

10 Drills To Take Your Game To The Next Level

A drill is nothing more than a piece of the point.

-Jorge Capostany

Why Drill And Practice?

Drill, drill, drill! How many times have you heard that you should be drilling more than playing rec games to take your game to the next level? I bet you've heard it a lot! It all depends on what your goals are, but for most of you, I know you want to make less errors and prove that you can hang with the "in crowd."

Drilling helps you improve specific skills and improve situations that come up during a game. Take the time to drill multiple times a week if you really want to feel more confident with your game. Playing rec games are fun, but is it going to get you to where you want to be?

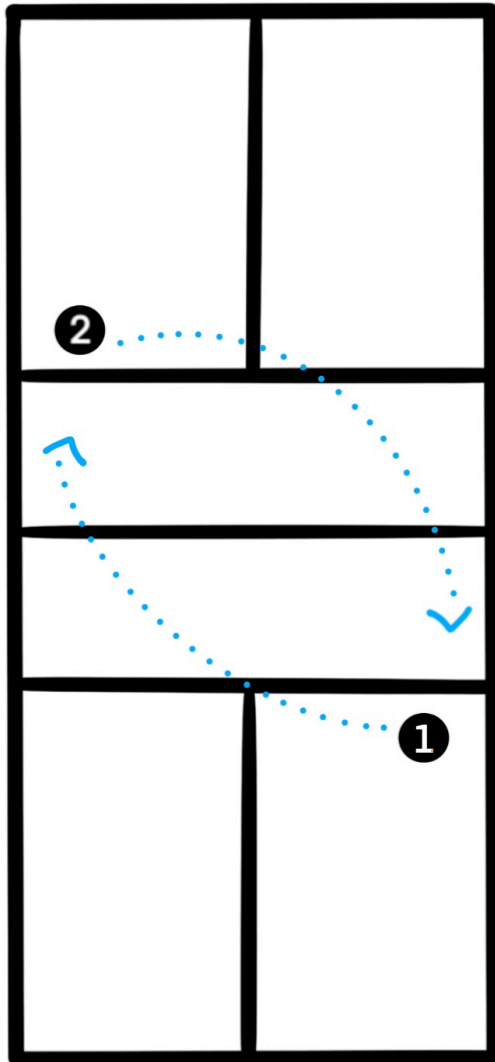
Take a moment right now and pull out a pen and paper. Now write down what your ultimate pickleball goal is. This may be different for each of us. You may want to play this game at the highest level. You may want to play comfortably at 4.0. You may simply want to make fewer mistakes than those you play with. Or you may simply just want to have fun and enjoy the social aspect of the game. Whatever it may be, write down your goal and keep it someplace you can see often.

Knowing why you play and practice is important so that you have something to work towards. When you know what your goal is, you can be more specific and focused as you train. When you step out on the court, do so with intention right from the very first ball you hit.

These ten drills and games are meant to give you something specific to practice. There is a purpose for each drill and each player plays an important role in making the drill or game effective for the other player. Drilling can get you in a groove with a particular shot and games put a little pressure on the skill spotlighted. You can easily turn a game into a drill or turn a drill into a game. Be flexible and know that you can adjust the drills and games to fit your needs during your practice time.

As you drill, remember the big picture is the point being played and the smaller picture is the particular skill you are focusing on. Do your best out there and put in that extra work!

Enjoy the process!
Coach Chris



Dink For Days

This is a great non attacking game to improve consistency and patience while dinking.

