

Pickleball-

The Sun City Festival Way

Module 4: Advancing from 3.0 to 3.5 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 session. 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 forehand and backhand drop shots from the transition area;
- Makes 60% of forehand and backhand drop shots from the baseline;
- Makes 70% of forehand and 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 and returns serves such that 80% bounce in the deep third 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; volleys dinks that may be comfortably reached;
- 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;
- Takes advantage of opportunities to attack high dinks from opponents.

In doubles match play, a player:

- Consistently serves and returns serves deep (to the back third of the court);
- Employs a drop shot on at least 70% of third shots;
- Based on the early trajectory of own or 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 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 by not hitting balls that would better be taken by his/her partner.

Lesson 1: Strategic Dinking; Hitting & Defending the Offensive Lob

Lesson Plan:

1. As a **warmup drill**, have pairs of players do the “**windshield-wiper dinking**” drill. (Use both courts.) See Figure C-4.1. A pair starts dinking at the middle (Positions 1) but then move in opposite directions toward Positions 2, dinking all the while. With non-stop dinking, they reverse direction moving steadily to the opposite sidelines (Positions 3). Finally, they continue to dink while returning to the center (Positions 4). 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.

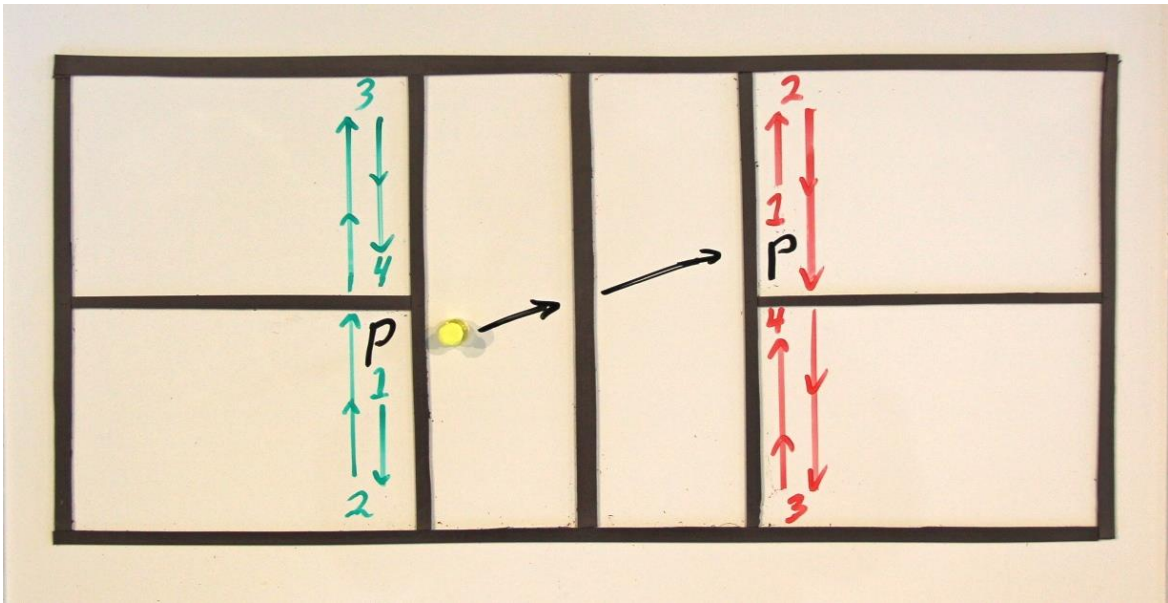


Fig C-4.1: Windshield-Wiper Dinking Drill

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. Volleying such incoming shots significantly reduces the number of dinks you have to “dig out” from close to your feet, affords you better control and accuracy of your return shot, and gives your opponent less time to get to an optimal position to hit your return shot.

Two (or even three) pairs of players can simultaneously work on this 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 all players on one court. The two coaches should demonstrate hitting a forehand offensive lob (from the context of a dinking situation). Point out that a cross-court lob is a lower-risk shot than 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; 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 for the other player to 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).

4. **Demo: 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/smash an overhead return.

