



Special Olympics  
**Junior Athletes**



# Pickleball



## WHAT IS PICKLEBALL?

Pickleball is a net/wall game played with a paddle and a plastic ball that has holes. You hit the ball over a net, like in tennis or badminton!

The goal of the game is to hit the ball over the net and try to score points. Don't let the ball bounce twice on your side!



## BASIC RULES:

### Serving

- Serve underhand (swing from low to high).
- The ball must go diagonally over the net.
- The ball must bounce once on each side before it can be hit in the air.

### Rally Time

- Hit the ball back and forth.
- Only one bounce is allowed.
- If the ball bounces twice or goes out, the other team gets a point.

### No Volley Zone ("Kitchen")

- The box close to the net is called the kitchen.
- Don't hit the ball in the air while standing in the kitchen.
- The ball cannot land in the kitchen during a serve or after the first receive back.

### Scoring

- Only the serving team can get points.
- First team to 11 points (and win by two) wins.

## CONNECTING TO SPECIAL OLYMPICS YOUNG ATHLETES

The sport skills align with the categories of walking & running, balance & jumping, trapping & catching, throwing, striking, and kicking. Coaches who are familiar with the Young Athletes program will notice that the core gross motor skills taught there are



continued and further developed in the Junior Athletes program. If you have athletes who need a little extra practice, reference the skill in Young Athletes for more skills, games, and activities. [Click here](#) or scan the code to access the Young Athletes activity guide.

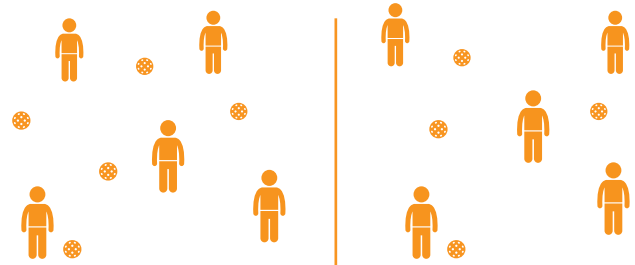
## WARM-UP 1: CLEAN THE COURT

### Equipment

- Pickleballs, tennis balls, foam balls
- Line or net

### Setup

Divide players into two groups on either side of a net or line



Players stand on either side of the net and try to “clean” their side by throwing balls over the line or net. Players must pick up the balls and throw them; they cannot kick them.

After 2-3 minutes (or longer), have them stop and count how many balls are on each side.

Repeat.

Have everyone help quickly clean up the balls when this warm-up is done.  
(This is still part of warming up, so make sure they run!)

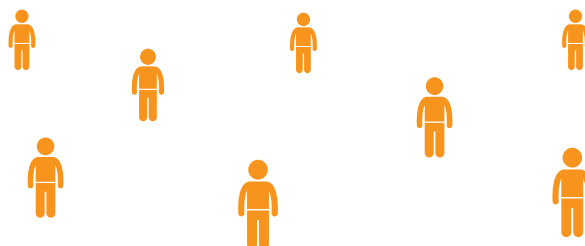
## WARM-UP 2: STRETCHING

### Equipment

None needed

### Setup

Players spread out throughout the space



### Stretches



Arm Circles



Side Bend



Lunge



Calf Stretch

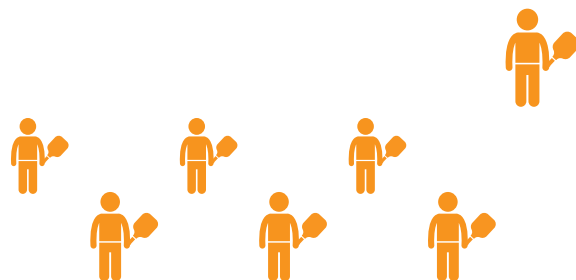
## SKILL: STRIKING TECHNIQUE & PRACTICE

### Equipment

- Floor markers
- Paddle for each player
- Balloon or beach ball for each player

### Setup

Players watch coach demonstration and then each have their own paddle



Demonstrate the “handshake” grip, ensuring players understand the proper technique:

- Hold the paddle with all of your fingers gripping the handle.
- The thumb should rest on the opposite side of the handle, near the base of the paddle.
- The grip should be loose enough to allow for wrist movement, but firm enough to maintain control.

