

Week 2: Intentional Decisions

60 minutes | 16 players | 4 courts | Current level: 4.0+

The big idea for this week is to making and executing plans in pickleball. Too often we get in a habit of just playing 'our game' or reacting in the moment to the ball coming our way but particularly when we are being challenged being able to formulate and implement a strategy can make a big difference. Sometimes this can be simple ideas like "serve to player X's backhand" but sometimes we need something little more complex like "after two crosscourt dinks Player Y stops resetting their footwork and will be exposed in the middle."

Goals for this week

- 🧠 Deciding and communicating strategies before the point starts
- 🧠 Choosing targets during the point to accomplish specific goals
- 🧠 Adjust your plan to the incoming ball trajectory and your positioning
- 🧠 Recognize when opponents haven an opportunity to attack and prepare appropriately
- 🧠 Understand how opponents will react to repetition and variants

Drilling Plan

#	Time	Drill	Type	Style	Minutes
1	00–15	Dink patterns	Tactic	Cooperative	15
2	15–30	Targeted serves and returns	Mechanic	Target practice	15
3	30–45	Speedup and reset	Tactic	Rally game	15
4	45–60	Six-ball drill	Strategy	Point play	15
	60–150	Rec play	All of the above	Competitive	90

Getting started

- 🧠 **Court assignments:** We'll assign you starting random numbers for moving you between courts at minutes 15, 30 and 45. Four players per court; new partners each segment.
- 🧠 **Keep things moving:** Demos, rotations, and discussion for each drill should happen within each 15-minute block.
- 🧠 **One ball or two?** Two for crosscourt dinks and the straight-ahead speedup/reset warmup, otherwise one for all rally play.
- 🧠 **Scorekeeping.** Drills 1–2 count are all about repetition and consistency with no scoring (unless you want to track the number you get in each zone while serving/returning). Drill 3 uses a soft-feed game with bonus scoring and drill 4 has regular scoring with truncated points.

Takeaway

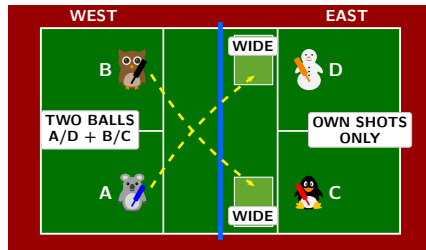
As you are doing the drills, one thing to consider is how you might apply these ideas in your actual games. This includes how to communicate with your partner about what your plan is. In evaluating your choices, you want to separate the question of 'Did I make the right decision?' from 'Did I successfully execute the shot?' The other thing to keep track of is your instincts. If you can figure out what causes you to speed up or how often you serve to the forehand vs. backhand by default you can then start to intentionally modify those patterns. Once you've started to develop some intuition about these decisions, this is a great thing to practice in rec games. Before each point take a couple of seconds to decide what your plan is and try to stick to it. Often what you'll discover is that initially having to think through something extra during a point causes you to lose more rallies than you otherwise would but as it becomes second nature you will be able to evaluate what went wrong (or right!) and make iterative improvements.



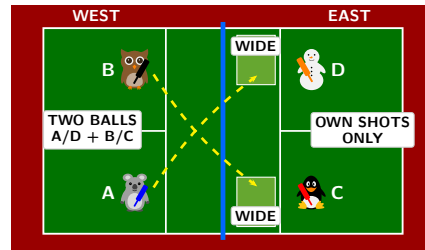
1. Dink patterns

00–15 min

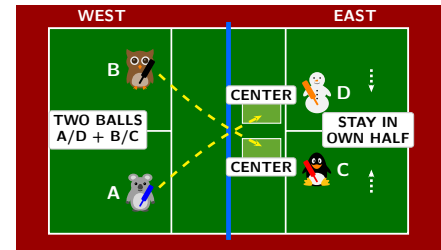
Key idea. Move your opponent with a pattern, then adjust to the ball.



