

# **Numbered Cones for Tennis**

**Games, Drills, and Exercises  
For Fun and Fitness**

by Joe Dinoffer

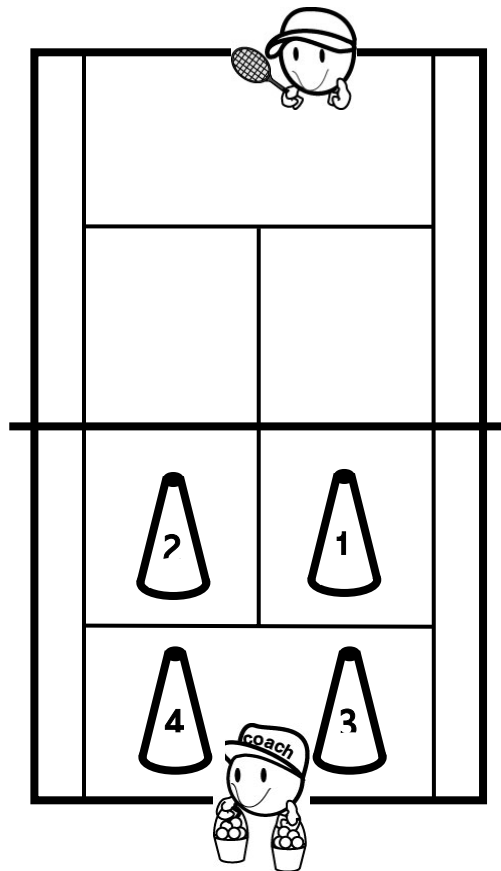
President, Oncourt Offcourt, Ltd.

# About the Author

Joe Dinoffer has had an extensive "world class" career in the tennis industry, having conducted clinics and exhibitions in over 50 countries, personally logging over 30,000 hours of instruction in English, Spanish, and German. He is a USPTA and PTR Master Professional, a distinction that has been awarded to only a handful of tennis professionals in the world. He is also the founder and president of Oncourt Offcourt, Ltd., a company exclusively serving the needs of tennis, fitness, and physical education coaches with innovative training aids and educational tools.

Joe is the author and editor of 9 books, 18 DVDs and hundreds of magazine articles, having written numerous articles for *Tennis Tennis Life*, and *Racquet Sports Industry Magazine*. He has also appeared numerous times on television on The Tennis Channel in the United States.

# #1 Four-Quadrant Drilling



**GROUNDSTROKE DRILLS:** Helps players hit groundstrokes to the four primary court areas.

**Variation #1:** With either blocked or random feeds, the hitter calls out the number of the intended quadrant before contacting the ball.

**Purpose:** Make decisions as early as possible.

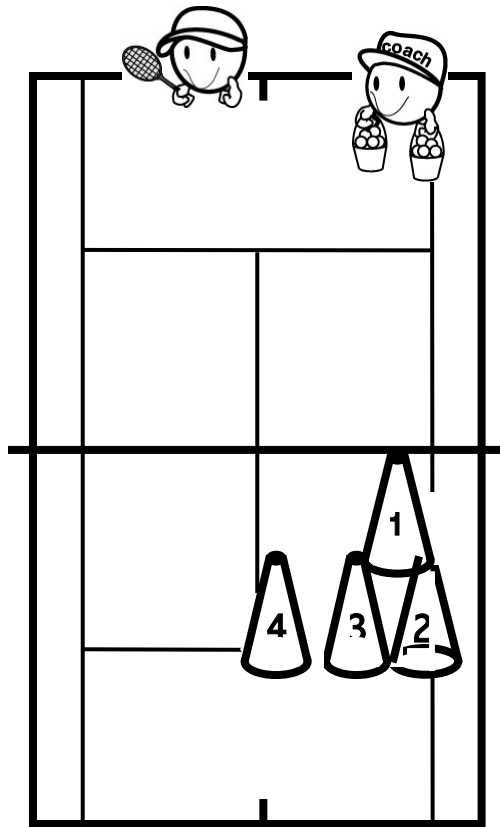
**Variation #2:** Coach calls out the target quadrant number as balls are fed.

**Purpose:** Helps players disguise the direction and depth of groundstrokes.

**Variation #3:** Two players compete from the baseline. Points start with a bounce-hit. Players call out intended target quadrants before hitting each ball. Miss a quadrant; lose the point.