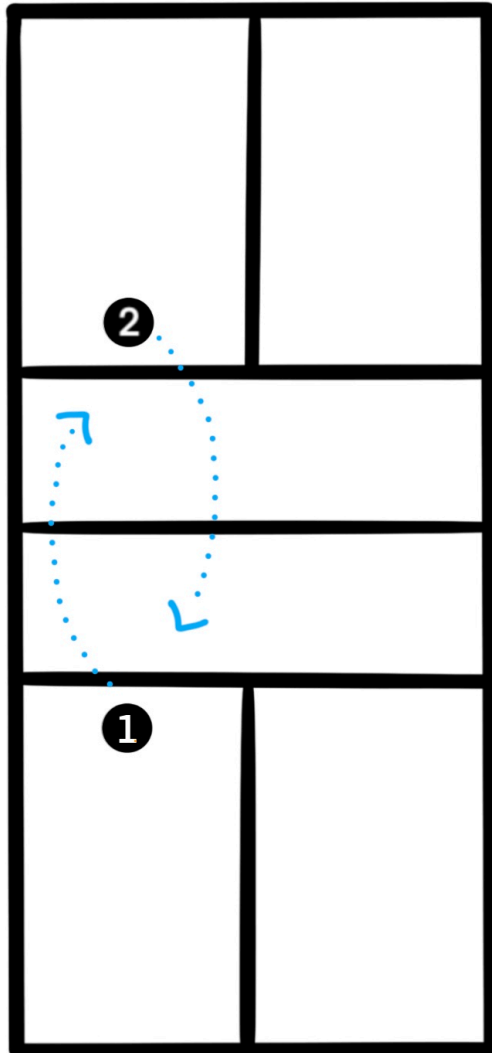
Level: All levels

Setup: Players 1 & 2 stand directly across the net from each other at the NVZ line. Play this game down the line, left side to left side, and right side to right side to play in all directions.

Goal: To outdink your opponent by staying patient with the rally until they miss wide or into the net.

Drill/Game:

- Points are played half court.
- Dink back and forth until someone misses.
- There is no attacking in this game so reset a higher ball.
- Play points to 11, win by 1
- Points are only earned on errors, not winners.
- Move your opponent around to create an error.



Don't Pop It Up!

This is a great game to improve consistency and patience while looking for opportunities to attack a high ball.

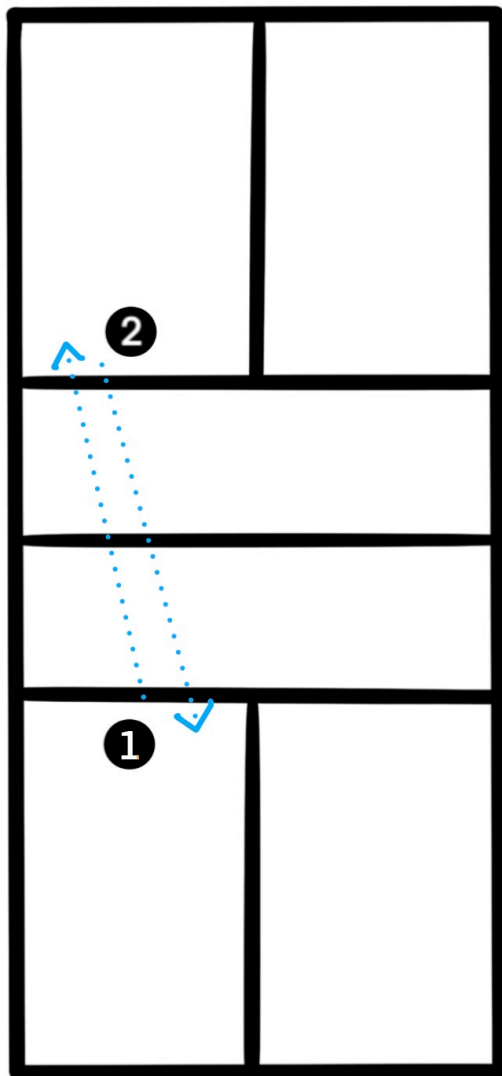
Level: 3.0+

Setup: Players 1 & 2 stand directly across the net from each other at the NVZ line. Play this game down the line, left side to left side, and right side to right side to play in all directions.

Goal: To outdink your opponent with quality dinks and look for opportunities to attack the right ball when it is attackable.

Drill/Game:

- Points are played half court.
- Dink back and forth until someone misses or pops the ball up.
- Attack balls that are popped up, but be careful with non attackable balls.
- Play points to 11, win by 1
- Move your opponent around to create the error and opportunity.



Volley To Volley

This is a great drill that will improve and strengthen volleys.

