



# Pickleball Tutor Drill Manual Short Version

---



The Pickleball Tutor ball machine is manufactured by Sports Tutor, one of the leading sports ball machine makers in the world.

OnCourt OffCourt is the exclusive U.S. distributor of the Pickleball Tutor, and the Pickleball Tutor can be purchased either through OnCourt OffCourt or any of our reputable distributors.

This detailed manual was developed by Kevin Duff in collaboration with OnCourt OffCourt, developers and manufacturer of tennis and pickleball practice and training equipment. Visit [www.OnCourtOffCourt.com](http://www.OnCourtOffCourt.com) and [www.PickleballTutor.com](http://www.PickleballTutor.com).

# INTRODUCTION

This drill manual includes:

- Settings: machine position, player position, ball speed, arc/elevation, feed rate/frequency, and options
- Descriptions: how to execute the drills, target locations, and drill options
- Diagrams: player(s), machine, and target positions
- Multi-player options: how multiple players can drill together

Machine settings will likely need to be modified to accommodate altitude, type of balls used, and player skill level. Use the recommended settings as a starting point and fine-tune as needed.

Drill diagram references:



Pickleball Tutor location



Primary drill participant

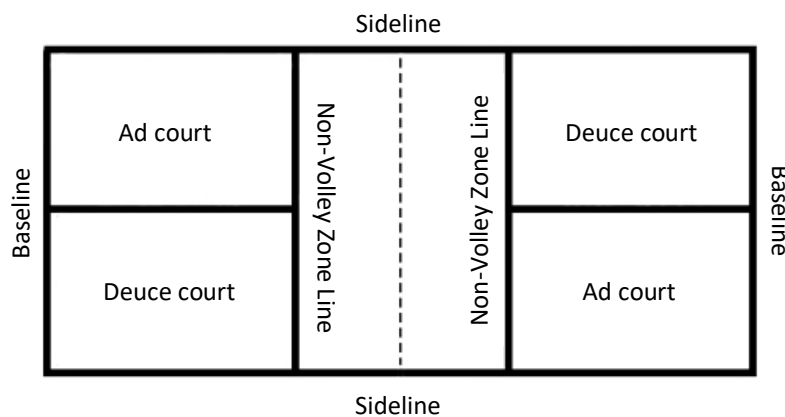


Secondary drill participant



Shot target(s)

Note that tennis terms were used to reference court locations. The deuce court is the right side of the court for a player facing the net. The ad court is the left side of the court for a player facing the net.



If you are truly motivated, document your drill performance by tracking results (i.e. percentage of targets hit). Without tracking performance, it is difficult to know if you are improving and if whatever aspects of your game you are training are working (i.e. modifications to your swing or footwork).

It has long been accepted that drills need to be game specific. Standing in one place and hitting thousands upon thousands of balls with the Tutor will not necessarily make you a better player. The drills need to either simulate real game situations or, if practicing single shots, have a competition mindset and practice visualizing yourself in a game situation while hitting each ball. *"Practice doesn't make perfect. Perfect practice makes perfect."* Best is to hit no more than 10 balls in a row, since most pickleball points are relatively short and you will want to keep your focus and energy consistently high.

# DEEP GROUNDSTROKES

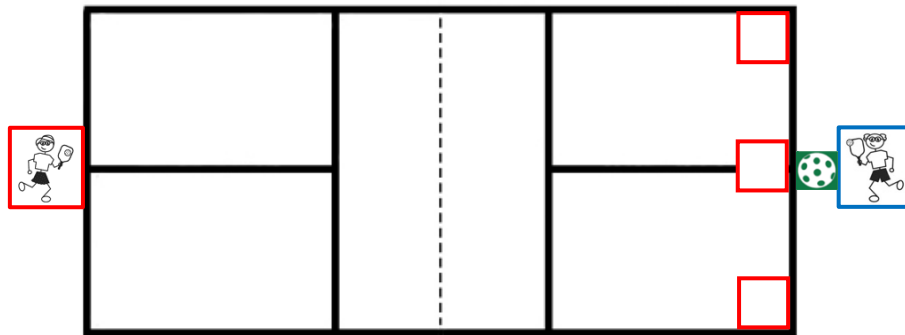
## SETTINGS

Machine position	behind baseline midpoint, pointed straight ahead
Player position	behind baseline midpoint
Speed	4.5
Frequency	4.5
Elevation	4
Options	side-to-side oscillation, random oscillation