**Purpose:** Helps players plan shots while playing.  
**Tips:** Remember that the target is not the cone itself; it's the quadrant.

# #2 Four-Target Serving



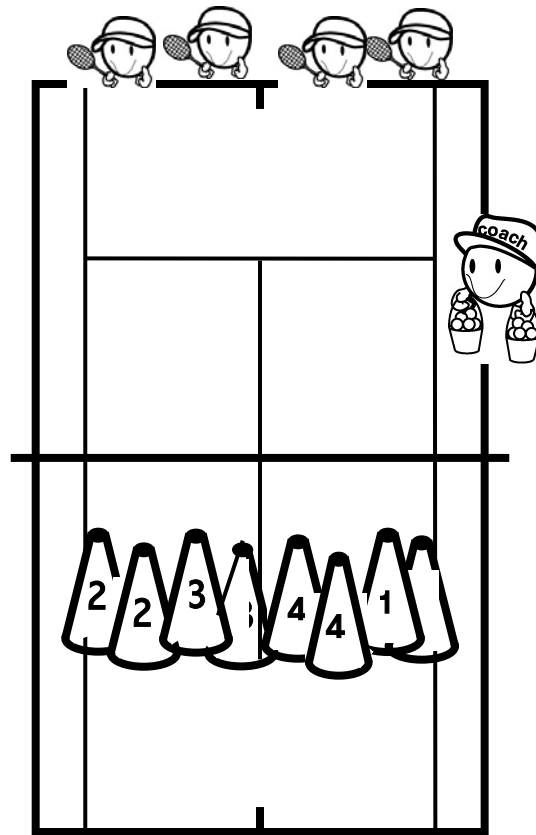
**SERVING DRILLS:** Helps servers understand their serving choices, become decisive in planning what type of serve to hit, and develop the ability to disguise those serve variations. Each service box has 12 possibilities. There are four directions as notated in the diagram and three spins for each (flat or no spin, slice, and kick).

**Variation #1:** The server calls out the number of the intended target and the intended spin before contacting the ball. Example: #1 Slice, or #4 Flat.  
**Purpose:** Make decisions before serving.

**Variation #2:** Coach calls out a target and spin as the server tosses the ball for each serve.  
**Purpose:** Helps players disguise the direction and spin of their serves.

**Tips:** Remember the target is not the cone itself; rather, an area of about four feet around the cone.

# #3 Serving for Dollars



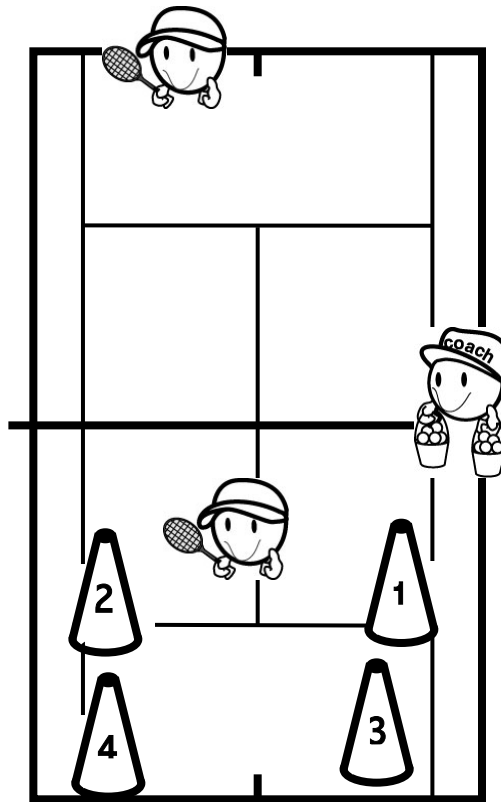
**SERVING DRILLS:** Servers practice planning and controlling serve direction in a fun, game-like atmosphere.

**Variation #1:** Divide group into two teams. Set up as many numbered cones as possible as shown. Players hitting cones score the number of points written on the cones for their team. As cones are knocked down, that server must sprint to the other side and reset the cone. Game ends when one team reaches eleven or fifteen points.

**Purposes:** To challenge servers to plan out the direction of their serves. Serving practice can be boring. This game changes serving practice to fun.

**Tips:** It's critical to have as many cones as possible to make point scoring likely. Also make sure the servers do not "push" the ball into the box; rather, coach makes sure they take full swings or the points do not count.

