Week 4: Set Up the Erne

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

Hi everyone! This week we'll start out working on transitions and shots for escaping difficult crosscourt dink rallies. The second half is about setting up and hitting Ernes, including partner movement. Overall, we want to focus on having a plan for the next shot, including court coverage, whether we are creating or escaping pressure.

Goals for this week

- Use drops and resets to earn steps moving forward while the kitchen team pushes back with controlled aggression.
- Change a difficult crosscourt shot to a safe up the line 'bailout' dink.
- Recognize and set up Erne opportunities and appropriate footwork to stay outside the kitchen.
- Move together after a wide dink and exploit positioning errors among opponents.

Drilling Plan

#	Time	Drill	Type	Style	Minutes
1	00–15	7–11	Strategy	Rally game	15
2	15–30	Bailout dinks up the line	Tactic	Live repetitions	15
3	30–45	Set up the Erne	Mechanic	1-on-1 practice	15
4	45–60	Wide, slide, and Erne	Tactic	Doubles play	15
	60–150	Rec play	All of the above	Competitive	90

Getting started

- **Groups and timing.** Four players per court. We'll rotate courts after the second drill. For drills where we don't switch courts, rotate partners between drills.
- **Rotate one position.** Move around the four starting spots: west-lower → west-upper → east-upper → east-lower → west-lower (A → B → D → C → A). This has each player with a different partner and side. The diagram letters refer to positions on the court, not specific individuals.
- **Balls and space.** Two balls for the opening lane games and 1-on-1 Ernes, one per court for all other play.

Erne details:

An Erne is a volley that is hit from outside the sideline beside the kitchen, usually timed so that the attacking player jumps over the corner of the kitchen. The shot is named after Erne Perry, who got famous for using this approach in a USAPA national tournament[1]. Based on your movement, a right handed player will usually make forehand contact on Ernes from the left side and backhand contact on Ernes on the right.

Relevant Rules:

- You must establish position outside of the kitchen with both feet before hitting your volley.
- This also means that you can't push off of the kitchen line if you jump, even if you land outside the kitchen
- You must make contact with the ball on your side of the net but you may follow through after contact onto the other side

Footwork

- If you set up the Erne well, you will likely have to time just run around the kitchen corner, no jumping required. This can also be a good way to put pressure on your opponents, even if they dink to another location that you can't reach
- Similarly, you can run right through the kitchen as long as you are careful to step with both feet
- For right handed players on the left side of the court, you'll often want to push off with your left foot and land on your right if you jump over the kitchen.

Setup

- A common intentional Erne setup comes from up the line dinking. The goal is to place the ball to the outside and deep enough that your opponent has to take a step back. As soon as they step back and their head looks down to track the ball, you can leave for the sideline.
- Another setup can come from dinks to the middle that the left hand player on the other side steps over to take. That shot often goes crosscourt and can float a little high due to the short length of the court, which makes it another Erne opportunity.

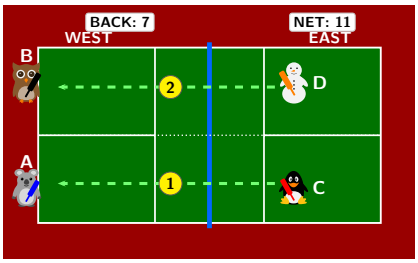
[1] This means that the Bert (where you cross in front of your partner to hit a ball off the other side of the court) is a comical neologism based on a malapropism (or at least a mistaken homophone).



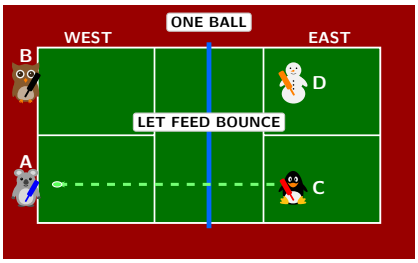
1. 7–11

00–15 min

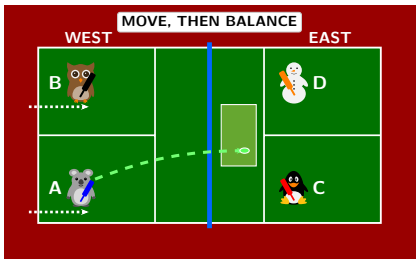
Key idea. The back team earns its way forward while the kitchen team tries to keep them back.



1. Two balls, two lane games. Net to 11; back to 7 in each.



2. One-ball doubles after rotating. Kitchen feeds every rally.



3. A useful drop earns forward movement. Reset depth each rally.

Set up. A/B start at the baseline; C/D at the kitchen. Kitchen players feed every rally, which you should basically treat as a return of serve. Replay bad feeds. After the first bounce, play is live and the back players may advance. Reset everyone to their starting position after each rally.