For **deeper lobs**, point out the dangers (particularly for “active adults”) of backpedalling to get to the ball. For reasons of both safety and effectiveness, the defenders need to coordinate both their communication and their movement. In Figure M-4.2, player P1 has hit a deep lob (dashed arc). As early as possible, P4 shouts “Yours!” and/or P3 shouts “Mine!”, and P3 hustles to reach 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 either (1) a drop shot to the opponents’ NVZ or (2) a deep lob to their backcourt. Properly executed, either shot gives P3 time to advance quickly (upper arrow) to the spot vacated by P4.

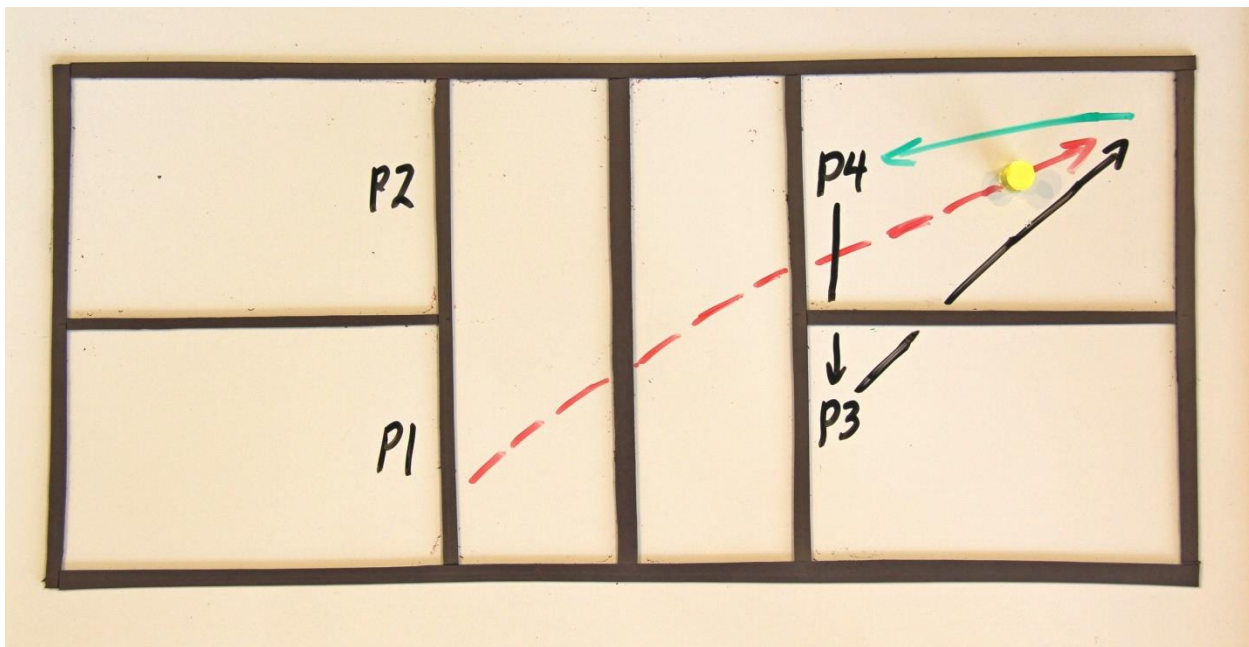


Figure M-4.2: Defending a Deep Lob

As a **demonstration**, the two coaches should take on the roles of P3 and P4. P3 should dink with student/player 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** coordinated defensive play when student/player P2 lobs to P3’s backcourt.

5. **Drill: Defending Against the Offensive Lob** Split the players between two courts where they take up dinking positions. P3 dinks to P1’s forehand. P1’s second or third

shot should be an offensive lob to P4's backcourt. P3 and P4 react and defend as dictated by 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 7 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 7 minutes.

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

Review 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 frequently forces 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 your partner especially on incoming dinks near the center line and on opponent's lobs.

Since players are reluctant to try new shots in a competitive game, we will not keep score to encourage them to try offensive 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 the ball may be volleyed before it bounces);
- After the first 3 shots of the rally, any shot can be made to anywhere on the court;
- Serve passes to the next (clockwise) player after each rally;
- Every 5 minutes, the players shift one position clockwise on the court (and the 5th player, if any, rotates into the action).

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 pose questions to draw players' thoughts about where and why a rally went "off the rails". We're looking for the sort of causes listed in the first sentence of this paragraph rather than instances of "Joe popped up his dink shot".