# #4 Fire in the Hole



**PASSING SHOT DRILLS:** "Fire in the Hole!" tells you to act quickly. If your opponent is at the net, you also have to make quick decisions. Will you hit a passing shot and if so, where, or will you lob?

**Variation #1:** After the initial feed volley bounces, the coach calls either #1 or #4 for either Side-T; and #2 or #3 for a down the line passing shot or lob in that direction.

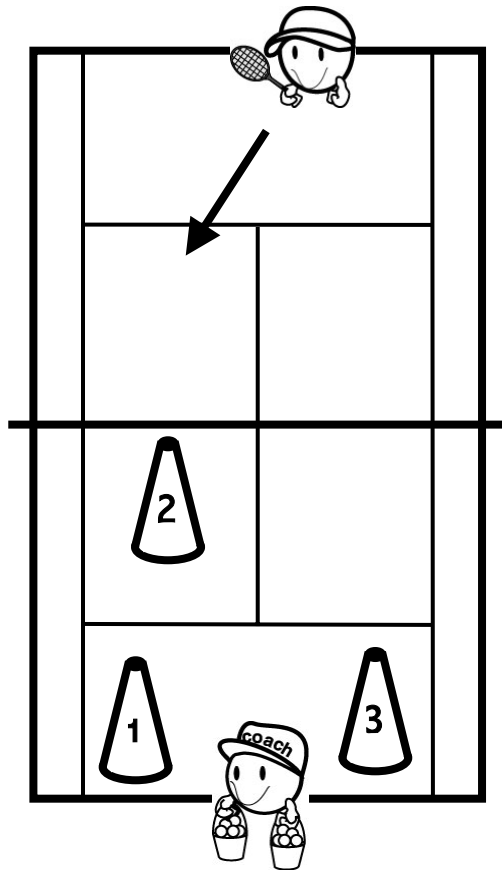
**Purpose:** Helps players disguise shots against volleyers and recognize their choices.

**Variation #2:** Coach stands behind baseliner who calls out selection quietly before hitting. The volleyer doesn't hear it. Play out points.

**Purpose:** Helps players make own decisions.

**Tips:** Note that the target is not the single cone. It's an area about four feet around it.

# #5 Approach, Drop, or Crush



**APPROACHING THE NET DRILLS:** Identify and execute options on short balls in singles.

**Variation #1:** A feeder or coach hits short set-up shots to the baseliner. The hitter calls out the number of the intended shot well before contact: approach down the line, dropshot, or crushing crosscourt winner.

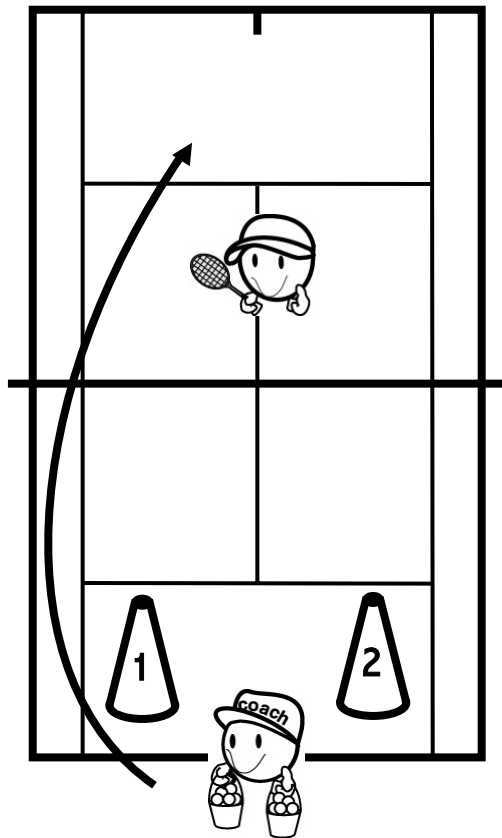
**Purpose:** Identify options on short balls, be decisive, and stick with the decisions.

**Variation #2:** Same as above, except the hitter calls out the intention at the last second. Play out the points until one player reaches seven and switch sides.

**Purpose:** Helps players disguise shots when approaching the net.

**Tips:** Remember to come in to the net on all three shots in case the ball comes back.

# #6 Controlled Smash



**OVERHEAD DRILLS:** Help players develop the skills necessary to make the overhead a point-ending shot. The center of direction control is the wrist and this exercise helps players develop the skills to not only hit the overheads, decisively, but also with control over direction and disguise.

