, one of the coaches should feed the ball for the other coach to demonstrate all the elements 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.
4. **L2 S2 Drill 1, Forehand Ground stroke:** 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.



L2 S2 Drills 1&2, Forehand Groundstroke:

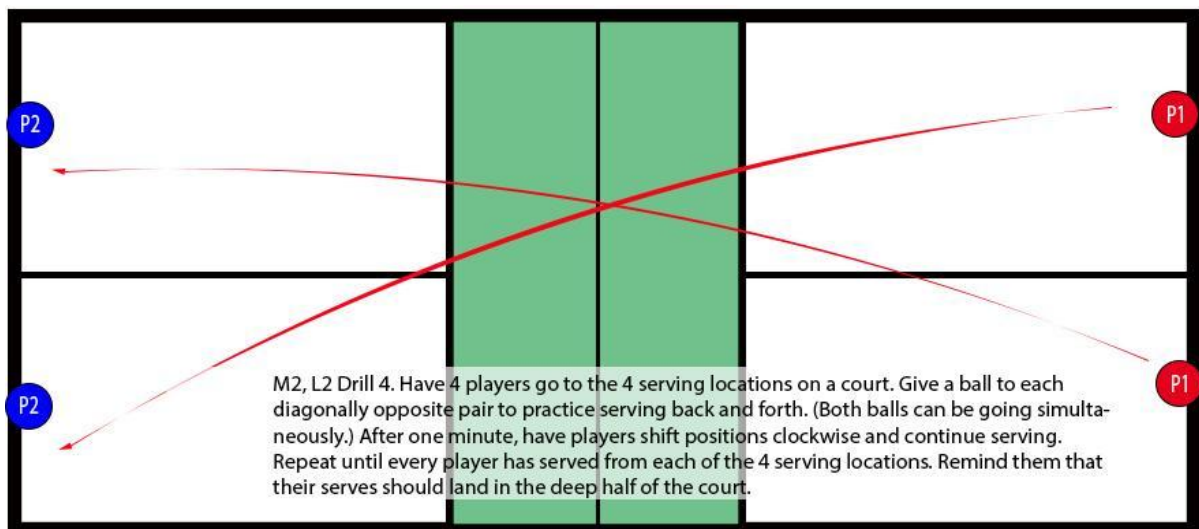
5. **Demo & Drill 2:** Repeat Items 1 to 4 for the **backhand groundstroke**.
6. **L2 S2 Drill 3: Ground strokes.** Next have the players hit ground strokes (**forehand and backhand**) to each other. Two pairs can be hitting simultaneously on a court. Interrupt the drill to make suggestions on improving shot mechanics. Don't forget to rotate in any extra player. (3 minutes straight ahead hitting & 3 minutes cross-court hitting.)

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L2 S2 Drill 3: Ground strokes

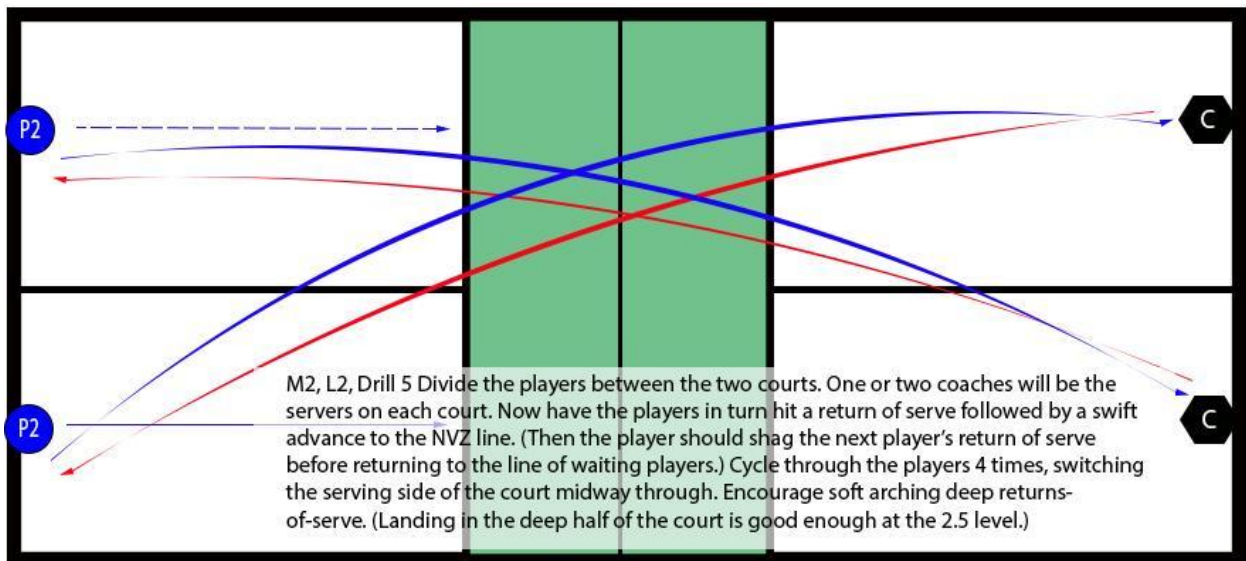
- 7. Demo: The serve.** Demonstrate the mechanics of the serve, first without hitting the ball, and then hitting the ball. Emphasize that the mechanics of the forehand groundstroke can be used for the serve--just toss the ball out from the body in such a way that, as you shift weight from the back to the forward foot, you contact the ball on the forehand side a little in front of the forward knee.
- 8. L2 S2 Drill 4: Serve** Have 4 players go to the 4 serving locations on a court. Give a ball to each diagonally opposite pair to practice 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.