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=1NhvH07dwvQ>

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 back in Item 1 of Lesson 1.
2. **Drop-Shot Drill** In this drill we want players to work on hitting drop shots from the baseline to the backhand side of an opponent. Figure M-4.3 shows P1 hitting to the backhand of P4 and P2 hitting to the backhand of P3. (If a left-handed player is involved, make the appropriate change of target area.) We should be able to have both diagonally opposite pairs drilling simultaneously, each with their own ball.

Divide the players between the two courts. Each diagonally opposite pair should try to sustain continuous shot-making. For example, P4 returns P1’s drop shots to P1’s backcourt. This gives P4 practice making the depth of shot that holds an opponent in his/her backcourt while P1 practises his/her drop shot.

P1 and P2 should attempt both forehand and backhand drop shots as dictated by location of the incoming ball. After 2 minutes, players shift one position clockwise on the court (and allow the 5th player, if any, to rotate into the drill). Continue the drill for about 15 minutes.

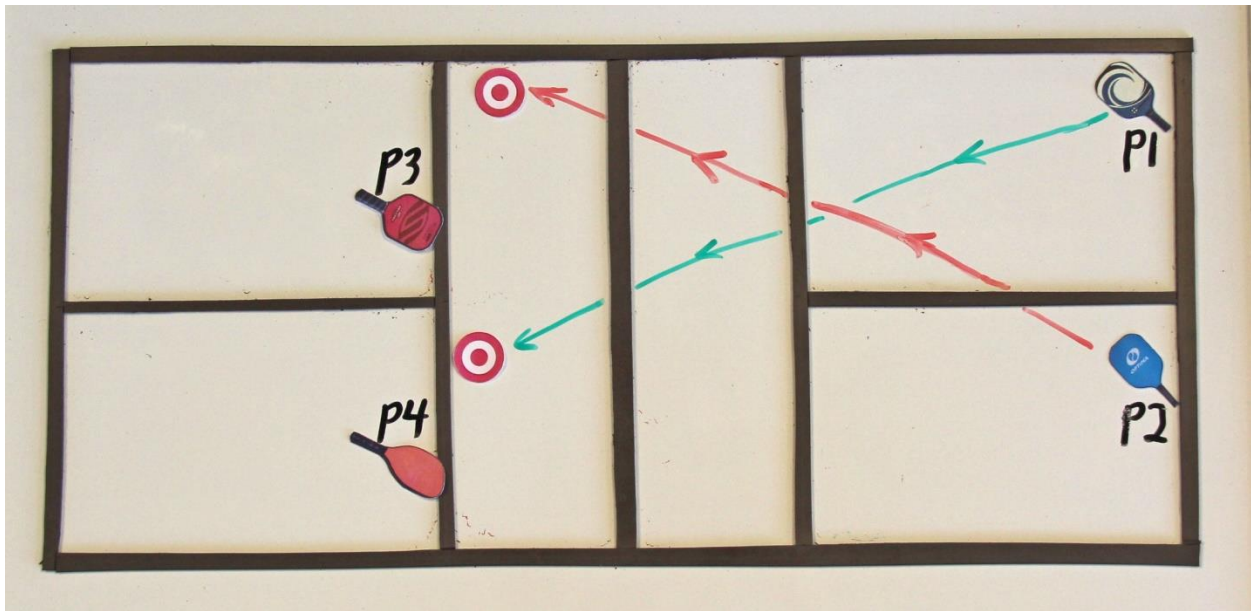


Figure M-4.3: Targeting the Drop Shot

3. **Drop-Shot Drill** Now we want to drill on drop shots with partners judging and communicating (as described on pages 7-8 in the Student’s Guide) 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. But we want to focus on two elements of play.
 - (1) Aim for an opponent’s backhand side on the drop shot.
 - (2) The player hitting the drop shot calls “**High**” if s/he thinks the drop shot will be long and high enough to be attackable by an opponent. (In that case the team making the third-shot drop advances only a step or two, expecting to defend against a punch

volley or smash return). Otherwise, the player hitting the drop shot calls out “Go” and both players rush to the NVZ line.

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 on the court and do another cycle of 8 serves. (Rotate in the 5th player, if any.) Repeat, if necessary, so that every player serves at least 4 times.

4. **Explanation and Drill: Changing-the-Pace-of-the-Ball** The purpose and technique of “changing the pace of the ball” are described on pages 8-9 in the Player’s Guide. Inevitably, some players will not have read the Guide in advance the lesson. (Yes, even in their “golden years”, they still don’t do their homework!) Therefore, coaches should explain the term’s meaning, the purpose in game play, and the technique for doing it.