Warm up first. Play one 7–11 game in each straight lane, A/C and B/D, with two balls and separate scores. Stay in your own half of the court. Each rally winner earns 1. The player starting at the kitchen needs 11, while the baseline player needs 7. First to get their target score wins.

Set up the game. Once both lane games finish, play full-court doubles with the same unequal score targets. After each game, rotate one position, reset scores and start again.

Scorekeeping. Simplified-start rally scoring, no win-by-two. The kitchen team is the designated serving/feeding team for the entire game. In doubles, teammates can alternate feeeds, regardless of the winner. Feed straight to the baseline player opposite. No score-driven position switches, second server or side out, only rotate only after the game ends.

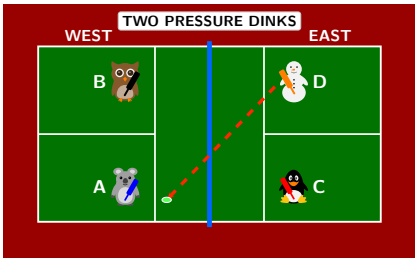
Drill notes. Drop or reset to make opponents contact low, and then try to move forward behind a useful ball. You might also try some drives, but should communicate to your partner so they know whether to advance or not. Kitchen players aim deep or at feet with control. A ball landing in the kitchen can still be too high to advance behind if it sits up high.

Timing and switches. Use the first 6 or 7 minutes for the up the line games and the remaining time for doubles.

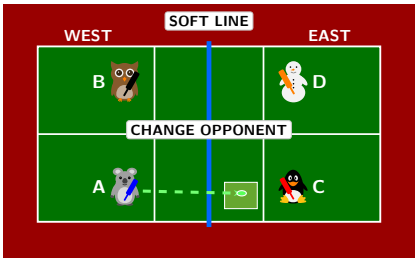
2. Bailout dinks up the line

15–30 min

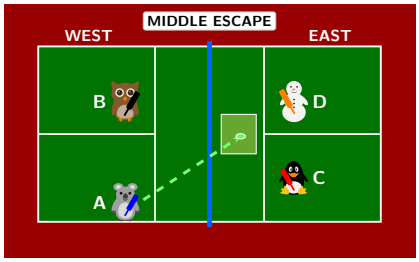
Key idea. Change the opponent and defuse a crosscourt attack.



1. D pressures A crosscourt twice; A returns the first diagonally.



2. Balanced A softens to C. Kitchen bounce and a low reply.



3. Late or stretched? Reset middle; recover together.

Set up. One ball, everyone starts at the kitchen. D applies crosscourt pressure to A with aggressive dinks, while C receives the up the line bailout. After the bailout just hit two more dinks and then restart. C should have a plan for when the receive the ball, just like in 2 on 1 targeting. B should move with A and watches the next ball. Use a broad kitchen targets roughly 3 feet wide, comfortably inside the sideline.

Drill notes. D starts with a pressuring but manageable crosscourt dink. A dinks back crosscourt D, who sends a second wide/deep dink. A then softens up the line to C with a shovel dink. C plays one controlled reply, then stop and re-feed. If A is late or stretched they may reset toward the middle instead, either way the goal is to set up a safer next shot.

Success is a kitchen bounce that makes C **contact low and play up**. After the bailout, recover together for the new ball location. Try six attempts for each ordering before rotating and count the number of successes. If the line dink pops up, C can put away or attempt and Erne. Rotate one position after every 6 balls.

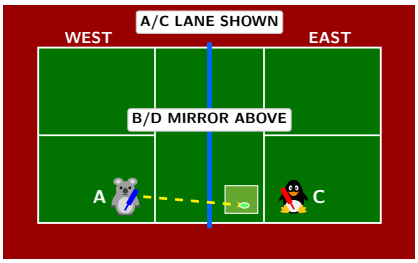
Timing and switches. Rotate one position every six balls so everyone tries each role so everyone practices the defender's job. Once everyone has tried it, you can put it into play with some rally games starting at the kitchen.