1. Own first shot: WIDE. A/B shown; C/D do the same back.



2. Own second shot: WIDE. Each pair keeps rallying its ball.



3. Own third shot: CENTER, in partner's half. Repeat continuously.

Set up. Two balls, crosscourt pairs A/D and B/C, all at the kitchen. Start soft feeds a moment apart.

- Each player repeats a dinking pattern of **two wide, one center**, counting their own shots after the feed. Start by just getting the ball to the right place but then try to improve the dink quality. After the center dink restart the pattern with two more wide shots.
- Both targets should stay in your partner's kitchen half. Wide means toward the sideline while center means toward the seam with a safety margin.
- Lateral footwork is important. Try to reset to the proper position between each ball.

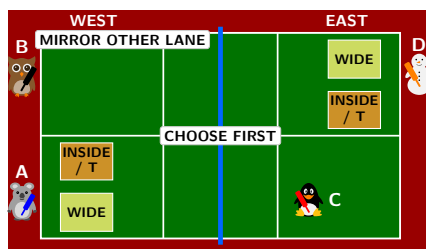
Drill notes. Since this is our warmup, start at a gentle pace. Aim for at least three useful patterns each per round. The placement should deny easy attacks (no dead dinks!). W

Timing and switches. Three five-minute rounds. During the first everyone does two-wide/one-center. In the second choose and explain your own pattern (which can differ per ball). For the final segment, you can again define your patterns but also adapt with a soft inside-half bailout when stretched, then restart your count. At minutes 5 and 10, rotate clockwise: west-low → west-high → east-high → east-low → west-low.

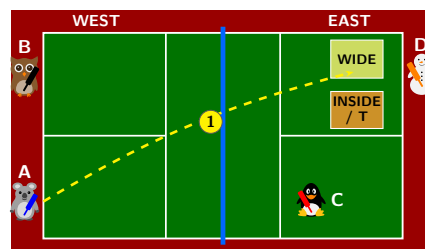
2. Targeted serves and returns

15–30 min

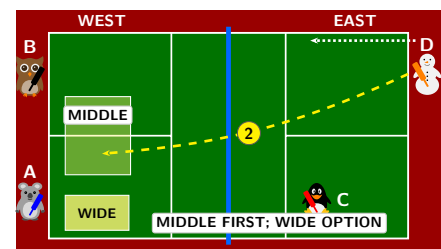
Key idea. Choose a target that helps set up the point you want, including your next shot or position.



1. Choose WIDE or INSIDE / T. Targets are shown at both ends.



2. A serves legally across court to D; example: WIDE.



3. D returns deep MIDDLE, then moves in. Either half is legal.

Set up. Mark broad deep WIDE and INSIDE/T serve windows in both service boxes at both ends. Add deep MIDDLE and wide return windows, with line margin.

- Each server hits **five wide, then five T attempts** from one service court and then switch sides. Order: A serves D, B serves C, C serves B, D serves A. Returners call and aim middle. Stop after the return lands and serve a new ball. Faults or off target serves count towards the five attempts.
- Once everyone has served, rotate positions around the court and move on to the next part.
- Identify your chosen serve and return targets before the serve. Returns should mostly go middle and most importantly land deep. Alternate service courts in this phase, with the diagonal receiver. Return and advance under control while servers stay back until the return bounces. No third shots.

Drill notes. Track target and useful effect separately on five attempts. Goal is also to serve deep to create pressure. Similarly for the return since a deeper return buys you more time to advance.

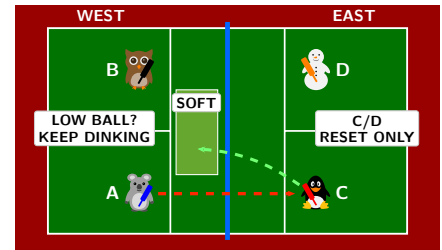
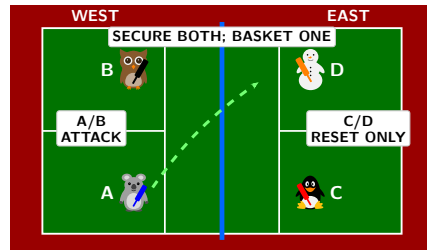
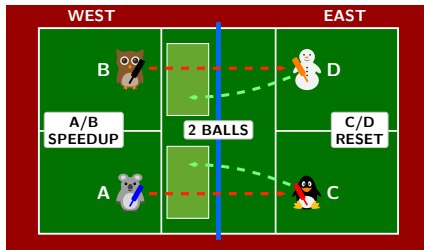
Timing and switches. Rotate after both players on the serving side have hit 10 serves from their side.