Position Player A at mid-court and Player B 3 feet in from the opposite baseline. A should hit firm (but not real hard) shots that B can volley between knee and waist height. B attempts a **drop volley** back to A’s “kitchen”. After 5 drop volleys attempts, B 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, rotate in the 5th player, and repeat as time allows--reserve at least 20 minutes for Item 5 (Third-Shot Drop Game).

5. 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 “2nd 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 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

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. **Demo & Drill:** Another fun dinking drill is for two players to keep two balls going in straight ahead continuous dinking. This requires concentration and consistency. Coaches demo and then players try it. Can any pair do it non-stop for 20 seconds?
3. **Punch/Blocking Volley Drill:** On page 10 of the Player’s Guide, the two types of volley shot are described. Their appropriate use in game situations is explained.

Split the players between two courts. From a deep mid-court position, a coach hits 8 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”. Idle players can retrieve balls.

After going through all 4 or 5 players, hopefully players can then drill each other with 2 pairs hitting simultaneously (to the forward direction only). 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. Allow 15 minutes drill time.

4. **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 two or three 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 two or three short steps 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-of-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.

5. **Match Play:** A group of four plays 3 games to 8 (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 draw 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 between lessons. The following URLs are listed in the Player’s Guide.

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

Blocking 2 Ways

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dLUiivy6b98>

Returning a Smash

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

Blocking a Smash

Lesson 4: Stacking; Sizing Up Opponents; Review

Lesson Plan:

1. One more time--for a **warmup drill**, divide the players between the two courts and have them in pairs do the “**windshield wiper dinking**” drill.
2. **Dink Volley Drill:** Let’s repeat this drill that was introduced in Lesson 1. 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 this 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. More importantly, players should strive for low net clearance on dink volleys so that their shot will not be “attackable” by their opponent. After two minutes, players shift clockwise one position and dink volley for another 2 minutes. Finally, one more player shift and a third two-minute drill.

3. **Drill: Changing-the-Pace-of-the-Ball** This drill was introduced in Lesson 2. Remind players of a couple circumstances where this shot is warranted. (Players will grasp the scenario better if coaches deploy 4 players to positions corresponding to the hypothetical situation.) (1) Team X’s attempted third-shot drop shot is too high and a Team Y opponent hits back a punch volley. (2) Team X’s return of serve is short—Team Y player charges forward and hits back a hard groundstroke. In both scenarios, Team Y ends at its NVZ line while Team X is deep in its end facing a low hard incoming shot. Team X can neutralize Team Y’s positional advantage in either case if a Team X player can turn back the fast-pace incoming ball as a slow-pace ball that drops in Team Y’s kitchen. Team X must rush forward to its NVZ line to take full advantage of a well-executed change-of-pace shot.

Put Player A at mid-court and Player B 3 feet in from the opposite baseline. A should hit firm (but not real hard) shots that B can volley. B should attempt a **drop volley** back to A’s “kitchen”. After 5 drop volleys attempts, B 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 rotate in any 5th player. Allow 15 minutes.

4. **Explanation and Demo: Stacking** Deploy 4 players with a lefty/righty pair (Team LR) as the serving team. If there is no lefty in the group, just have one of the players hold her/his paddle in her/his left hand. For their first serve of a game, the lefty serves. Point out that **(1)** both paddles are toward the middle making providing strong offense and defense down the middle. (Note: The following URL for a stacking video is provided in the Player’s Guide: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IQ2SS3bDa8E>)

Suppose Team LR wins the first point. Point out that **(2)** if Team LR switches sides in the usual way for the second point, they will have no paddles down the middle, which creates a weakness for their opponents to exploit. Show how Team LR sets up when the lefty serves from the “ad” court, and then how they move immediately after the serve.

Carry on with the game scenario (without actually hitting balls), moving players to show the starting positions for each rally and the movement (if any) of Team LR

immediately after the serve or return of serve. Cover all possible situations of Team LR serving and returning serve.

5. **Match Play:** A group of four plays 3 games to 8 (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. If there is a lefty in the group, guide the lefty righty pair through stacking play.

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 draw from the players their thoughts about where and why a rally went “off the rails” for one team.

That’s it! Thanks coaches!