**Variation #1:** A feeder or coach hits set-up lobs. The feeder calls out where the hitter should direct the overheads by saying "1" or "2" well before contact. Score points for balls that land in the correct half of the court. Feed six balls and rotate.

**Purpose:** To control the wrist and racquet head and therefore the direction of the overheads.

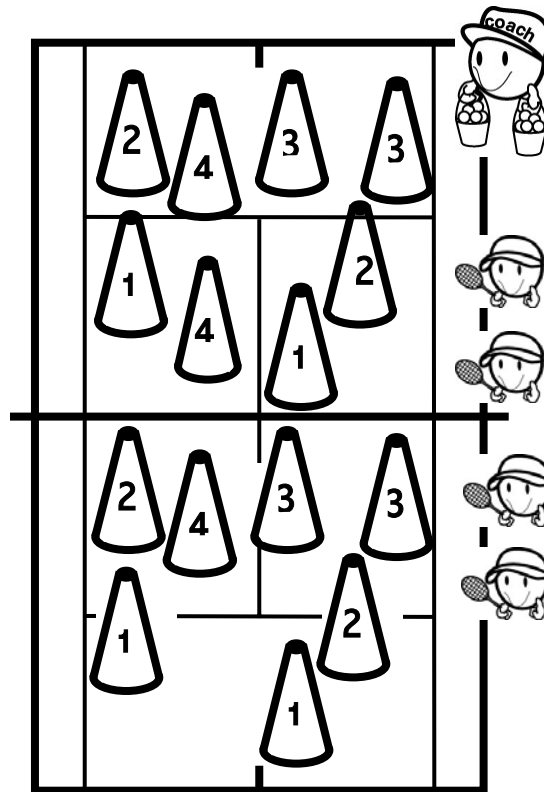
**Variation #2:** Same as above but play out points.

**Purpose:** Good recovery after overheads.

**Tips:** Remember the target is not the cone but the entire half of the court.



# #7 Run the Numbers

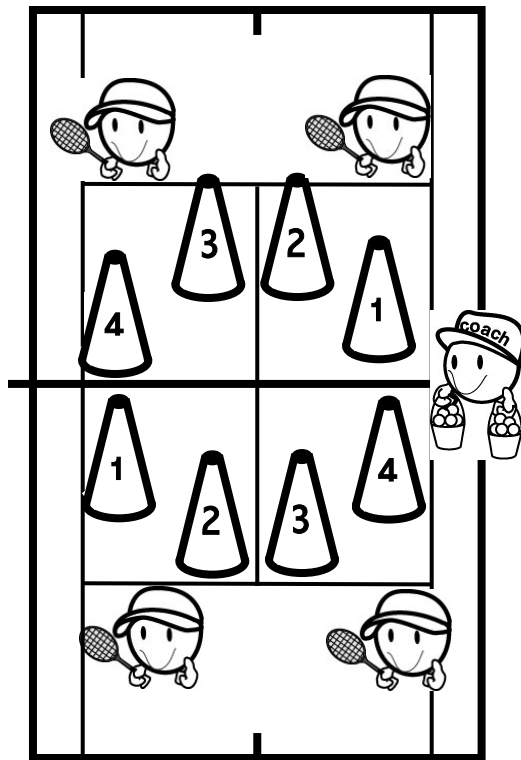


**RUNNING GAME:** Juniors will enjoy this game and it can be used as a warm-up or simply a fun exercise to add fitness and conditioning to any practice session. From this game you will see that fitness drills can be enjoyable.

**Variation #1:** Play as many numbered cones as possible on the court and balance a tennis ball in the hole on top of each cone. Divide up the cones evenly accordingly to their numbers on both sides of the net. Assign each child a number and line up four children at a time on the doubles sideline. Blow a whistle to start the children running to pick up one ball at a time from "their" cones. They then immediately squeeze that ball into a nearby fence. Ball, fence, ball, fence, etc. When all the balls are retrieved, that child runs again to the doubles sideline.

**Purposes:** Movement, fitness, and fun!

# #8 Control and Disguise



**PASSING SHOT DRILLS:** Hitting in the service boxes, this exercise teaches directional control with disguise in a controlled area. As players succeed, they can gradually move back to the baseline.