Have players practice holding the paddle. Have them show 3 other players their grip, and have them get a floor marker and balloon.

- Progression 1:  
Players hold a floor marker on their racket and try to flip it like a pancake.
- Progression 2:  
Players place the floor marker on the ground and try to hit a balloon into the air without stepping off the marker.
- Progression 3:  
Players practice hitting the balloon into the air while switching forehand and backhand.

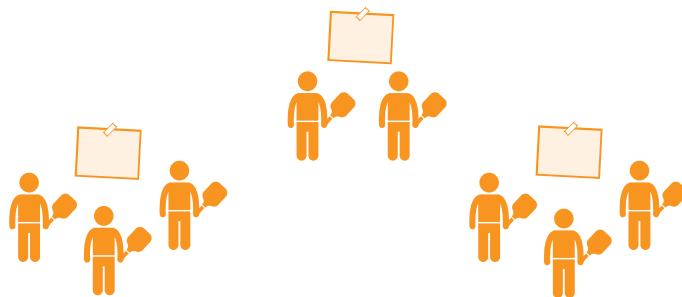
## GAME: JOIN A CLUB

### Equipment

- Paddle for each player
- Balloon or beach ball for each player
- Blank paper with club names on it

### Setup

Hang up club names around the court ahead of time; players will pick what club they want to join



Pick 3-4 clubs in which you think players will be successful, and write the names of the clubs on pieces of paper.

Players pick a club that they want to be in and stand next to that sign. Once they complete that club, they can move on to a different one.

Examples:

- MVP Club: 5 taps
- Hall of Fame Club: 10 taps
- Superstar Club: 15 taps
- Worldwide Club: 20+ taps
- Silly Dance Club: Do a silly dance while tapping the ball
- Eyes Closed Club: Close your eyes and tap the ball 3 times
- Athletic Club: Walk 5 steps while tapping the ball
- Make up your own!

Make sure you write out the posters before this lesson! This will help the game run smoothly. Leave a few extra blank pages if players want to create their own clubs! You will be using these posters for the next lesson, so be sure to keep them.



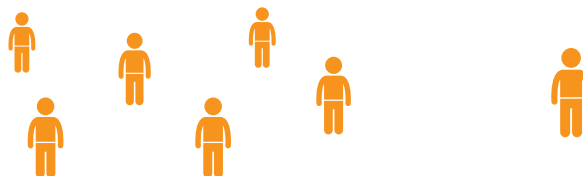
## COOL-DOWN: MIRROR GAME

### Equipment

None needed

### Setup

Players should spread out in the space, facing the coach



Players mirror the coach's movements to help focus on specific strokes or movements:

- Forehand
- Backhand
- Serving
- Take 2 steps then hit the ball
- Back up 1 step then hit the ball
- Be creative!

### Stretches



Toe Touch



Downward Dog



Tricep Stretch



Butterfly

### Lesson 1 Reflection

Why is it important to practice controlling the ball?



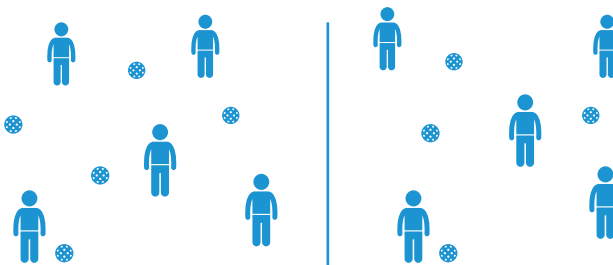
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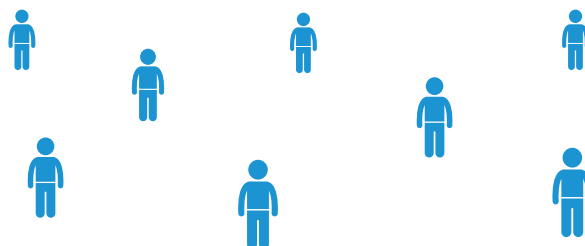
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### Equipment

