



**NEW ENGLAND  
PICKLEBALL CLUB**

## **1. CORE SKILL: Volleying from the Kitchen**

### **DRILLS:**

- Both players stand at kitchen line.
- Always cooperative (not playing to win), version 1 of this drill is to control the ball back and forth between belly-buttons (you don't want to be popping the ball up high toward your partner's head). The entire goal of this drill is getting lots of reps **controlling** the ball with your volleys. Do not try to hit the ball hard! It's 10X better practice to go slower and really work on controlling the ball back and forth to each other. Going too fast and trying to "hit" the ball rather than "control" it will be counter-productive!
- Technique:
  - Maintain a good ready position (paddle up, defending your body, for 80%+ players you will be ready to hit a backhand shot as most of your blocks will be with the backhand for most players).
  - Critical to be relaxed!
  - Very short, simple, crisp motions
- Variations:
  - 1) Stand just inside of kitchen line (back of foot touching kitchen line).
  - 2) Instead of belly-button to belly-button, go across backhand to backhand and then forehand to forehand.
  - 3) one player moves the ball around to any spot (forehand, backhand, high, left hip, right hip, etc) and the partner has to control all of these balls back to the belly button. For this advanced variation, make sure you especially focus on not hitting the ball too hard and just focus on controlling the ball.
  - 4) Figure-Eight: one player always volleys cross-court while the other play always volleys back down the line.
  - 5) One player initiates a speedup (off bounce or out of air) and the point is played out straight ahead.

## **2. CORE SKILL: Using lift/drop shots to not give opponent a high ball, & defend and get back into position**

### **DRILLS ("transition zone survival" or "no man's land survival" drill):**

- One player stands at the kitchen line, the other player stands and stays in the transition zone (also sometimes referred to as "no man's land").
- The player at the kitchen line will start with the ball, and, give an easy first ball to his partner. After this, the player at the kitchen line will practice pressuring the player in the transition zone (if the player in the transition zone is struggling, stick with giving easy balls, if they are doing well, then you can do your best to pressure them as in a normal competitive game).
- This drill can be done cooperatively if the player in the transition zone is struggling. Generally, however, this is a competitive drill where the player at the kitchen line will be trying to "win the point" with offensive shots against the player in the transition zone.
- The player in the transition zone gets to practice lift drop shots (getting under the ball), dropping the ball over the net so that the player at the kitchen line doesn't get a high ball. If this is your first time doing this drill, it will be difficult: stick with it, focus on lifting the ball, getting a good amount of arc to clear the net comfortably and drop down so your partner doesn't get a high ball. Do this drill every week and it will gradually become easier and easier: if you are comfortable surviving in the transition zone it will become much easier to survive in any area on the court!
- Common technique mistake: when hitting a "survival"/drop shot as is the case with the player in the transition zone in this drill, it is a common MISTAKE to try to spin the ball / try to spin the ball too much. This will make it much harder to drop the ball in your target zone over the net.
- Variations:

- This drill and should be done cross-court both ways as well as straight-ahead.
- Keep score: first player to 5, OR, play “7-11”: the player in the transition zone wins by getting to 7 before the player at the kitchen line gets to 11.
- The player at the transition zone can play in “mid” transition zone or “shallow” transition zone (a little closer to the kitchen line) or “deeper” transition zone (a little closer to the baseline).
- The player in the transition zone can also drive the ball (whenever they get an easier/higher ball).
- Cooperative drive/drop combo drill: start with the player at kitchen line giving the player in transition zone an easy, driveable ball, the transition zone player drives the ball, then the kitchen line player blocks the ball, then the transition zone player hits a drop shot, then repeat. So, the kitchen line player gets to work on blocking the drive, and the transition zone player gets to work on the drive-drop combo (simulates 3rd shot drive, 5th shot drop).

## OTHER DRILLS:

- Heels inside the kitchen line volley back and forth (most important focus on CONTROLLING ball back to partner’s belly button as accurately as you can)
- No man’s land survival (one player in no man’s land, the other at the kitchen):
  - player in no man’s land tries to survive as long as possible.
  - Player at kitchen line works on taking balls out of the air when comfortable AND targeting the feet!
- No man’s land attacking drill (one player in no man’s land, the other at the kitchen): player in no man’s land attacks relentlessly.
- 3rd shot drill (hit a lot of third shots in a row, drilling partner at kitchen)
- Work on moving in after hitting third shot (drilling partner at kitchen)
- Skinny singles (and cross-court skinny singles) - see video explaining skinny singles [here](#).
- Straight ahead dinking
- Cross-court dinking both ways
  - Variation: take turns one player does lift dinking (defensive), the other does push dinking) offensive.
- Can be played cooperatively OR “play to win the point”: both players start at kitchen line, straight ahead skinny singles. Cooperative version = take turns feeding your partner a yellowzone attack ball.
- Drive/Drop drill: one player at kitchen line, other player just inside of baseline. Player just inside of baseline alternates between drive and drop (staying in the backcourt), player at kitchen line “feeds” an easy-ish ball for the drive.
- Serve & return practice