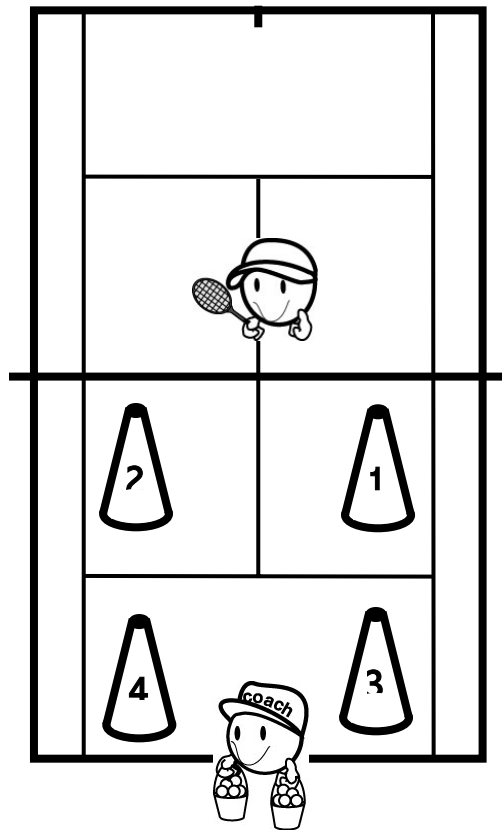
**Variation #1:** Players pair up and play mini-tennis crosscourt. Each one has to call prior to hitting the ball which cones (designating a general direction) they are targeting. Hitting the intended cone scores points and it should be possible since play only takes place in the service boxes.

**Purpose:** Helps players make decisions on where each ball will be hit earlier and more decisively.

**Variation #2:** Same as above except this time the players call out where they want the opposing player to hit. Each player calls out the number as the ball they just hit clears the net.

**Purpose:** Helps players develop disguise.

# #9 Controlling Volleys



**VOLLEY DRILLS:** Identify and execute four volley options: Two drop volleys and two deep volleys.

**Variation #1:** A feeder or coach feeds to the volleyer. The volleyer calls out the number of the intended shot well before contact. #1 or #2 for drop volleys and #3 or #4 for the deep corners.

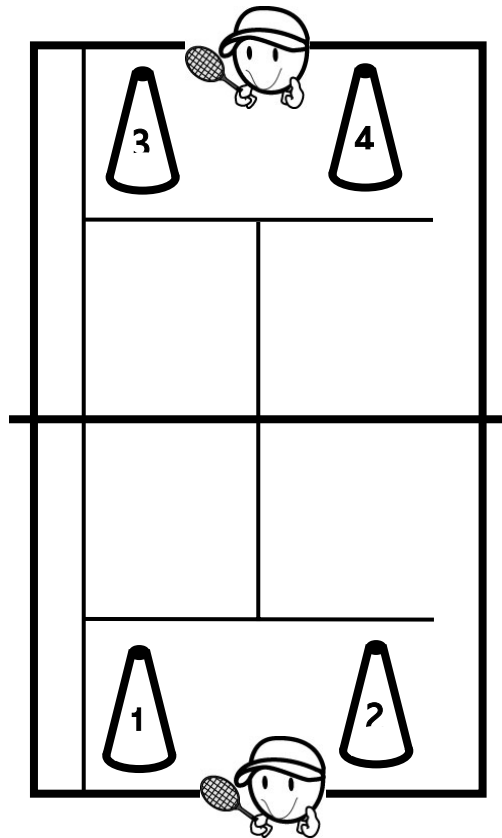
**Purpose:** Identify volley options and commit to them early and decisively.

**Variation #2:** Same as above, except the feeder calls out what the volleyer should do just after the ball is fed. Play out the points until one player reaches seven points and then switch sides and play again.