## DESCRIPTION

Deep groundstrokes can be used tactically in singles more often than doubles. Deep groundstrokes hit with pace to the opponent's backhand often result in weak returns, allowing you to advance to the Non-Volley Zone (NVZ) line to control the point. Likewise, a short groundstroke hit to the midcourt invites your opponent to advance to the NVZ line.

Between shots, return to the baseline midpoint, split step (or at least flex your knees to facilitate a quick first step to the ball), and then hit the next feed. Move quickly to the ball but don't start until you see the feed coming to make your practice as realistic as possible. Your goal is to get into position and on balance for each shot so you are relaxed and focused, not rushed and tight. Hit forehand groundstrokes on the deuce side of the court and backhands on the ad side (for a right-handed player). Experiment hitting the ball while it is rising off the bounce (short hop / half volley) and while it is dropping. Also try side-to-side oscillation to alternate forehands and backhands. For variety and unpredictability use the random oscillation feature. Advanced players may want to experiment hitting topspin and backspin as well.



## MULTI-PLAYER OPTION

Slow the feed frequency to allow for each sequence to be completed before the next ball is fed. And, move the machine to a non-hazardous position for the second player. This drill option is a 3-shot sequence. The second player starts at the baseline midpoint. Have them return your groundstroke with a cross-court drop to your backhand. You will then either dink the drop (if it is a low drop), drive the ball deep to your partner (if it is a mid-height drop) or overhead smash the ball (if it is a high, attackable "floater"). The drill ends after you return your partner's drop shot. Note: Since this is a relatively high-movement exercise, try just 5 sequences in a row and then use your remote to pause the machine. Rotate positions as desired.

## RETURN OF SERVES

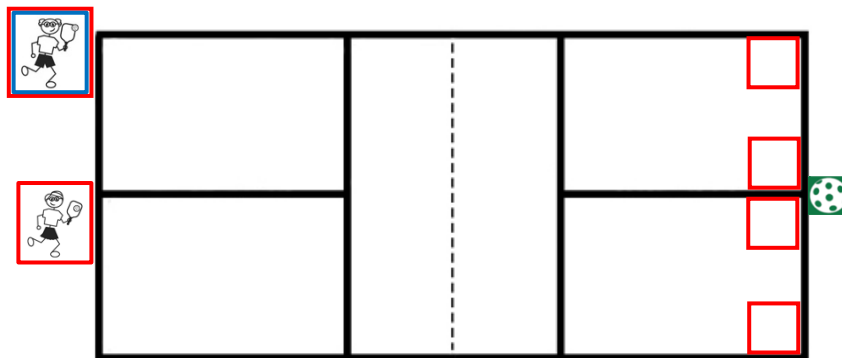
### SETTINGS

Machine position	behind baseline midpoint, pointed at deuce or ad court
Player position	behind baseline deuce or ad court
Speed	4.5
Frequency	4.5
Elevation	4
Options	none

### DESCRIPTION

Rather than being a passive shot, an aggressively hit return of serve can put pressure on your opponent's second shot. The return of serve should be hit with pace but should still allow yourself enough time to reach the Non-Volley Zone (NVZ) line by the time your opponent's third shot crosses the net. The return of serve should normally be hit on your preferred side (the forehand for most players), typically with back-spin, deep to your opponent's backhand.

