

## Dinks – The What, Why, How, and When

1. **What exactly is a Dink?** - A shot that is hit with an upward trajectory, that lands just over the net in your opponent's NVZ (or kitchen). It's a finesse shot – not easy to do. It's what is called "the soft game". Dinking sets up winning shots.
2. **Why do you think we would want to dink?**
  - Slow the game down – take away a high-powered or hard hitting game from your opponents.
  - Take away a player's ability to drive the ball
  - Levels the playing field
  - Dinking sets up point
  - If your opponent is tall – dinking will force them to have to bend low – takes away the smash out of their game.
  - Almost every player can hit the ball hard, but not every player can hit the ball soft with precision and purpose. It takes a lot of practice and patience
  - Dinking is an excellent tactic which can help you become a complete player.
  - 85% of all points in Pickleball are won at the NVZ – so learn how to be a master dinker!
3. **The How –**
  - Knees bent, feet should width apart in an athletic stance
  - Prepare your paddle – out in front of you, loose grip, contact the ball in front of you.
  - Short compact backswings and follow through with your dink shots
  - Watch the ball all the way to your paddle
  - Move your feet. Try to keep your body parallel to the NVZ line. If you need to reach a dink – take a lateral step – DON'T crossover as this will take you out of position.
  - Hold the line – try not to step back. Sometimes you get a shot that forces you to take a step back, just get back as quickly as possible. Retreating off the line will give you more time to react, but it also has consequences – exposes your feet for them to hit down at.
  - If you can take the dink on a volley – do it! It takes time away from your opponents.

- Get under the PBall – get your paddle under the ball. You should be able to see the underside of the ball strike your paddle.
- Gently lift through the ball – the lift comes from your SHOULDER, rather than from your wrist or elbow
- Stay low through contact – stay compressed. If you stand up, then your paddle comes up with you which will cause the ball to be hit with too much height and be attackable. Engage your legs through your dinks.
- Don't bend at the waist, bend at the knees. Get your center of gravity lower.
- Revert back to ready – after you finish your dink, revert back to the ready position. Be ready for next dink or a surprise fast ball, or a lob.
- Respect the net – the height of the apex of your dink is important. Give yourself some margin of error over the top of the net. If you are too low – rally is over and you just took yourself out of the point. Too high is better than in the net – don't be too hard on yourself, just practice keeping the ball lower (like a paddle with higher than the net).
- Think of your arm as a lever – shoulder is your hinge (push from your shoulder) the wrist / arm are firm.
- On a forehand dink – lead with your palm
- On a backhand dink – lead with your knuckles
- Dinking is NOT easy – but with practice you can master this shot.
- What do you think the key to good dinking is? **PATIENCE!**

#### 4. When is the Best time to Dink?

- As your 3<sup>rd</sup> shot (A 3<sup>rd</sup> shot is nothing more than a long dink)
- If you serve, our opponent is going to try and give you a deep return and then charge the net. You have to stay back because of the 2 bounce rule (so the receiving team has the advantage) – BUT if you can master putting the ball back into their NVZ, it allows you to approach the net w/o fear of getting the ball smashed back at you. By dropping the ball in the kitchen, you are also giving yourself a little more time b/c you have slowed the pace of the ball.
- When you receive a good dink – the best response is by dinking it back – it levels the playing field. If you receive a good dink and then you try to make an aggressive shot in return, things likely will go very wrong for you (out or in the net). When dinking you are waiting for

your opponent to give you that xtra couple of inches, so you can put some pace on the ball.

- When you are trying to neutralize your opponents

## 5. Type of Dinks

- Groundstroke Dink – this is when you are letting the ball bounce before returning the shot. When you allow the ball to bounce, b/c of physics, this will take some speed off the ball. The bounce gives you a bit more time to execute your shot.
- Volley Dink – when you hit the ball out of the air without letting it bounce. This shot tends to have a little more pace than a ground stroke dink b/c the way the ball bounces off the face of your paddle and tends to travel a little further. As you practice you may notice that you have to loosen your grip on the paddle. It's a little more adv dink – but it takes time away from your opponent.
- Cross Court Dink – the most important dink shot to learn. This is when you hit the ball at an angle to the other side of your opponent's court. Simple in concept, but not in execution. These balls can be hit with top spin, backspin or with slice for side spin. Most PB beginners and Int plyrs will hit what's call a "PUSH DINK". This is when you hit the ball with an underhand motion, "pushing" the ball over the net (hopefully to a strategic location on the court).
- Straight Ahead Dink – the most simplest dink shot. This shot becomes important when its used as a fallback for a tough cross court dink that you received.
- DEAD DINKS! – Avoid this shot!!! Next to a pop-up, this shot will get you into trouble. A dead dink typically bounces high, has little to no spin and puts absolutely no pressure on your opponent. Dead dinks are very attackable – putting you on the defense very quickly or is an outright winner for your opponent.

## 6. Dinking Strategies

- Dinking isn't about a winning shot, it's about making your opponents make a mistake. Main strategy is to move your opponent around the courts, trying to create openings or setting up an attacking shot or forcing your opponent to make an error.
- Always hit out of the air if possible – take time away from them.
- Dink to the backhand foot – during a dink rally, hitting to this BH foot moves player out towards the sideline of the court. If you watch the

other players' position on the court to see if they are moving over to help support the middle. If they leave the middle open – attack down the middle to the open space. If the opponent supports the middle – wait and try to see if you get a dink return shot that is higher or has a higher bounce – then you attack down the line.

- Mix up your dinks and move your opponents around the court – when in doubt – BH foot.
  - Attack dead dinks – make them pay. Down the line, down the middle, paddle side of shoulder/hip
  - Move and communicate with your partner (yours, mine). If your partner is being pulled wide – help support that middle – don't loose balls down the middle. The player with the forehand shot tends to be the primary player (but NOT always) communicate if you have a better shot or if your more balanced/better position or you see an opportunity (trust your partner).
  - Re-set with straight ahead dink if needed – if your getting stressed b/c lots of challenging dinks being hit, reset and regroup. Don't try to hit low percentage return dinks. Take a step back of you need to, hit a dink that will allow you to get back under control.
  - Attacking Lob – another great shot during a frantic dink rally is a lob shot. Typically, players are on their toes, leaning forward, expecting more dinks. If you notice this, you might mix-in a lob shot. Back corner over the backhand shoulder – its much harder than a forehand smash. A lob shot also allows time for you and your partner to reset your positions. If you lob, you CAN'T lob short or that ball is coming back with a lot of pace – be prepared.
- 7. Practice / Drilling** – shoot for 50 consecutive balls without a mistake. 50 cross court dinks then switch sides and hit 50 more cross court dinks. If you make a mistake, start over. Try putting a ball in the armpit – forces you to use your shoulder and stay more tugged in. If you are reaching – you'll lose the ball. Help your drill partner – if they aren't moving back to position, remind them to get back to ready position. Drilling is a cooperative exercise, a player doesn't "win" in drilling or practice.