

Great Drills

Great One-Wall Drills

Over the years many players have asked "what can I do to improve my game?". The obvious answer is the old cliché "practice makes perfect". The problem is that most players don't know where to start. Practice can be boring so it is important to find ways to make it more fun. One method that has worked for me is incorporating my practice sessions into non-tournament matches. To help them out I've comprised a list of some of the most successful drills that I've found.

If you rubbed a magic lamp, and a genie offered you three handball wishes to improve your game, I'm sure that a terrific serve would be the top choice. After all, does it really matter if your opponent can out rally you if you can score aces and get set-ups off of your serve? The second wish would be for a fantastic return of serve. When starting off the rally, the receiver is obviously in a less desirable court position. Even a novice knows that no return, or a weak return, of serve immediately loses you a point. A strong return of serve negates the server's advantages. My guess is that the third and final request would be a toss up between a magnificent opposite hand, and a rock solid volley court game. Unfortunately your odds are finding this magic lamp are slim. Fortunately you have the next best thing. A few great drills to which will enable you to practice and improve these skills on your own.

When practicing keep in mind that the primary goal is both physical and mental improvement. If you find that you are getting something positive out of your practice sessions but losing the games don't fret. Remember that in practice, or tune-up games, winning is of secondary importance. Since the idea of mentally improving may seem far fetched I'll cover the notion briefly. These drills place handicaps on the participants, similar to a chess player taking a piece out of the game, and therefore force the players to look at the game in a different light. Hopefully, through realization of your limitations and a more cerebral approach to playing your game will improve.

Two Shots - I'm mentioning this drill first because I feel it places emphasis on the most important part of the game. You've heard it over and over "the first two shots of the rally, serve and return of serve, are most important shots in the rally". The receiver has to return the ball legally two times to win the rally. After playing this way a few times their importance should be evident. The server must try to concentrate on offense by serving and shooting. On the other hand the receiver will become more defensive minded.

Over the short line - Once you've become a "pro" at the above drill you'll be asking "how do I improve my back court game?". The over the short line game is the answer. Usually the server is required to start the rally off with a lob serve. Seems like a piece of cake. You'll change your mind once you've tried it. The key to this game is not to be too aggressive.

Off Hand - In NY we have high school handball teams. On many occasions, I'll be watching a match and have a youngster approach me asking "what should I do to win the game?". Invariably I'll answer with the question "what would happen if you play your strong hand to his weak hand?". Immediately you can see how surprised they are that they didn't think of the simply obvious plan of attack. I always make sure to remind them that their opponent will be trying to use the same plan of attack. It isn't always easy, especially when your receiving serve, to prevent your opponent from finding your off-hand. That is why you practice it by serving with your "opposite", and playing complete games with it. Many players take it a step further using their weak hand to do normal daily skills like brushing their teeth, combing their hair, turning doorknobs, etc. etc..

One Against Two - Another name for this game is singles - doubles. It is the next best thing to playing one strong player. If stamina is what you are looking to improve you might find this to be just what the doctor ordered. If you are not strong enough to play two opponents by yourself try cut throat.

Up Serves - Usually the weakest return you'll make is when you strike the ball overhand. Many players concentrate too much on hitting ball below their waist and become one, or two zone players. Playing this way is sure to strengthen your overhand stroke. The overhand serve is one of the most underutilized serves. After practicing this way for a short while you'll see that the overhand serve pushes your opponent backwards enabling you to hit a higher percentage second shot and still win the rally.

On a closing note, remember that there are many variations to these drills like using point handicaps or mixing and matching the drills. Ex. One player uses only his opposite hand and the other player must hit everything over the short line.