

You get better by playing. But you get a lot better—faster—by practicing (drilling). A one word definition for confidence is preparation. You need to improve your strengths and weaknesses. Can't always happen during games. You may play 6-8 pickleball games on a given day and find that you only were able to work on a particular shot (strength or weakness) a handful of times. Sometimes you may not touch a ball during a rally. If you or your opponents are bangers (or lesser skilled players), the rally may be over in just a few shots. You need repetitions. See where I'm going?.....

Practice doesn't make perfect. Perfect practice makes perfect. I used to teach golf. Loved the game. I would tell my students that going to the driving range (practice) on days other than class days was imperative. The once a week class (at our college driving range) was not enough. One third of the way through the 16 week semester, I always asked this question. **When you go to the driving range, what is your practice routine?** I asked them to write down the routine and hand it in. Know what I found? Very few even mentioned working on the single most important shot in the game. Putting. Did you know that during an average round of golf (18 holes), 40% of your shots will be putts? More than any other shot you take to get to the green. Yet, when you go to the driving range, it's all about the woods and irons, and the putter stays in the bag. Getting the hint?.....

I think you see where I'm going with this. In golf, practice should also focus on the short (soft game). In baseball, finding your comfort zone swing every day (by taking batting practice) is imperative. The same can be said about any sport. Playing a sport well requires a commitment to high maintenance and a routine that will improve the single most important shot(s) in the game? I think you know what's coming.....

Drills To Improve Your Soft Game. All Done With Drill Partner. Bring Extra Ball(s).

1. **This is a no brainer.** When you pre-game warm up, dink cross court with partner or opponent. Work from both sides of your court. If drilling, rally until you get to a count of 50 (combined) before moving to YOUR other side of the court.
2. **Sideways Walk.** Also a dink drill. Start cross court with drill partner. After each dink, take one step towards YOUR opposite sideline. Continue with dink routine until you've gone all the way across to the other side of your kitchen line. Your drill partner, across the net, has done the same in the opposite direction. Return to your starting point by performing the drill going in the opposite direction.
3. **Dink Game.** Play to eleven. Both you and partner are on opposite sides of the net. The game is cross court from the kitchen line. Serve must be off the bounce (bounce the ball on your side and bump the serve over to your opponent). Any ball bouncing outside the half kitchen is out. It would help if you bring painter's tape to divide the kitchen into two 10' x 7' halves. Chalk will do. Play a second game from the diagonal opposite side of the net.
4. **Mirror Drill.** Two players, directly across from each other, start at the kitchen line and same net post and dink back and forth to each other while moving to the other net post. One dink and one shuffle step towards the other net post. Repeat going the other way. Suggest 3-4 complete rounds. Emphasis on straight ahead dink shots and movement of feet.
5. **Sideways Walk Volley Drill.** From the kitchen line. Same as #4 above only ball must stay in the air. You are in constant motion sideways to the other side of Your court. Hopefully each

volley matches a sideways shuffle. No hard volleys. Firm is good. Drill is for control and feel. Also soft placement. Note: This is not an easy drill.

6. **Walkaways.** Drill partners on opposite sides of the net. Standing at the NVZ line. Mirror each other. One is walking away from the net hitting dink and drop shots (balls coming from partner) back into the NVZ. Make sure with each dink/drop attempt the person walking away takes one step back after each shot. Continue walking backward with each shot until player gets to baseline. Drop two from the baseline, then reverse direction (coming forward with each shot). Feeder (always standing at kitchen line) works on hitting shots near partner's feet. Once the walker gets back to the kitchen line, he/she becomes the feeder and the walkaways continue with partner on other side. Walker has extra ball in hand and pocket. Each walker should get about 5 hits walking away and 5 hits coming forward.

7. **Halfway Drill.** Partners stand halfway between kitchen line and baseline. Rally from there. Emphasis is on bouncing the ball at your opponent's feet and keeping the rally going. You can mirror each other or drill diagonally. Or both.

8. **3-D Drill (Deep, Deep, Drop).** Deep serve. Deep return. Third shot drop. Best if you have 6-8 balls. Alternate serving and sides of the court. Simulate the first three shots of a rally. One of pickleball's best drills.

9. **Skinny Singles.** Play on one-half of the court, either mirroring each other or playing diagonally. Called skinny singles because you and partner are using only half the court. Best played if you still have the kitchen divided with painter's tape or a chalk line (see drill 3 suggestion). Each player only has to defend his/her half of the court. Play to 11 (regular scoring or rally scoring).

10. **Finish with Drill #1.** The complete session starts and ends with the game's most important skill shot....the dink. Remember the putting analogy above?

That's it. The complete drill practice session takes about an hour and a half. It can take longer if you want to add more repetitions to any drill. Time worth spending. Once a week skip a scheduled 'social play' day and meet with a partner. You'll be happy with the session, the exercise and the results. The drills are simple and most focus on playing soft. Remember to have extra balls and painter's tape/chalk. A wet towel will remove the chalk lines after drilling. Have fun. Get better. Quickly.

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