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L2 S2 Drill 4: Serve

9. **Demo: The Return of Serve** One coach should serve to the other coach. The latter should demonstrate three elements 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 **very importantly**,
 - Promptly advancing to join his/her partner at the NVZ line.
10. **L2 S2 Drill 5:** 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 followed by a 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 of the court midway through. Encourage soft arching deep returns- of-serve. (Landing in the deep half of the court is good enough at the 2.5 level.)



L2 L2 Drill 5: Return of Serve and Advance to NVZ

Homework and Videos: Encourage the players to practice between lessons.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oDD2GY3ywIg> How to Hit Great Ground strokes
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wUaUegE-b6Q> Pickleball Serving Rules
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fK4bFs6RkdI> The Underhand Serve
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YOASInnqjq0> Pickleball Serve-Legal and Effective
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ovaoROTczlY> Be at the NVZ; Mistakes & Benefits
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NAwIXA4cWgY> The Soft Return of Serve

Session 3: Punch Volley/Drop Volley; Drop Shots

Session Plan:

1. **L2 S3 Drill 1, Warm up with Travelling dink:** As a warm up drill, have pairs of players do the “travelling dinking” drill illustrated in Figure L2 L3 Drill 1. (Use both courts.) It is most natural for right-handed players to hit backhand dinks when shifting to the right, and forehand dinks when shifting to the left.

When one pair gets halfway across, another pair can start. Once both (or all three pairs) have crossed the court, then dink back to the starting side. Do two out-and- back cycles.