**Purpose:** Helps players disguise their volleys and drop volleys.

**Tips:** Remember that the target is not the cone itself but about a four-foot area around it.

# #10 Cone Run-around



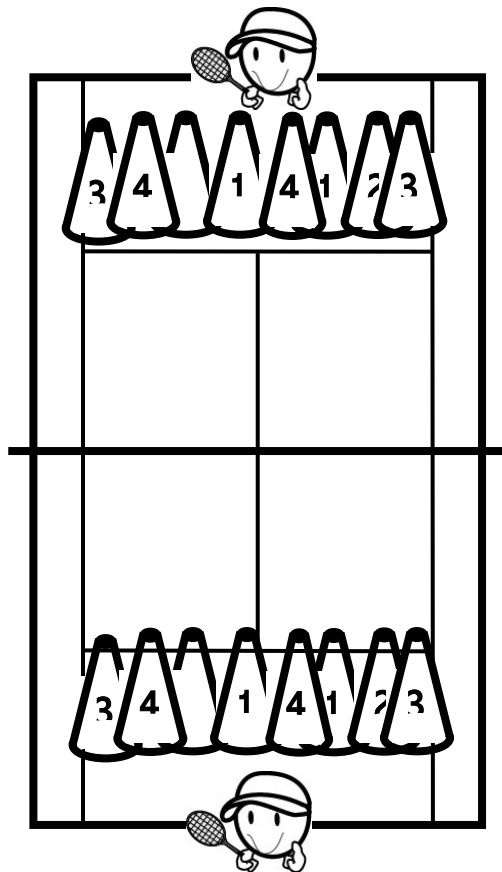
**GROUNDSTROKE DRILLS:** Develop the movement, recovery and agility skills.

**Variation #1:** Players start from the baseline and points begin with a bounce-hit. After every shot, the player who just hit the ball must quickly run around one of the cones on their side of the net. No dropshots are allowed and if a ball bounces twice in the service boxes, that point is immediately lost. First to seven points and switch ends of the court. If any cone is hit, that player scores five points. Any player who knocks a cone over while running, immediately loses that point.

**Purpose:** To quickly recover instead of standing still and admiring the shot just hit.

**Tips:** One of the keys to succeeding in this drill is to hit most balls crosscourt since the recovery distance is less, plus the ball travels further, giving the hitter more time to perform the drill.

# #11 How Deep Can You Go?

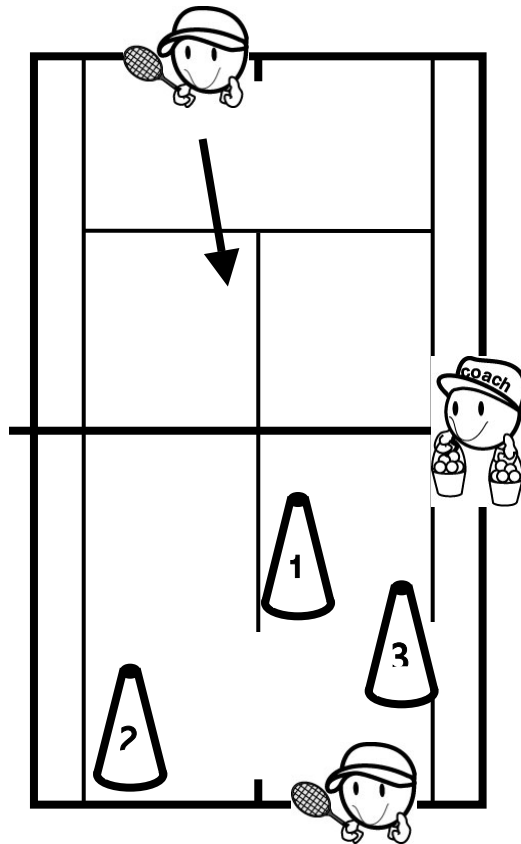


**GROUNDSTROKE DRILLS:** One of the principle tactics in singles is to keep the ball deep. This singles groundstroke drill adds an ingredient of fun while players improve their ability to hit deeper in the court more consistently.

**Variation #1:** Set up as many cones as possible across the width of the singles court, sideline to sideline, ten feet inside the baseline. Start each point with a bounce-hit from opposite baselines. No dropshots are allowed and if a ball bounces twice in the service boxes, that point is lost. Play until one player reaches twenty-one points. If any cone is hit, that player scores double the number on that cone. All other points are worth one point. Anyone who kicks over a cone immediately loses two points for each cone knocked down.

**Purposes:** To develop a visual reference point for how deep their groundstrokes land in the court.

# #12 Sequence for Success



**SERVE AND VOLLEY DRILLS:** Shot combinations or sequences are an essential part of planning and executing any strategy. This simple exercise helps players develop one of the most fundamental sequences in tennis, the serve-and-volley.

**Variation #1:** Cone #1 is the target area for the serve, #2 for the first volley as the server moves forwards, and #3 is for the final angled volley, hit from close to the net. Try this exercise cooperatively with both players intentionally working together to complete the five-ball sequence. After three total sequences are completed (or five minutes passes, whichever comes first), change sides and start again.

**Purpose:** Plan where each ball will be hit.

**Tips:** Remember that the target is not the cone itself but about a four-foot area around it.