3. Speedup and reset

30–45 min

Key idea. Be prepared to attack suitable balls and be prepared to reset speedups from opponents.



1. Two balls up the line: A/C and B/D. Swap jobs halfway, in place.
2. Basket one ball. One-ball game starts with a soft crosscourt feed.
3. Speedup/reset game. After each game, reverse jobs in place.

Warm up first. Two balls up the line: A/C and B/D. In three minutes: 30-second demo, one minute A/B speed up and C/D reset, one minute reverse jobs, 30 seconds wrap up to actually start the drill. For the warmup start with a soft feed, bounce and soft reply. Stay in your lane only hitting up the line. Repeat controlled speedup/reset exchanges without scoring.

Set up the game. One ball with A/B attacking and C/D resetting only. Keep attacking/defense roles throughout each rally. Attackers may dink until they get an attackable ball. Resetters aim for kitchen replies that deny a downward attack.

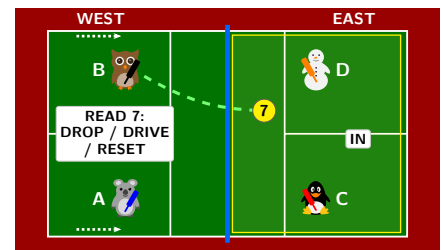
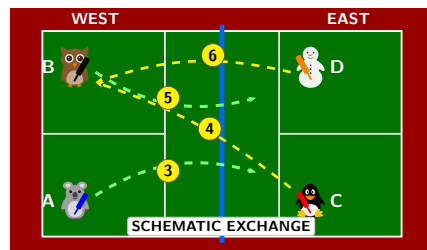
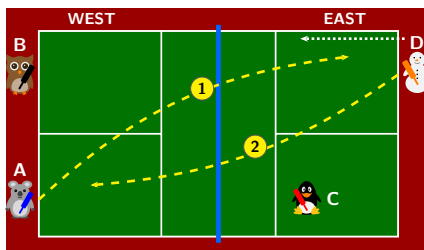
Scorekeeping. Whoever wins the rally gets one point. The resetters get one bonus point if they win on a ball that bounces in the attackers kitchen (either a winner or an attacker error). Attackers get two bonus points for a speedup winner. Attackers lose one point if they make an error on a speedup (hit it out or in the net).

Timing and switches. First three minutes for warming up speedups and resets. For the remainder, rally games to six, using the scoring rules above. Rotate counterclockwise after one team reaches 6 points.

4. Six-ball drill: Controlled Aggression

45–60 min

Key idea. Serving team is trying to construct a point, returning team is trying to disrupt and win quickly.



1. 1 serve, 2 return. Returner advances; servers let 2 bounce.
2. Count 3–6 across BOTH teams. Servers choose on 3 and 5.
3. 7 = seventh shot of rally. Lands in or is volleyed: A/B win.

Set up. Play out points with regular scoring rules, except that the game ends by the 7th shot. If the serving team gets their 7th shot in the point ends and they win. If the point ends before the 7th shot, count the score like normal. Play games to 5 and then rotate.

1. Count **all rally shots**: serve 1, return 2, third 3, then 4–7. Ball is live for any shot from the serve. On 3 and 5, the serving team should choose to drop, hit a controlled drive or reset and advance.
2. **If Shot 7 lands in (or is volleyed): servers win immediately**, even if the volley would win. A serving-team fault on the seventh ball still loses the point and earlier rally winners score normally. Seven means the rally's seventh shot, not the serving team's seventh contact.

Drill notes. A volleyed seventh shot scores but you should at least think through whether it would have been a 'good shot' in a real game.

Timing and switches. Rotate after each game to 5

