

Week 3: Drive, Slide, and Set Up the Next Ball

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

Hi everyone! Last week we focused on intention and decision making within points and this week we are going to extend that idea to drives, hand battles, and speedups. For all of these setups, the goal isn't to try to win the point on the first show but rather to setup up an easier put away on the next ball. This requires anticipation and positioning, so we'll discuss that too.

Goals for this week

- ☹️ Hit controlled drives deep enough to hold opponents back.
- ☹️ Recognize an open line and leave margin when trying to pass.
- ☹️ Make lateral adjustments while keeping paddles up and the seam covered during hands battles.
- ☹️ Choose suitable dinks to speed up, with a plan for the ball coming back .

Drilling Plan

#	Time	Drill	Type	Style	Minutes
1	00–15	Deep drives	Mechanic	Warmup	15
2	15–30	Passing Shots	Tactic	Live repetitions	15
3	30–45	Slide, counter, and cover	Tactic	Cooperative	15
4	45–60	Speedups off the bounce	Strategy	Rally game	15
	60–150	Rec play	All of the above	Competitive	90

Getting started

- ☹️ **Groups and timing.** Four players per court. Starting random numbers assign new groups and partners at minutes 15, 30 and 45. Partners stay together within each block.
- ☹️ **Equipment and space.** Use court markers to denote depth for warmup and speedup targets with two balls per court.
- ☹️ **Controlled pace.** Build from easy drives around 30–40% up to about 60–70% pace. For hands battles and speedups aim below shoulder height. Use compact swings and small steps rather than reaching or crossing feet.

Scorekeeping: Drills 1 and 4 use custom rally scoring: 1 point to the rally winner, plus the stated bonus in 4. A/B are the initial serving team, with A the feeder/current server, and C starting for C/D. Use a gentle feed instead of a regular serve and replay bad feeds. The rally winner gets to feed the next ball and teammates alternate their team's feeds. Losing the feed is an immediate side out, with no second server. All games are win by 1. Reset scores, alternate the starting team, and keep the feed alternation for successive games. The feed for drill 1 should be deep crosscourt, while drill 4 feeds should be in the kitchen.

Takeaways

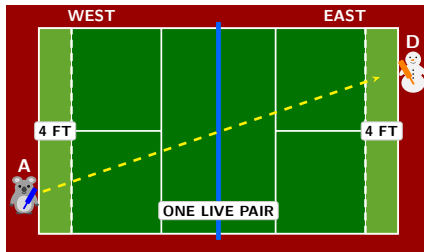
Before the point, chat with your partner and agree on one tactical idea to try out. Look for opportunities where your opponents are consistently out of position. Check in after side outs about how things are going.



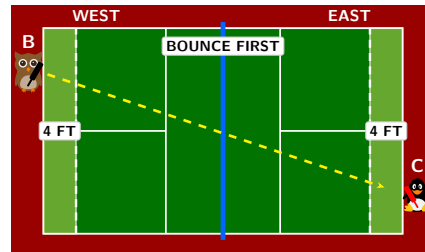
1. Deep drives: stay back

00–15 min

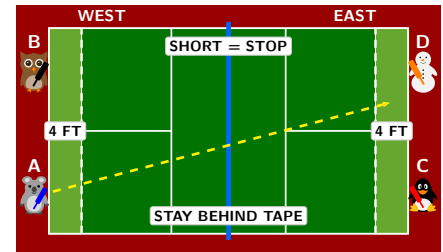
Key idea. Keep the drive deep with enough control to hit the next one.



1. A/D hit crosscourt; B/C wait behind the barrier. Short turns.



2. Switch to B/C. Let it bounce; build controlled depth.



3. All four, one ball. Every bounce in the deep strip.

Set up. Tape a line exactly **4 feet inside each baseline**. The deep target is the full-width strip between that line and the baseline, including both lines. Each shot should be targeted beyond the line but players can move wherever they want.

Warm up first. Crosscourt pairs A/D and B/C warmup drives with each other (2 balls). Start each ball with a gentle deep feed and then rally drives after the bounce, starting at a relaxed pace. Aim for six deep balls in a row to start but then move the ball side to side as well, keeping targets within 4 feet of the baseline.