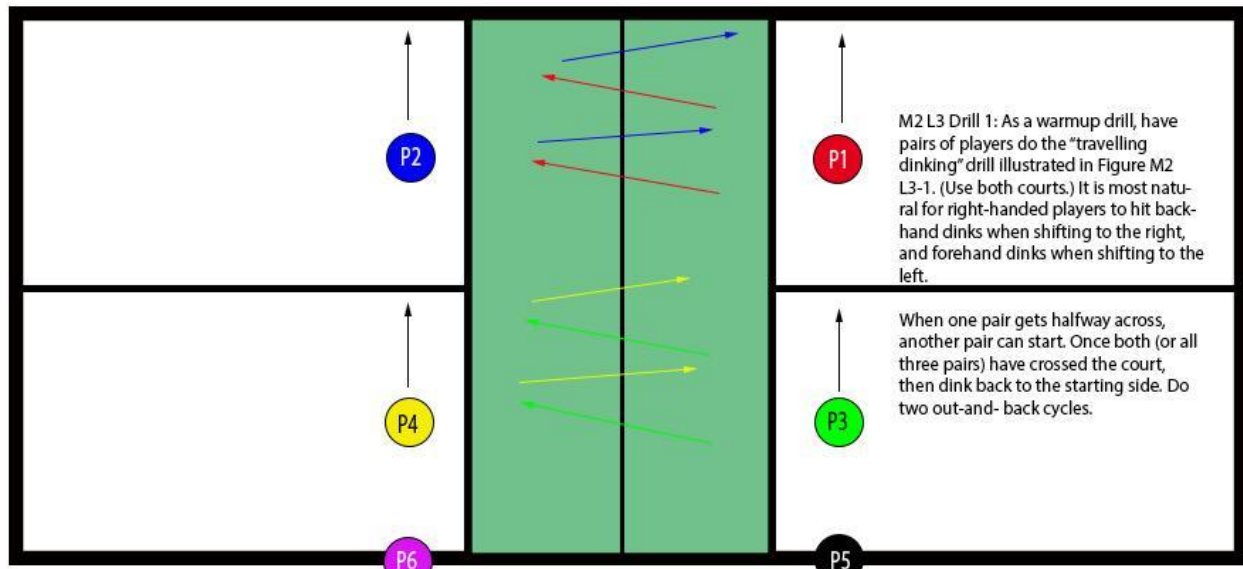
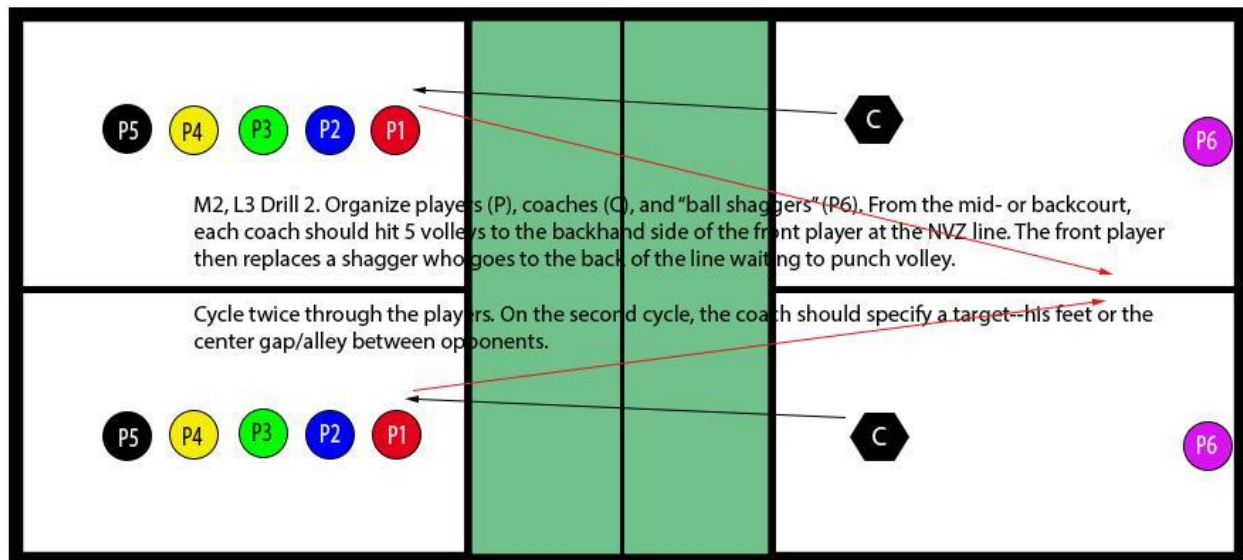