Between shots recover to the return of serve ready position, split step (or at least flex your knees to facilitate a quick first step to the ball), and then hit the next feed. The return of serve ready position will be dependent on if you are right- or left-handed (below positions are for right-handed players who prefer hitting forehands). Move quickly to the ball but don't start until you see the feed coming to make your practice as realistic as possible. Your goal is to get into position and on balance for each shot, so you are relaxed and focused, not rushed and tight. Experiment hitting the ball while it is rising off the bounce (short hop / half volley) and while it is dropping. Practice from the deuce side and then reposition the machine to return from the ad side. Many variations of this drill can be performed by aiming the feeds to the player's forehand/backhand, and by adjusting the speed/elevation to simulate high-loft serves or short-corner serves.



### MULTI-PLAYER

Position your partner on the same side of the net as you but on the opposite side of the court (see above diagram). Set the machine to side-to-side oscillation. You and your partner will alternate hitting serve returns. If you are hitting returns from the deuce court, then your partner will be hitting returns from the ad court (and vice versa). Hit 10 returns from the side of the court you're on before switching positions with your partner. Continue to switch sides after every 10 return of serves.

## DROP SHOTS

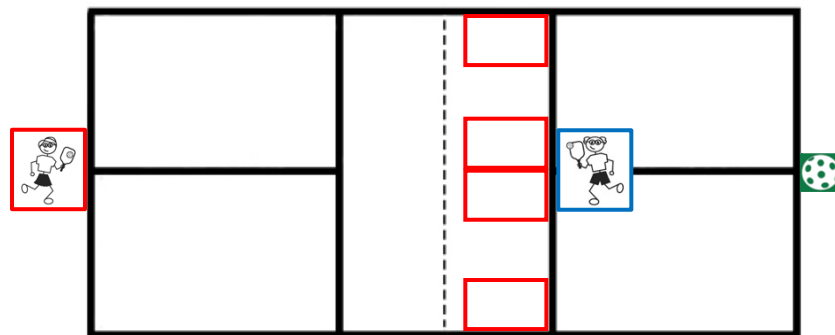
### SETTINGS

Machine position	behind baseline midpoint, pointed straight ahead
Player position	behind baseline midpoint
Speed	4.5
Frequency	4.5
Elevation	4
Options	side-to-side oscillation, random oscillation

### DESCRIPTION

The drop shot is one of the most important shots in pickleball and also one of the most difficult. A player's ability to reliably hit well-placed drop shots is often cited as a key skill of players rated 4.0 and above.

Between shots return to the baseline midpoint, split step (or at least flex your knees to facilitate a quick first step to the ball), and then hit the next feed. Move quickly to the ball but don't start until you see the feed coming to make your practice as realistic as possible. Your goal is to get into position and on balance for each shot so you are relaxed and focused, not rushed and tight. Hit forehand drop shots on the deuce side of the court and backhands on the ad side (for a right-handed player). Experiment hitting the ball while it is rising off the bounce (short hop / half volley) and while it is dropping. Also try side-to-side oscillation to alternate forehands and backhands. For variety and unpredictability use the random oscillation feature. Advanced players may want to experiment hitting topspin and backspin as well.



### MULTI-PLAYER

Position your practice partner at the midpoint of the Non-Volley Zone (NVZ) line. Have them return your drop shot. Your partner will either dink the drop (if it is a low drop), drive the ball deep to your partner (if it is a mid-height drop) or overhead smash the ball (if it is a high, attackable "floater"). This 2-shot drill ends after your partner returns your drop shot. Adjust the machine position for safety and adjust the feed rate to accommodate the drill.