Set up the game. All four play doubles with one ball. Use the cover's feed/scoring rules. Every shot, including the feed, must bounce in the far deep strip, anything that lands short is out and loses the rally. Call a short ball and stop rather than chasing it forward.

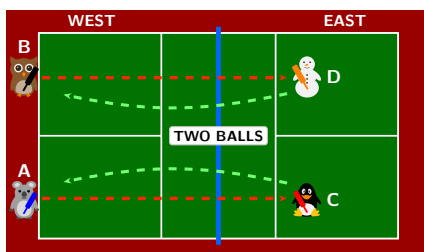
Drill notes. Aim through a broad deep window with baseline margin. Although the initial goal is to get the ball deep, ideally a stroke should hold the receiver back, not just float deep. If control breaks down, lower the pace and rebuild the rally. Play rally games to 7 and then rotate one position around.

Timing: Use the first five minutes for warmup, then the next 10 minutes for rally games, rotating one position after each game to 7.

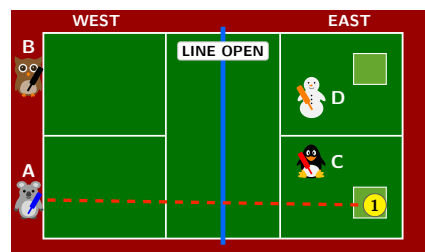
2. Passing Shots

15–30 min

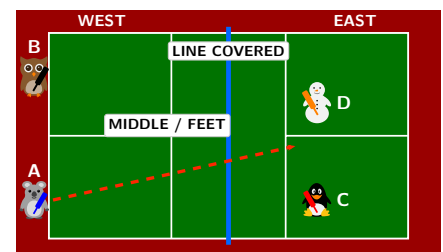
Key idea. Drive through an open alley with an appropriate margin for error. Setup space by moving the opponent to the middle.



1. Two straight lanes: feed, drive, block, stop. Swap jobs.



2. One ball: C shades middle. A reads the open line and passes.



3. C guards the line. A changes target; play the next ball.

Set up. A/B start back at the baseline with C/D at the kitchen. Mark a broad line window in each backcourt, roughly 2–5 feet inside the sideline and 2–6 feet inside the baseline. Targets are to give a visual bounce window for passing shots, not precision bullseyes.

Drill notes. Start with two balls in straight lanes A/C and B/D. Kitchen players feed a comfortable bounce; back players drive up the line at controlled pace. Block cooperatively, then stop and re-feed. Swap front/back jobs after five minutes, aim for a bunch of attempted drives each. Swap sides (left /right) after you've both done drives. Once everyone has done drives from both sides, switch to a single ball, having the kitchen players move and shift together.

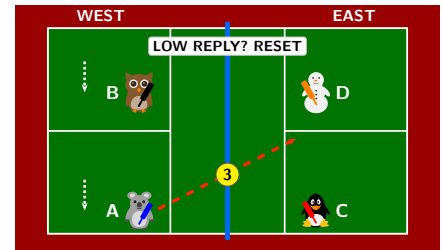
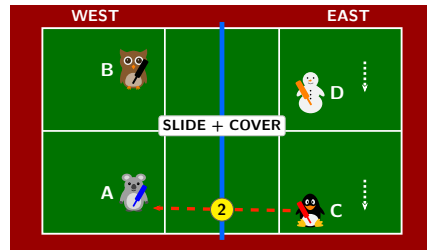
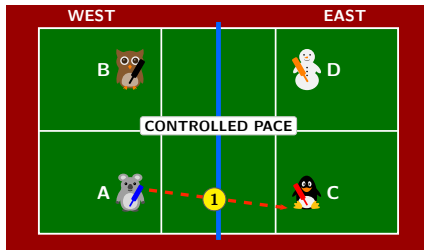
1. Kitchen players alternate feed locations (forehand / backhand) to the player straight ahead. The feeder varies between shading middle and guarding the line, settling before the hitter's contact. The other kitchen player covers the seam.
2. Based on the position of the kitchen player make a decision about where to target. A gap on the line means you can drive, but if it is covered you should instead use a controlled drive or drop towards the middle/feet.
3. Once everyone has practiced drives on both sides, play out rallies with everyone.
4. Note that blocked drives can still be useful if they force an upward or weak volley.