Fig L2 S3 Drill 1: Travelling Dinking Drill

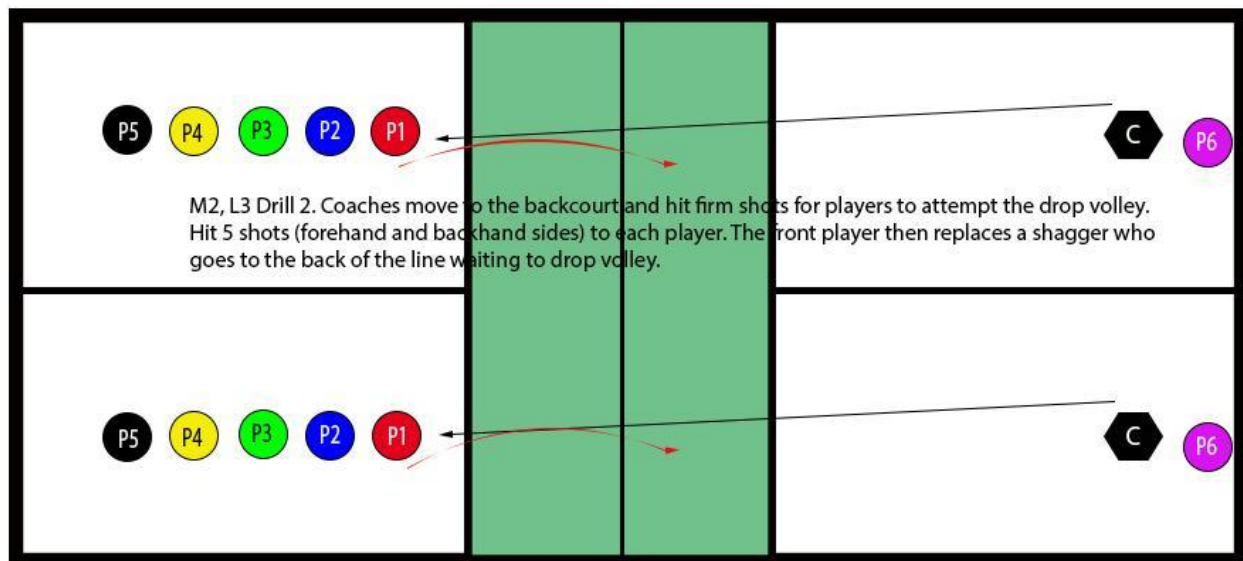
2. **Demo:** Next, the two coaches demonstrate the forehand punch volley.
3. **L2 S3 Drill 3, Punch Volley, forehand side.** Repeat Item 3 with the coaches hitting to the forehand side of the players.
4. **Demo:** With one coach feeding the ball to the second coach, demonstrate the **backhand punch volley** (first on balls fed firmly at the body, then on balls fed to the backhand side).
5. **L2 S3 Drill 2, Punch Volley, Backhand.** Organize players (P), coaches (C), and “ball shaggers” (sh) as in Fig C-2.5. From the mid- or backcourt, each coach should hit 5 balls at or to the backhand side of the front player at the NVZ line. The front 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.

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L2 S3 Drills 2 & 3, Punch Volley, Backhand

6. **Demo:** Next, coaches demonstrate the **blocking/drop volley** with one coach hitting hard shots from the backcourt to the other coach at the NVZ line.
7. **L2 S3 Drill 4, Drop Volley.** Coaches move to the backcourt in Figure below and hit firm shots for players to attempt the drop volley. Hit 5 shots (forehand and backhand sides) to each player.