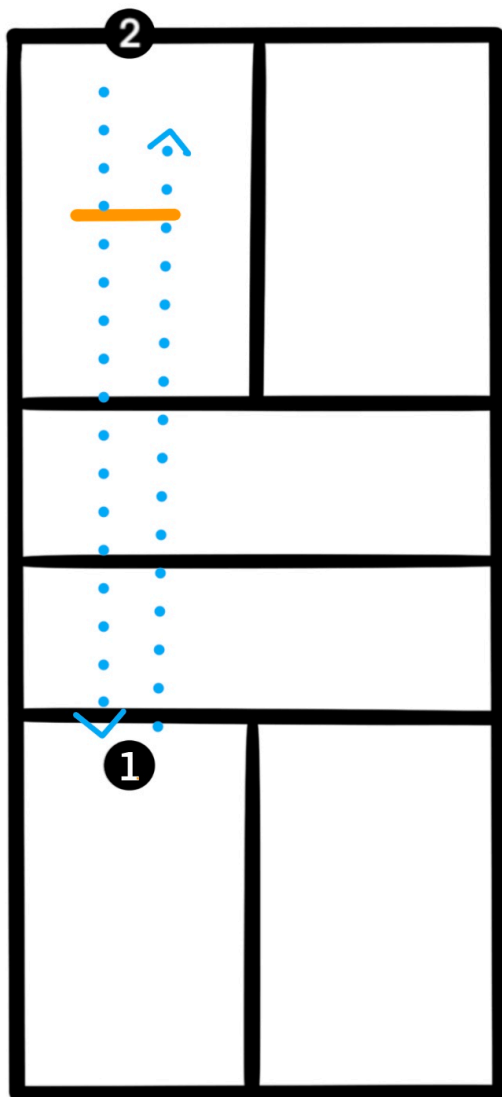
Level: All levels

Setup: Players 1 & 2 stand at the NVZ line directly across the net from each other. For this drill you can step inside the NVZ if desired. The closer you are, the less movement your volley motion will be due to less time.

Goal: To strengthen and improve volley control.

Drill:

- Volley forehand to forehand.
- Volley backhand to backhand.
- Volley body to body.
- Set an amount of time to do each volley pattern.
- Track how many times volleys are hit in a row.
- To slow the ball down and be more consistent, hit the ball with an arc to give allow for more time.
- Drive the ball at chest level when more comfortable and consistent to speed up your response time.



Drive To Volley

This is a great cooperative drill that 2 players can do so that each player is improving a different skill at the same time.

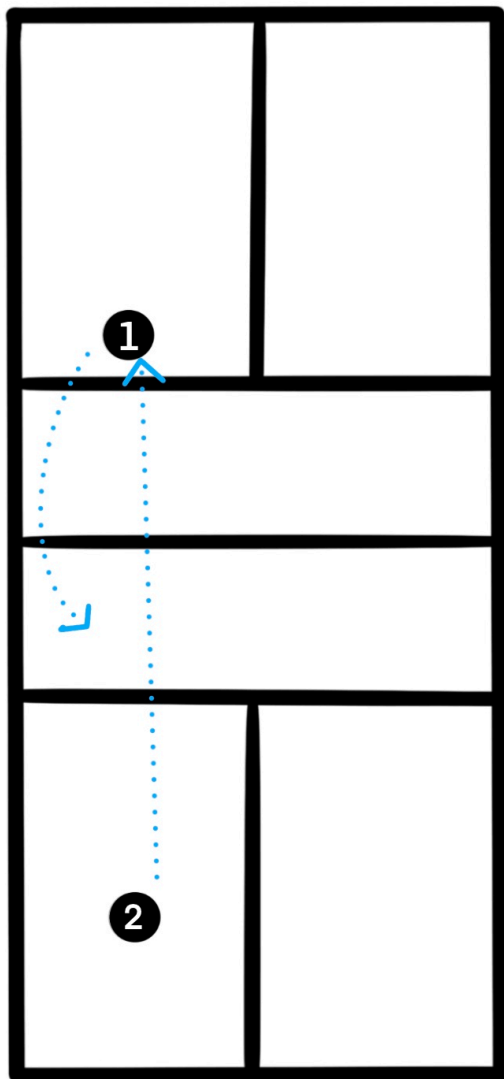
Level: 3.0+

Setup: Player 1 stands at the NVZ while Player 2 stands at the baseline. Set time to hit straight ahead as well as each crosscourt direction.

Goal: To hit deep controlled volleys and to hit groundstrokes directed at the volleyer. This improves consistency with volleys and groundstrokes.

Drill:

- Player 2 feeds a ball to Player 1 who is at the net.
- Player 1 volleys the ball deep back to Player 2.
- Player 2 then hits a groundstroke back to player 1.
- Keep the rally going as long as possible.
- Set a goal to hit a specific number in a row and attempt to improve that number each time.
- After a set time, switch roles so Player 1 is at the baseline and Player 2 is at the NVZ.



Drive To Reset

This is a great drill to reset a drive so that the ball doesn't pop up every time.