Timing: Use the first half of the period for drive practice, making sure that everyone gets to practice drives from each side. Once you move on to hitting a single ball, alternate feeders and targets but feel free to play out the points.

3. Slide, counter, and cover

30–45 min

Key idea. Create space for the counter and keep your partner laterally connected.



1. After a soft feed/bounce, A speeds up at C's outside hip.
2. C makes space and counters line; D closes the seam.
3. A tracks the line reply; B covers seam. Ready for ball 3.

Set up. All four at the kitchen. Begin with two balls up the line (A/C and B/D). Start with a soft feed that bounces in the kitchen, then the receiver sends a controlled speedup toward the opposite player's outside hip. That player makes a small lateral adjustment if needed and counters up the line. The initiator plays one more ball then stop and reverse who initiates.

Drill notes. Move only enough to free up the paddle space, with target contact in front and feet balanced. Make a decision to counter if you are balanced but block/reset if you get jammed. The player who speeds up initially should recover their paddle immediately and expects the counter.

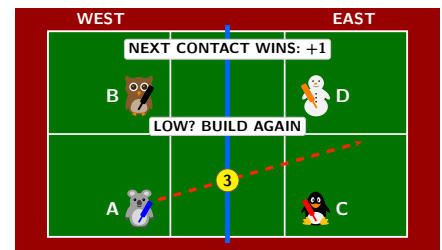
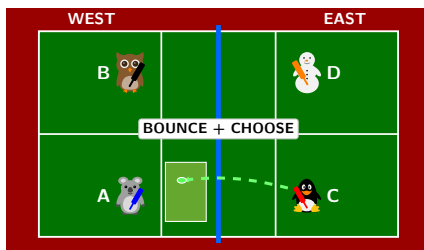
1. With one ball on the court, rehearse the same opening across the full court: feed, speedup off the bounce, line counter, and next ball. All four shots are live from the speedup.
2. If C slides wide to counter, D closes the seam while A shades the likely line reply and B covers the seam beside A. Mirror this when the other lane is attacked. Stay on your own side of your partner (no running around or automatic poaching).
3. After the opening, continue at controlled pace until a reset or fault. A low counter or reset is a reason to soften the next ball, not to force a second attack. After three feeds per player, rotate who is feeding. Then after each player has fed three balls rotate one position around the court.

Timing: Start with two balls with both pairs practicing the speedup and slide up the line. After 5 minutes of practice, move to using a single ball for all four players with the ball live after the feed.

4. Bounce speedup

45–60 min

Key idea. Use an initial attack to earn a better second shot to put away



1. C's dink bounces. A attacks only from a balanced contact.
2. First attack returns. A/B expect the counter and stay ready.
3. Next team contact: finish a lift or soften a low reply.

Set up. One ball, all at the kitchen. Soft crosscourt feed, bounce, then cooperative dinks. The receiver is the designated first attacker; feeds go A to D, D to A, B to C, C to B, repeating. Speed up **off the bounce** when you are in a balanced position with contact in front. Otherwise, dink if the ball is low or you are stretched. Stop after the thirteenth shot after the attack (attack, reply and next shot from attacking team), then use the next feed in the order.

Drill notes. On the first attack, expect a counter. The player facing it should make space while their partner covers the seam. The attacking pair stays ready for the next reply. Either teammate may finish a high ball that comes back. If the reply stays low, reset or dink and try again. Be really thoughtful about speedup targets, don't just wing the ball crosscourt into your opponents' forehand!

Game setup: Use the rules from the first page, where after one soft return, either side may make the first attack, always off a bounce. Full-court play follows. Players may counter, reset, or leave a clearly out ball (so in particular the other side does not have to block the speedup).

Scorekeeping. Rally winner gets 1. Add 1 bonus point for a speedup winner, a counter winner off a speedup, or a putaway on the third shot after a speedup.

Timing and switches. First five minutes cooperative practice with three starts each. Then play rally games to 7, rotating one position around each game.