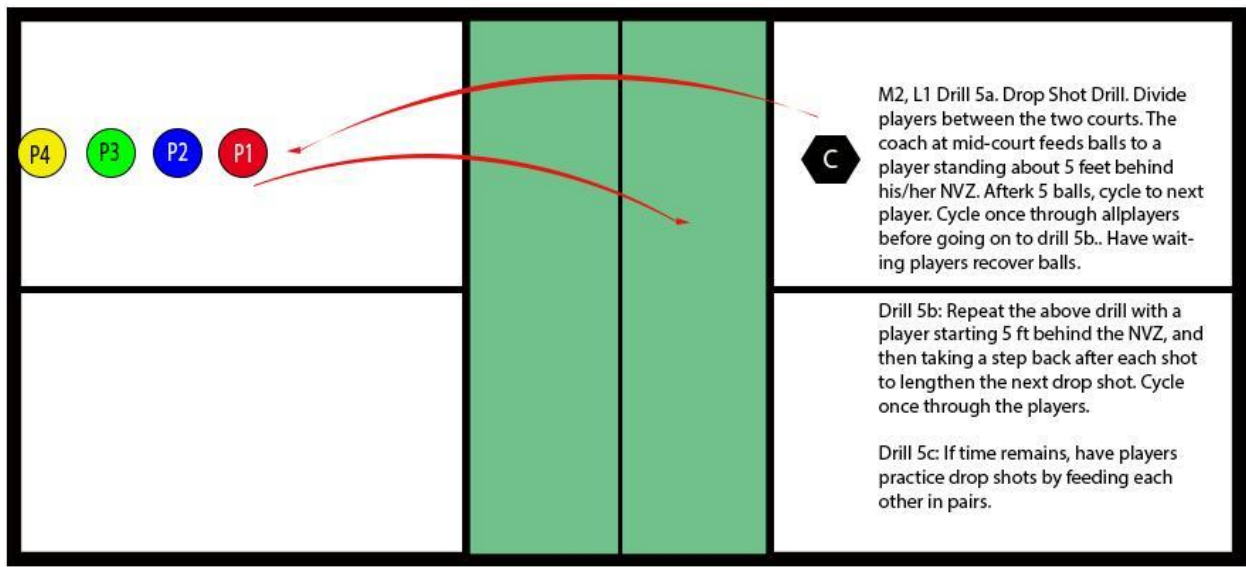


L2 S3 Drill 4, Drop Volley

8. **Explanation & Demo:** Gather all players on one court. A coach should demonstrate the mechanics of the **drop shot** from mid-court. First demonstrate with a paddle but without a ball. Have the players face the coach and mirror the coach's mechanics a few times.

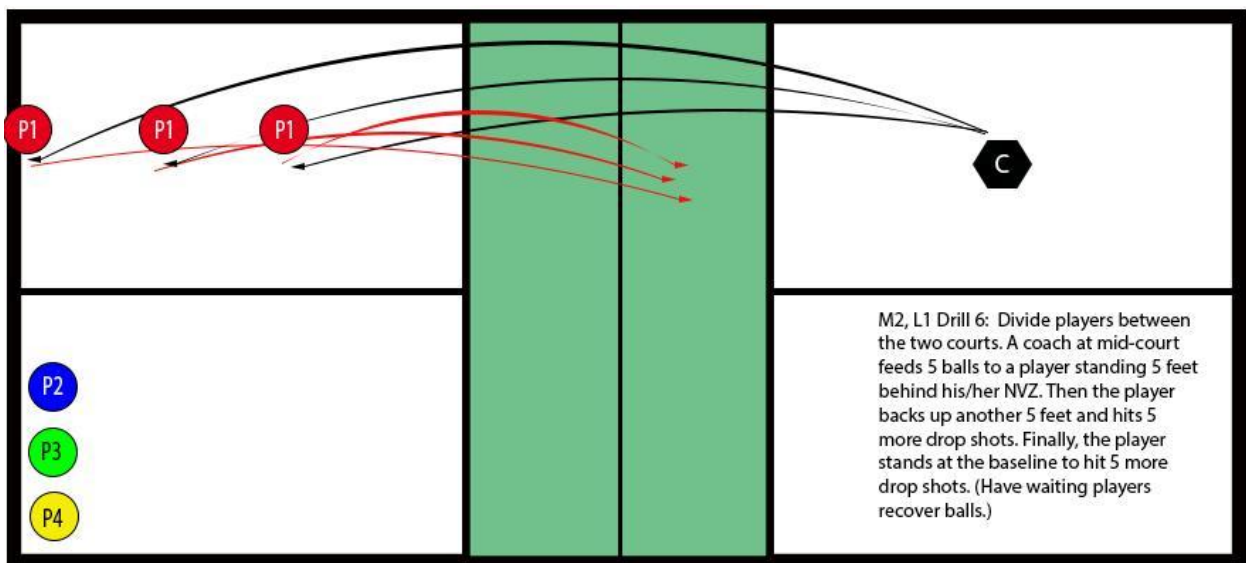
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9. **Demo:** Next demonstrate the drop shot with one coach feeding the ball from the backcourt or mid-court to the other coach at the opposite mid-court. Then demonstrate the drills coming up in Items 12 & 13 below.
10. **L2 S3 Drill 5, Drop Shots:** Divide players 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 recover balls.)



L2L3 Drills: 5, 6, 7, Drop Shots:

11. **L2 S3 Drill 6, Drop Shots:** Divide players between the two courts. A coach at mid-court feeds 5 balls to a player standing 5 feet behind his/her NVZ. Then the player backs up another 5 feet and hits 5 more drop shots. Finally, the player stands at the baseline to hit 5 more drop shots. (Have waiting players recover balls.)



L2 S3 Drill 6, Drop Shots

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12. L2 S3 Drill 7: If time remains, have players practice drop shots by feeding each other in pairs.