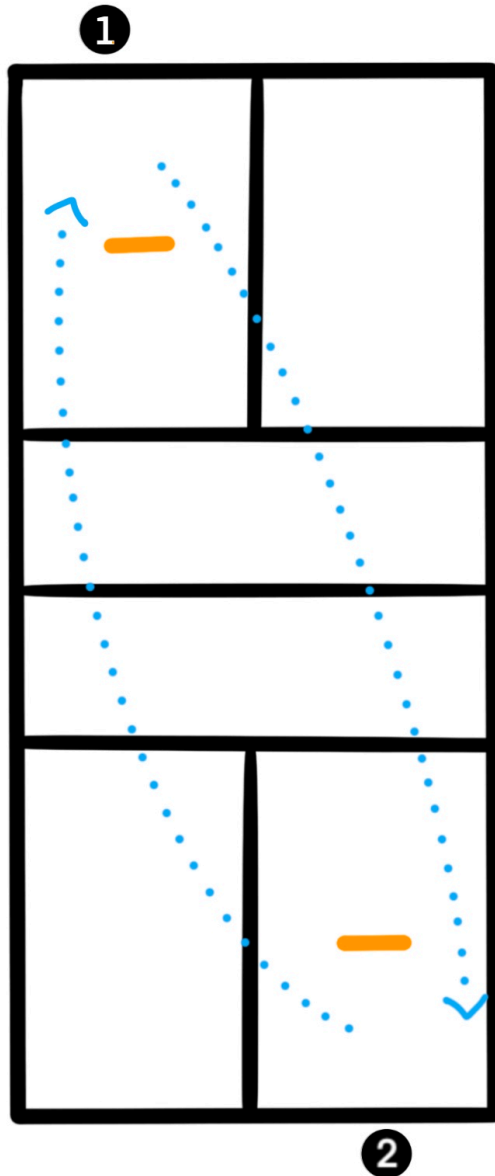
Level: 3.0+

Setup: Player 1 stands at the NVZ line while player 2 stands mid-court. This allows Player 1 time to respond to a fast ball.

Goal: To use a soft relaxed grip to reset the ball into the NVZ. This will prevent the ball from popping up and being smashed back at you.

Drill:

- Player 2 drop feeds a drive to Player 1.
- Player 1 absorbs the pace of the ball with a soft grip.
- Adjust the angle of the paddle for the desired height over the net.
- It is okay if the ball goes into the net.
- Focus on the touch with this shot,
- Player 2 can move forward or backward to adjust the difficulty along with the pace they hit the ball.
- Switch roles so both players practice resetting.



Grinding Groundies

This is a great drill to improve consistency with groundstrokes.

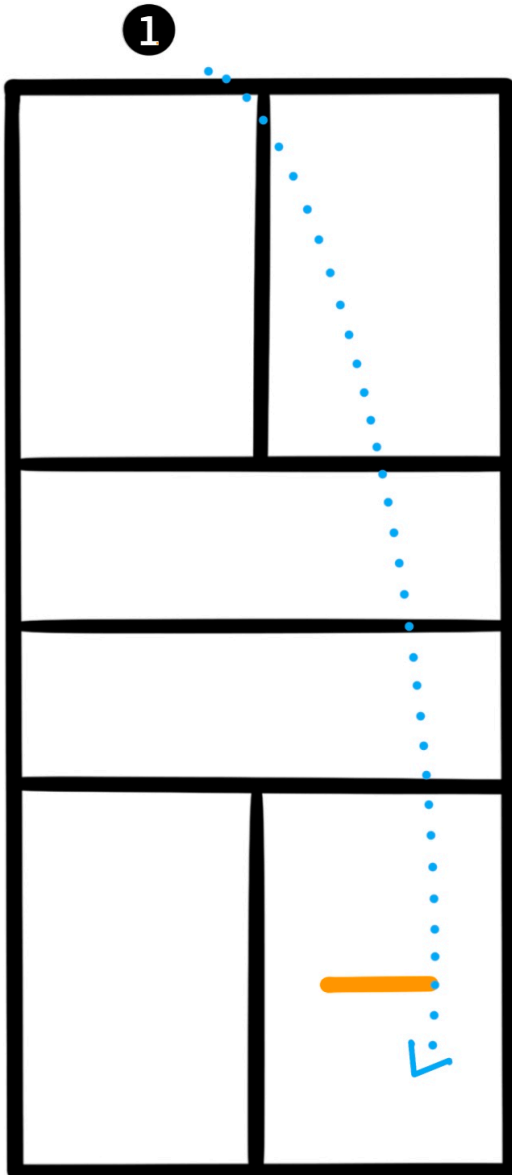
Level: All levels

Setup: Players 1 & 2 stand across the net from each other at the baseline. Rally down the line, crosscourt on the right court and crosscourt on the left court. Rally each direction for a set amount of time.