## CROSSCOURT DINKS

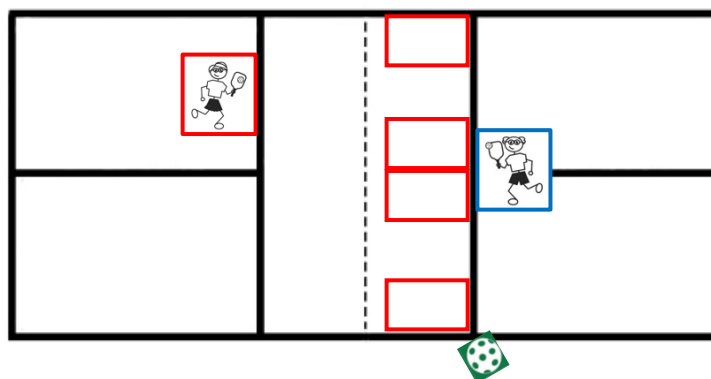
### SETTINGS

Machine position	sideline / Non-Volley Zone (NVZ) line, pointed at opposite sideline / NVZ line
Player position	behind NVZ line midpoint, deuce and ad courts opposite of Tutor
Speed	3
Frequency	4
Elevation	5
Options	none

### DESCRIPTION

The dink shot looks easy but it can be challenging to reliably hit unattackable dinks. Most dink shots should be hit crosscourt, allowing the arc of your dink to cross over the center of the net where the net height is the lowest. Well-hit angled dinks will also pull your opponent out of position.

Between shots, return to the midpoint of the NVZ line on your side of the court, split step (or at least flex your knees to facilitate a quick first step to the ball), and then hit the next feed. Move quickly to the ball but don't start until you see the feed coming to make your practice as realistic as possible. Your goal is to get into position and on balance for each shot, so you are relaxed and focused, not rushed and tight. Hit forehand dinks on the deuce side of the court and backhands on the ad side (for a right-handed player). Hit most dinks crosscourt but also hit some down-the-line. Hit a full round of dinks from one side of the court before swapping the Tutor location to the opposite side of the court. NOTE: When drilling, be careful not to hit too many balls in a row. Best is to hit a modest number like 10 shots and then pause to recover physically and also to re-focus your concentration... similar to what the best competitors do in real game situations.



### MULTI-PLAYER

When a hitting partner is available, hit the first shot off the machine down-the-line. The practice partner then moves to the ball and counters with a crosscourt angled dink. End the sequence here for a 2-ball sequence. Optionally, let the first player chase down the angled dink and return that shot crosscourt for a high-energy 3-ball sequence. Adjust the feed rate of the machine to accommodate the timing needed for this drill concept.

# PUNCH VOLLEYS

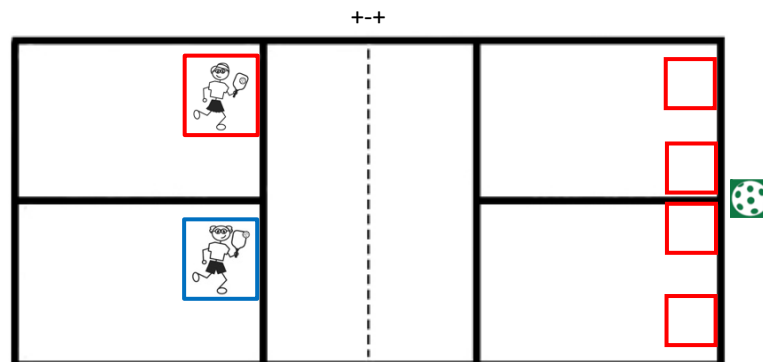
## SETTINGS

Machine position	behind baseline midpoint, pointed straight ahead
Player position	behind Non-Volley Zone (NVZ) line midpoint
Speed	4.5
Frequency	4.5
Elevation	4
Options	side-to-side oscillation, random oscillation

## DESCRIPTION

The punch volley is a shot with much less backswing compared to a groundstroke. It is typically hit against hard hit groundstrokes that have little arc and don't allow for a lot of shot preparation. The ball is struck with a short "punch" or jab motion and placed deep in the court. The goal is to prevent your opponent from advancing forwards toward the NVZ line.

Between shots return to the midpoint of the NVZ line, split step (or at least flex your knees to facilitate a quick first step to the ball), and then hit the next feed. Move quickly to the ball but don't start until you see the feed coming to make your practice as realistic as possible. Your goal is to get into position and on balance for each shot so you are relaxed and focused, not rushed and tight. Try side-to-side oscillation to alternate forehands and backhands. For variety and unpredictability use the random oscillation feature. Experiment hitting forehand and backhand volleys, both crosscourt and down-the-line.