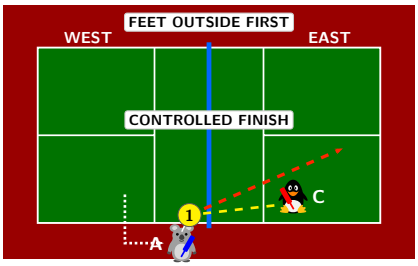
3. Set up an Erne

30–45 min

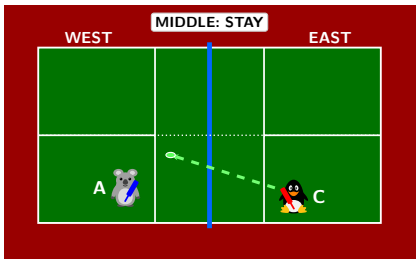
Key idea. Create a likely up the line reply, then move.



1. After C's feed, A sets up with a dink near C's outside foot.



2. C replies line; A steps around the corner, then volleys.



3. A central reply is a stay-and-dink choice. No forced Erne.

Set up. We'll demo the various setup options and potential footwork. Remember you have to choices, either go wide on an attackable up the line ball, or stay and dink. For practice, two straight pairs A/C and B/D use two balls, one per half-court. Each pair uses its **outside sideline** (no Berts).

Drill notes. In the A/C example, C softly feeds A and then A dinks toward C's outside foot. C cooperatively returns up the line. As C commits to that reply, A steps around the kitchen corner, establishes both feet outside the sideline, and volleys a controlled ball into open court inside the same lane. C lets that finish land. Do not aim at the feeder.

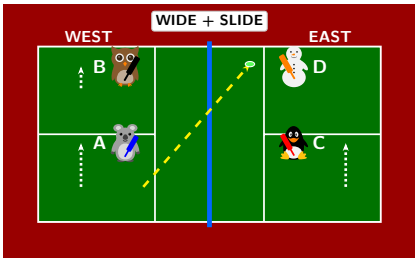
Use the step-around route first. Jumping is optional in the demo, not required for practice. Pay a lot of attention to where your feet are located and where you are making contact with the ball. If the ball stays live after an Erne, reset your feet and recover behind the kitchen line before joining your partner.

Timing and switches. After the demo, practice both roles, trying setups to the outside as well as the center. Try to establish how early you need to move in order to get in position in time to hit the ball.

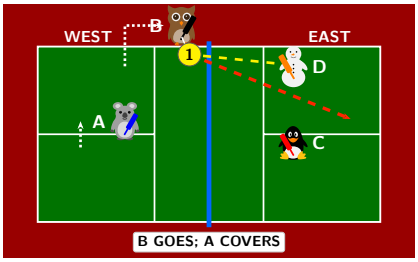
4. Wide, slide, and Erne

45–60 min

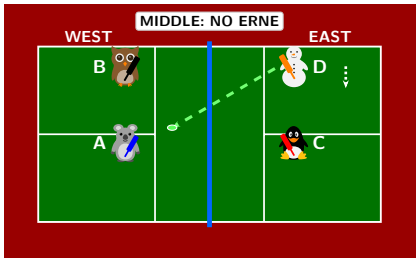
Key idea. Wide dinks can also create Erne possibilities if you move together.



1. A hits wide to D, then closes seam; B guards line; C closes middle.



2. D replies line: B may Erne; A covers the space B leaves.



3. D replies middle: B stays. Keep the pair connected and play on.

Set up. One ball, all four at the kitchen. Let a soft crosscourt feed bounce in the kitchen, then send a controlled wide dink back. The next player may reply line or middle, and the ball is live for everyone. Rehearse three starts each in this feed order: D to A, A to D, C to B, B to C. Repeat the cycle three times.

Drill notes. If A sends D wide, **A recovers toward the middle and closes the gap** while B protects the immediate line/angle and prepares to counter. C closes the middle beside D. If D's reply offers B a legal Erne, B goes outside while A covers the space B leaves. If D plays middle or the target is poor, B stays and the pair keeps dinking. D should recover after the reply. After an Erne, B regains balance and returns behind the kitchen line so that A and B can reconnect without crossing each other's paths. Mirror these responsibilities on the other side.

Set up the game. Play out every rally after the soft feed and wide-dink opening. Either team may attack any suitable ball and Ernes are optional and earn no extra points. Watch both the setup choice and the partner's coverage, even if the finishing shot misses. Defenders should watch the feet of the Erne player!

Scorekeeping. Simplified-start rally games to 7, win by 1. East serves/feeds first each game so its upper player (D) starts. West's lower player (A) starts that team's feeds. Rally winner earns 1 and gets to start the next feed. Teammates alternate their team's feeds and loss of the feed is an immediate side out, with no second server or score-driven position switches. Replay bad feeds. After games rotate one position, reset scores and restart the feed order by position.

Timing and switches. After demo, start playing games. Rotate one position after each game to 7.