Goal: To improve groundstrokes through the consistency of keeping the rally going as long as possible.

Drill:

- This is a cooperative drill.
- Start the rally and see how many times you can hit the ball in a row without missing or letting the ball bounce more than once.
- Hit the ball in the back half of the transition zone to improve depth on groundstrokes.
- Keep track of your high score so you can work to improve that number each time you are on the court.



Serve Depth

This is a great drill to improve consistency and control on the serve. No partner needed for this drill.

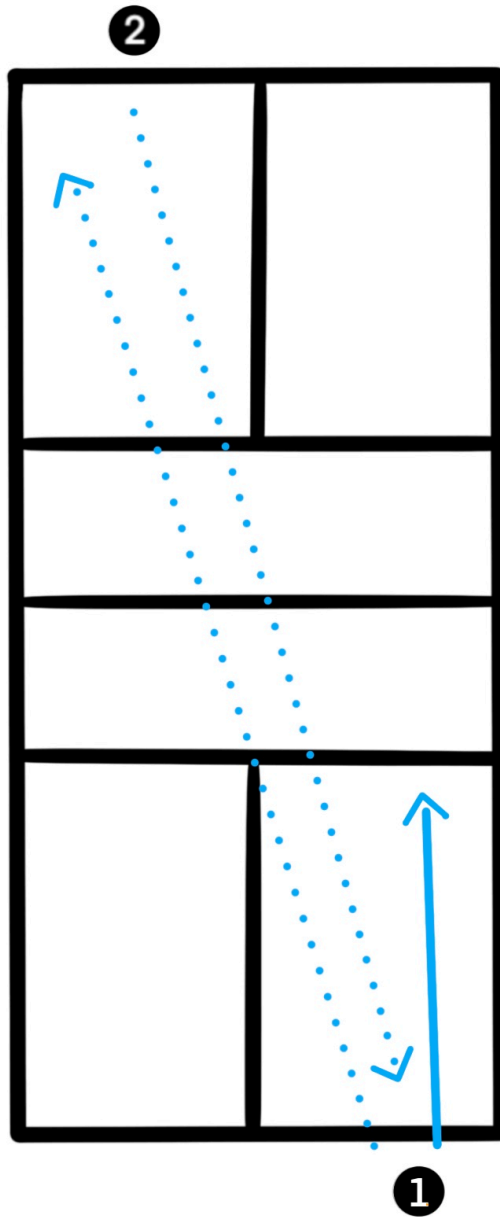
Level: All levels

Setup: Player 1 stands behind the baseline in their serving position starting on the right side.

Goal: To improve consistency with a deep serve to keep the opponent back.

Drill:

- Stand at the baseline in serving position.
- Serve the ball crosscourt, deep to the back half of the court.
- Serve 10 deep balls in a row on the right side.
- Then serve 10 deep balls in a row on the left side.
- Then serve 10 deep balls in a row alternating serving on the right side and the left side.



Return And Run

This is a great drill to improve your positioning after the return of serve. Too often, players get stuck in the transition zone trying to hit balls that are hit to their feet.

