

Pickleball Lessons: Pickleball Summit, Charlotte, NC

Legend: PC—Prem Carnot, MB—Matt Blom, MS—Matt Staub, SA—Sarah Ansbury

Dinking

- Dinks should land 3.5 feet or less from the net (PC)
- Bring paddle up to ready position, backhand in front of chest, immediately after dinking (PC)
- dinking consistency comes from bending knees and using legs not wrist or arms to power ball over the net (PC)
- misdirection dinks: hit balls inside out with handle leading swipe across ball. Ball should curve from inside sideline outwards (MS)
- hit down the side line to return a sharply angled dink but ensure dink is close to net (MS)
- attack dinks that you can volley, usually not those that bounce (MS)
- minimize steps and movement when dinking. Shift weight and extend but do not reach (SA)
- dinks close to the net are easy to hit and change directions, aim for feet of opposing player especially backhand foot (SA)
- play dinks in front of body and do not step back from non-volley zone line—volley ball instead (SA)
- sharply angled dinks usually result in sharply angled dinks in return (SA)
- dink deep to opponents' backhand to maximize difficulty of return (MB)

Strategy

- Divide court into thirds, two teammates each cover 1/3 of court moving in tandem to cover area (2/3 of total court) closest to where the ball lands on opposite side of net (PC)
- Refrain from smashing balls from midcourt to win points, instead dink and reset (MS)
- Attack player directly in front of you not cross court with hard shots (MS)
- hit 9 of 10 shots down the middle, i.e., between opposing players (SA)
- Poach whenever possible to protect partner (MB)

Technique

- Keep head down while hitting ground strokes to improve consistency (PC)
- Blocking: think soft, slow, deflate and move to net (MS)
- Blocking smashes: backhand paddle position, step back if necessary, keep paddle tight to body, elbows in, paddle head goes 1 inch out and down (MS)
- track ball using paddle head to help concentration, to keep paddle up and away from the body, and to enable poaching (SA) 
- back swing of most shots should stop at shoulder. If back swing travels behind shoulder you are telegraphing your shots and give your opponent more time to react (SA)
- soft grip equals soft shot, tight grip equals hard shot (SA)
- See holes of ball to maximize concentration and make it possible to seemingly slow down play (MB)

- visualize shots especially return of serve (MB)
- fluid, flexible wrist enables powerful shots (MB)
- force mistakes by hitting hard shots from non-volley zone line high to right shoulder of opponent (MB)

General

- Master one skill at a time (PC)
- Play shots that buy you the most time to respond--not react—in the same sense that a sick patient responds, not reacts, to proper medication (PC)
- Notice where the lead shoulder points when a player is hitting a ball. This usually determines ball direction (PC)
- Anticipate ball direction and speed by reading paddle head trajectory and whether the head is above or below the net (MS)
- Face ball squarely when ball is in opposite court. This will allow equal opportunity for forehand or backhand returns. (MS)
- Work your way to the non-volley zone line when serving. If you dink the opponent's return of serve, evaluate quality of shot. Best shots happen when player is stopped, feet shoulder width apart, square to ball (MS)
- Think balance and mobility when positioning your self at the non-volley zone line: back straight, head up, knees slightly bent (SA)
- Use whatever works for you. Do not play by so-called “pickleball rules” (MB)
- Seek opportunities to switch sides with your partner using hand signals. Best times to switch are after returning serve or after serving (MB)
- Strive for relaxed concentration. Negative self talk is counter productive. Accept your current state of ability without judging it as good or bad. It just is. (MB) *

* “When we plant a rose seed in the earth, we notice that it is small, but we do not criticize it as “rootless and stemless.” We treat it as a seed, giving it the water and nourishment required of a seed. When it first shoots up out of the earth, we don't condemn it as immature and underdeveloped; nor do we criticize the buds for not being open when they appear. We stand in wonder at the process taking place and give the plant the care it needs at each stage of its development. The rose is a rose from the time it is a seed to the time it dies. Within it, at all times, it contains its whole potential. It seems to be constantly in the process of change; yet at each state, at each moment, it is perfectly all right as it is.” –*“The Inner Game of Tennis”*, W. Timothy Gallwey, c. 1974

Drills

- Dink. Short hop all balls by first dropping paddle to the ground then lifting up
- Dink and Dink again. Dink from baseline, move in two steps, dink again
- Dink between. Dink to two opponents then suddenly dink inbetween them
- Dink Tag. Dink then suddenly tag (hit opposite player with ball)
- King of the court. Dink until you miss. “King” side gets 2 misses, challengers 1