

## Pickleball Backboard Drills

How is your practice routine working for you? You know, the little dinking thing you do when you first get to the courts. Yeah, the “one little dinkie, two little dinkie, oh, that’s good, let’s play routine”. For many of us that is the full extent of our practice routine, yet we still stand in wonder over why our game doesn’t improve.

If you want to get better at pickleball, you need to increase your practice time, not your play time. And by using a backboard to practice your shots, you will execute 7-10 times as many hits as you would in a doubles pickleball game.

As fate would have it, we have a backboard over on Court 5 that several club members built for us. Consider heading over there BEFORE YOU PUT YOUR PADDLE IN THE RACK TO PLAY, and if there is not a game in progress, feel free to improve your game. Focus on your shots that need improvement and practice them repetitively until can execute them without thinking about the mechanics of each shot. By investing just 15 minutes a day, your game will improve dramatically.

Here are some Beginner, Intermediate and Advanced Drills suggested by Joe Baker, author of [At the Line Pickleball](#). If you’re a visual kind of person, Joe demonstrates these drills on youtube at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DSEzQBRh35M&t=8s>. He now also has a Backboard Pickleball Drills 2 video at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XPVsBZXM7h8>.

### BEGINNER AND NOVICE DRILLS.

#### 1. Forehand and Backhand Groundstrokes.

- Stand behind the yellow tape line that is on the ground exactly 7 feet from the backboard. It’s more than coincidence that this is the exact distance from the net to the Non-Volley Zone line. Hit the ball softly, hit up on the ball and hit high on the wall. Allow the ball to bounce in between strokes. As your skill improves, move further away from the wall, hit lower on the wall and harder on the ball. Try to use good form by angling your body, pointing the lead foot and bending and straightening your knees.
- Do the same for your backhand, then alternate between your forehand and backhand with every stroke.

#### 2. **Serve.** Stand about 6-7 feet from the backboard and hit an underhand serve. Aim for an area above the net line marked on the board. Note: the line is 34 inches above the ground.

#### 3. **Volley Shots.**

- Start with forehand shots. Hit up on the ball and hit easy. Aim for a high point on the wall. As your skill improves, move away from the wall and increase your tempo and power.

- Repeat for your backhand. Alternate between forehand and backhand shots by steering the forehand shots to the left and the backhand shots to the right.
- To improve directional accuracy, most experts recommend using a blocking paddle movement instead of a swinging paddle movement. In the blocking style stroke, the paddle face does not rotate through the strike, but stays on a straight track through the strike. As you get better, move further from the wall and increase the tempo and power.

### **Intermediate.**

1. **Forehand and Backhand Groundstrokes.** Practice forehand and backhand shots that impart spin.
2. **Short Hop Returns.** Practice short hop shots, where the shots are landing at your feet. These are tough to get. Stand on or near the NVZ line marked in front of the backboard. You'll need to angle your return shots up sharply to clear the net.
3. **Drop Shots.** Practice forehand and backhand drop shots. Focus on using good form as this is the type of form used for all shots that land deep in the court such as service returns and 3<sup>rd</sup> shots to the kitchen.
4. **Dinks.** First use forehand dinks only, but try to steer the ball to the left and the right. Next use backhand dinks only, but, again, try to steer the ball alternately to the left and the right. Directional control is best achieved through a blocking paddle motion, so be sure to set the paddle face toward the target direction and drive it toward the target through the strike before changing its angle. Next alternate between forehand and backhand dinks steering backhand shots to the right and forehand shots to the left. You'll never get very far in pickleball without being able to direct the ball to sharp left and right angles.
5. **Volley Shots.** First hit forehand shots only, but steer the ball alternately left and right. Next hit backhand shots only, and steer the ball alternately left and right. Next alternate between forehand and backhand volleys steering backhand shots to the right and forehand shots to the left. Increase tempo and distance as you get better. You will likely not be able to steer the ball left and right unless you use the blocking motion through impact. Net play is often fast, requiring you to hit many shots without switching between forehand and backhand.
6. **Lobs.** Practice forehand and backhand lobs. The best lobs are often issued off the net after dinking. The best lobs are not excessively high, rather they are just high enough to prevent smashing.

### **Advanced.**

1. **Volleys.**
  - **Shotgun Drill.** Hit volleys with the fastest tempo possible. Practice forehand, backhand, and then alternate forehand/backhand maintaining the high speed.

- **Backhand Backspin Volley.** Backhand paddle face is set at a downward angle.
  - **Backhand Topspin Volley.** Backhand paddle face is set at an upward angle.
  - **Backhand Left and Right Sidespins.** The backhand paddle saws back and forth between left and right.
  - **Alternating Forehand and Backhand Spin Shots.** The front and back of the paddle face is wiped back and forth in front of the body keeping the ball in the air and hit against the wall.
2. **Taking Speed off the Ball.** Hit one or more fast balls against the wall and then attempt to dink the ball to the wall. Try this with both the forehand and backhand. All advanced players should be able to convert an incoming fastball into an outgoing dink.
  3. **Volley to Surprise Lob.** Convert a highspeed incoming volley into an outgoing surprise lob. Hit several highspeed volleys and then a surprise lob.
  4. **Third Shot Drop Shot to the Kitchen.** Hit the ball against the wall and pick it up on the first or second bounce. The goal is to have the apex of the shot trajectory in front of the wall so that the ball is descending as it hits the wall.
  5. **Dinking.**
    - **Disguised Lobs.** Dink several shots and then send up a surprise lob without any signaling.
    - **Disguised Body Shot.** Dink several shots and then shoot a surprise body shot in the air (at your opponent) without signaling.
    - **Angle Shots.** Alternate dinking left and right including dinks at rather sharp angles.
  6. **Fake Smash Shot.** Posture your body as if to execute a smash, but reduce your speed at the last moment and execute an overhead dink shot.