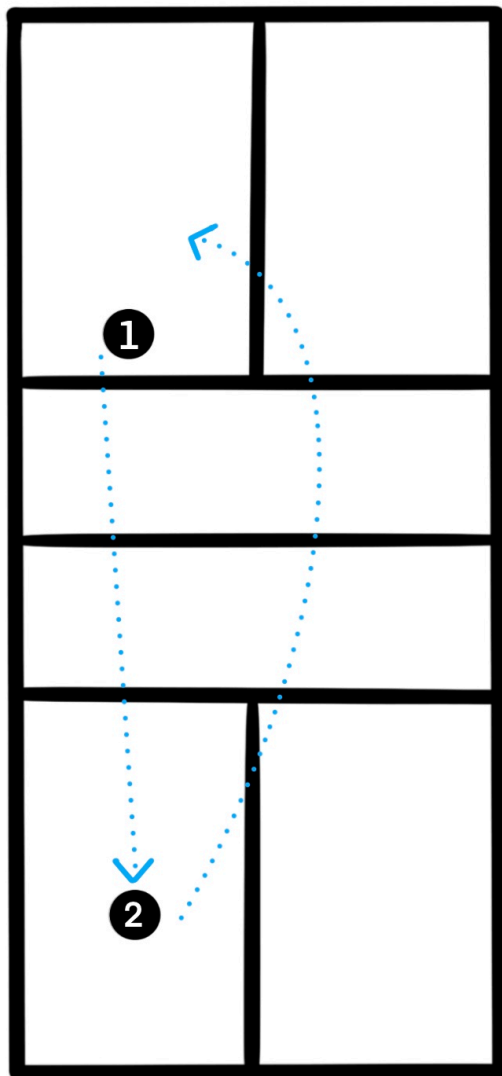
Level: All levels

Setup: Players 1 & 2 stand behind the baseline crosscourt from each other.

Goal: To improve returner positioning. The returning team already has a partner up at the NVZ. If both partners are at the NVZ they create a bigger wall making it tougher on their opponents.

Drill:

- Player 2 will serve the ball to Player 1.
- Player 1 will return the ball deep and run up to the NVZ line before Player 2 catches the ball.
- Notice where Player 1 ends up when Player 2 catches the ball to make adjustments to the return or footwork.
- Switch roles so Player 1 serves and Player 2 returns and runs to the NVZ line.



Lob To Overhead

This is a great cooperative drill focusing on hitting overheads.

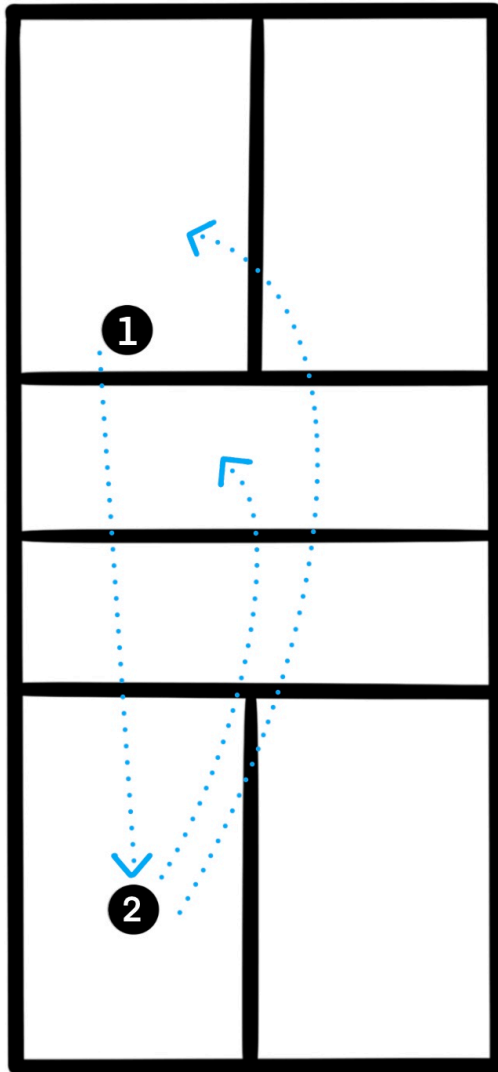
Level: 3.0+

Setup: Player 1 stands at the NVZ to hit overheads while Player 2 stands in the middle of the transition zone to defend and lob the ball back to Player 1.

Goal: To develop control with hitting overheads and to hit dig out the overhead and lob the ball back.

Drill:

- Player 2 feeds up a lob to Player 1.
- Player 1 smashes a controlled overhead to Player 2.
- Player 2 digs the ball out and lobs it back up.
- If this is difficult, feed a basket of balls to be hit as overheads while still trying to return the smash.



Defend And Destroy

This is a fun game to work on defending off an overhead.

Level: 3.0+

Setup: Player 1 starts at the NVZ line and Player 2 starts in the transition zone. Play half court.

Goal: To return a lob and fight to win the point. Resetting the ball off an overhead will allow the player up to the NVZ to play out the point.

Drill/Game:

- Player 2 feeds a lob to Player 1.
- Player 1 hits an overhead and Player 2 defends the overhead by getting the ball back over.
- Both players play out the point.
- Play to 11, win by 1.



COACH

Chris Gunnell