## MULTI-PLAYER

Use random oscillation for this drill. Position yourself behind the midpoint of the ad court NVZ line and your partner behind the midpoint of the deuce court NVZ line (or vice-versa). You and your partner will need to communicate when the random feeding machine occasionally throws the ball down the middle of the court. Don't let indecision beat you on this drill! Just like during a game, this drill will help you and your partner quickly and effectively react to balls that are driven up the middle of the court. You and your partner will return 10 balls in your original positions before swapping sides. Continue to alternate sides every 10 balls.

## OVERHEAD SMASH AT NON-VOLLEY ZONE (NVZ) LINE

### SETTINGS

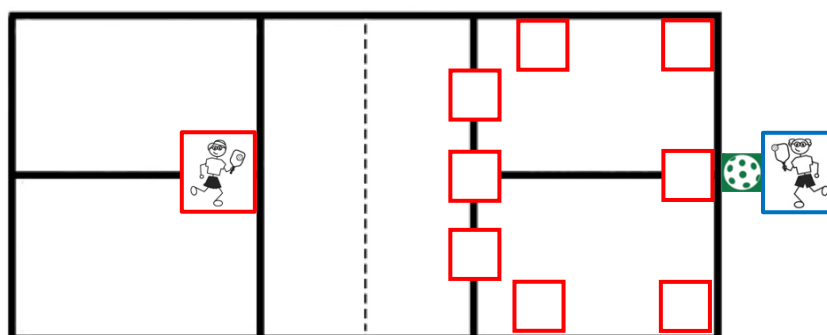
Machine position	behind baseline midpoint, pointed straight ahead
Player position	behind NVZ line midpoint
Speed	4
Frequency	3.5
Elevation	5 with 2-inch shim under front bumpers (if added elevation is needed)
Options	side-to-side oscillation, random oscillation

### DESCRIPTION

The overhead smash hit from the NVZ Line is an offensive weapon. Unfortunately, players often swing with all their strength to crush the ball, and regularly overhit or dump it into the net. Although a hard smash can impress your fans in the bleachers, it's better to take a little off, and hit it accurately and consistency with moderate power. From a technique standpoint, remember to extend your non-paddle hand to both balance yourself and track the ball.

Like all ball machine drilling, be sure to return to the midpoint of the NVZ line between shots with a split step (or at least flex your knees to facilitate a quick first step to the ball), and then hit the next feed. Move quickly to the ball but don't start until you see the feed coming to make your practice as realistic as possible. Your goal is to get into position and on balance for each shot so you are relaxed and focused, not rushed and tight. Try side-to-side oscillation to alternate forehand and backhand overheads, but generally take it with your "forehand" or throwing motion side as much as possible. For variety and unpredictability use the random oscillation feature. Experiment hitting forehand and backhand smashes, both crosscourt and down-the-line.

To simulate if your opponents are positioned at the NVZ line, hit the ball at the targets at the NVZ line (at their feet). To simulate when your opponents are at the baseline, then hit the baseline targets to keep your opponent(s) deep in the court or attempt to hit the two targets placed near the sideline at midcourt. Hitting the ball with an acute angle to these targets will often result in an outright winner.



### MULTI-PLAYER

Position your practice partner at the baseline midpoint. Have them return your overhead smash. The goal of your partner is not just to return your overhead smash but to drop it with accuracy into the NVZ so that they can then move forwards to advance to the NVZ line. You will either dink the drop (if it is a low drop), drive the ball deep to your partner (if it is a mid-height drop), or overhead smash the ball again (if it is a high, attackable "floater"). The drill ends after you return the drop shot, making this a 3-shot drill. Since the mid-court machine position creates a safety hazard, feed the initial lob from one side of the court or the other and hit the first overhead to the open court where the machine is not located.