13. Modified Match Play: Required Drop Shot.

The object of the modification is to force players to make a drop shot. With three of the players at their NVZ line, the coach feeds the ball to the fourth player standing at the diagonally opposite mid-court. The player must hit a “good” drop shot (meaning landing in the opponent’s NVZ) and promptly advance to his/her NVZ line. If the player fails to do both, the rally immediately ends and the pair on the side from which the coach fed the ball wins a point. If the drop shot and advance to the NVZ line are “good”, play continues in normal match play fashion with all shots allowed. The coach moves according to successive rallies won or lost, and feeds the ball to start each rally. Four players play three regular games to 7 (win by one point; otherwise, normal scoring). Each game is played 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.

11. In successive games the coach can have receiving player start a little deeper in the court to make the initial drop shot longer.

Videos: Encourage players to practice between lessons.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EAUYwOu9iJ0> Basic Third Shot Drop

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QuekFbM_sjM Drop Shot Drill (all distances)

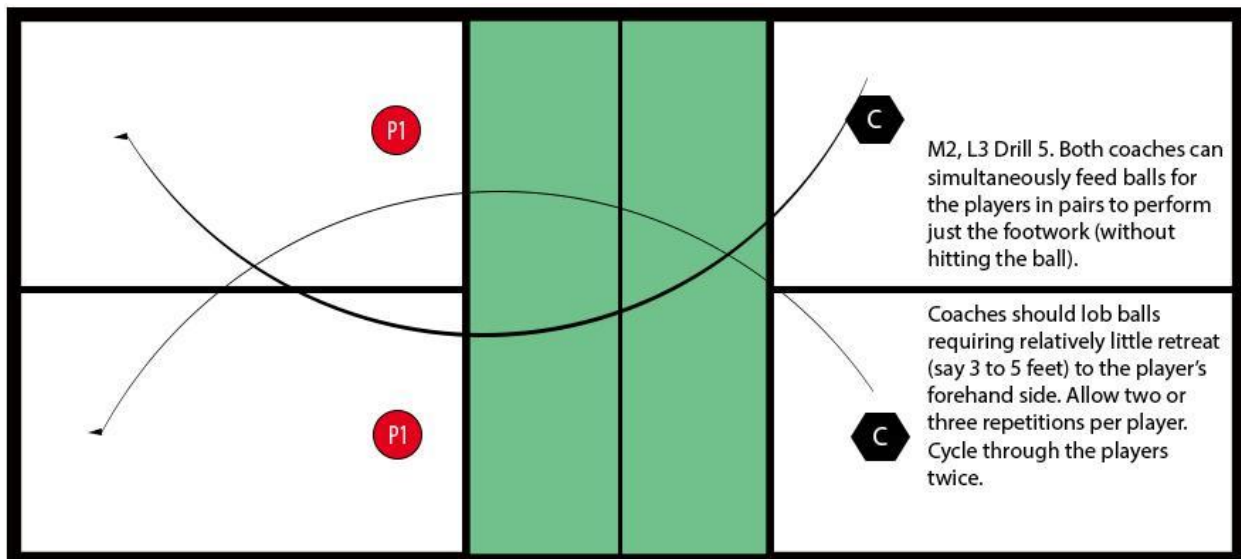
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=44LOdNOKG00> Pickleball Blocking Basics

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Session 4: Lobs, Overheads, Returns, Game Preparation and Strategy

Session Plan:

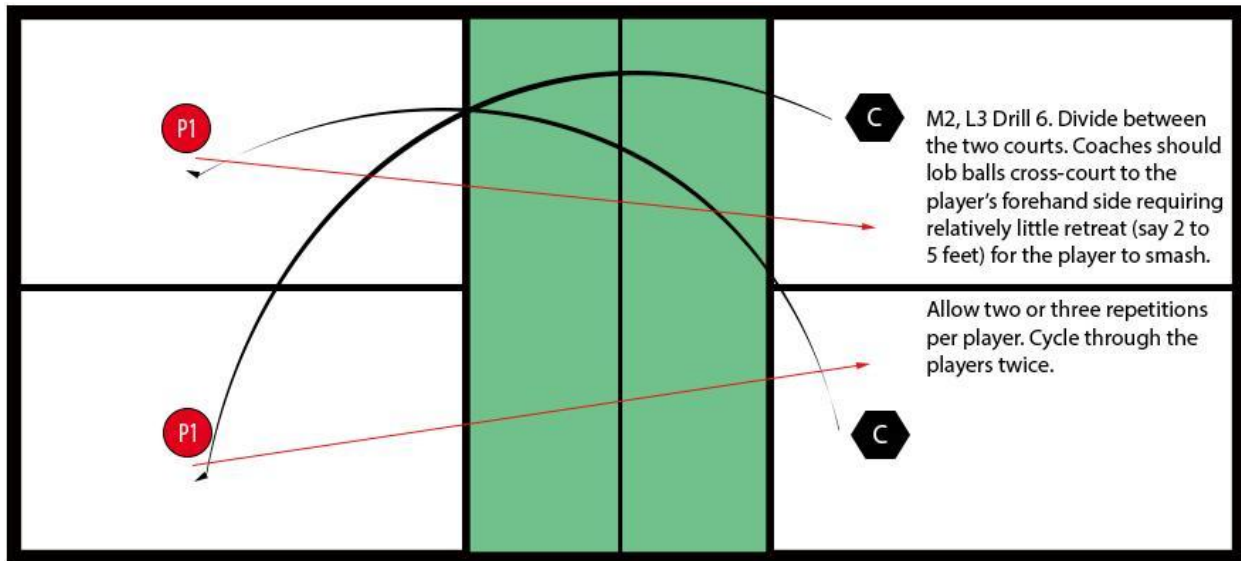
1. **Warm up:** Direct the players through the usual on-court warmup routine (dinking, then drop shots, then ground strokes).
2. **Overhead:** We only expect a player to smash relatively shallow lobs (no deeper than mid-court).
3. **Demo:** With one coach feeding the ball to the second coach, demonstrate the footwork to move back 2 to 5 feet from the NVZ line to get in position to hit the ball (but don't hit the ball). Repeat twice.
4. **L2 S4 Drill 5: Lob Footwork.** Both coaches can simultaneously feed balls for the players in pairs to perform just the footwork (without hitting the ball). Coaches should lob balls requiring relatively little retreat (say 3 to 5 feet) to the player's forehand side. Allow two or three repetitions per player. Cycle through the players twice.



L2 S4 Drill 5: Lob Footwork

8. **Demo:** With one coach feeding the ball to the other coach, demonstrate both the retreat and the mechanics of the lob return.
9. **L2 S4 Drill 6: Lob Return/Overhead.** Divide between the two courts. Coaches should lob balls cross-court to the player's forehand side requiring relatively little retreat (say 2 to 5 feet) for the player to smash. Allow two or three repetitions per player. Cycle through the players twice.

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L2 S4 Drill 6: Lob Return/Overhead.

Explanation: 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 are expecting a low success rate.)

5. Q & A Session: Let's first review and reinforce what the players have learned in the first three lessons by asking them to answer questions. To get everyone to seriously think about each question, tell them they have 15 seconds of thinking time to come up with their own answer in silence. You then ask one individual for her/his answer. Then ask the others if they agree or disagree. Choose different individuals for the answers to successive questions. It will probably help to have 4 players positioned appropriately on the court to set the context for each question.

Q1: Where do both players on the serving team set up? Why?

Q2: Where should the receiving team set up to receive serve? Why?

Q3: What type of shot should the serve be? Why?

Q4: Where should the serving team move immediately after the serve?

Q5: What type of shot should the return-of-serve be? Why?

Q6: How should the players on the receiving team move after the return-of-serve? Why?

Q7: What type of shot is normally attempted for the 3rd shot of a rally? Why?

Q8: How should the team attempting a third-shot drop shot move immediately after the shot? Why? Note: The answer here is: "It depends on whether the ball's initial trajectory appears to be "good" or whether it appears to be "too long and high making it punchable or attackable".

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Elaborate.

Q9: Suppose both teams are engaged in dinking at their NVZ lines.

- i. How can you make it more difficult for opponents to return your dink shots?
- ii. How should you and your partner move as dinking continues?
- iii. How far should you be behind the NVZ line?
- iv. What should happen on an incoming dink shot that both you and your partner can reach?
- v. How high should the ball be for you to “attack” it?

6. Regular Match Play: 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). Each player sits out one game.) Play with a different partner each game. At the end of the rally in which the error is made, the coach should point out and correct:

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