None needed

### Setup

Players spread out throughout the space



### Stretches



Arm Circles



Side Bend



Lunge



Calf Stretch

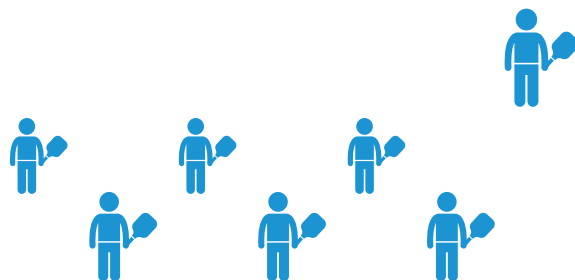
## SKILL: STRIKING TECHNIQUE & PRACTICE

### Equipment

- Paddle for each player
- Ball for each player
- Floor markers

### Setup

Players watch coach demonstration and then each have their own paddle and ball



**Note:** This is the same skill and game as Lesson 1, but players use a pickleball instead of balloon. If players are not ready to progress to a ball, repeat Lesson 1.

Demonstrate the “handshake” grip, ensuring players understand the proper technique:

- Hold the paddle with all of your fingers gripping the handle.
- The thumb should rest on the opposite side of the handle, near the base of the paddle.
- The grip should be loose enough to allow for wrist movement, but firm enough to maintain control.

Have players practice holding the paddle. Have them show 3 other players their grip, and have them get a ball.

- Progression 1:  
Players balance the ball on their paddle for as long as they can.
- Progression 2:  
Players balance the ball on their paddle while walking around the room.
- Progression 3:  
Players start to tap the ball up into the air with their paddle. (Use floor markers if players need help staying in one spot.)

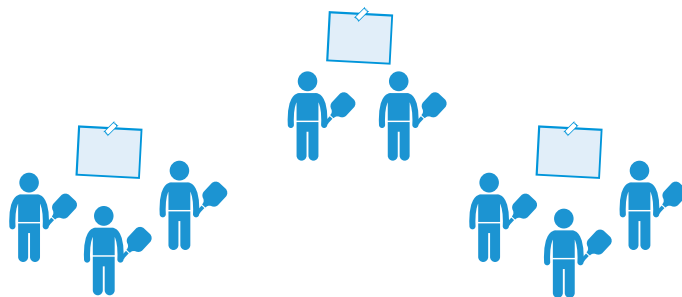
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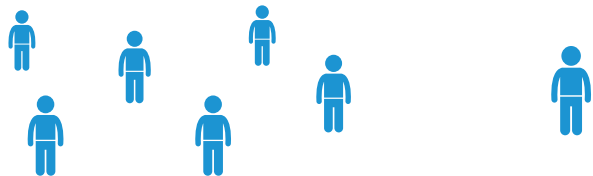
## COOL-DOWN: MIRROR GAME

### Equipment

None needed

### Setup

Players should spread out in the space, facing the coach



Players mirror the coach's movements to help focus on specific strokes or movements:

- Forehand
- Backhand
- Serving
- Take 2 steps then hit the ball
- Back up 1 step then hit the ball
- Be creative!

### Stretches



Toe Touch



Downward Dog



Tricep Stretch



Butterfly

### Lesson 2 Reflection

Why is it important to practice the same skills multiple times?

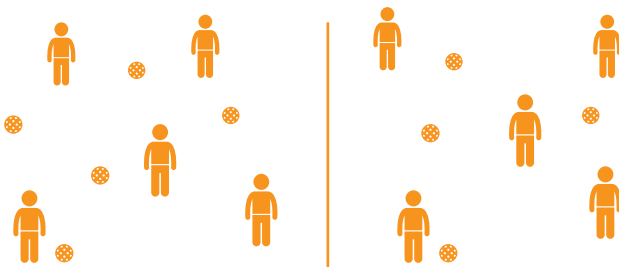
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### Equipment

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- Line or net

### Setup

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After 2-3 minutes (or longer), have them stop and count how many balls are on each side.

Repeat.

Have everyone help quickly clean up the balls when this warm-up is done.  
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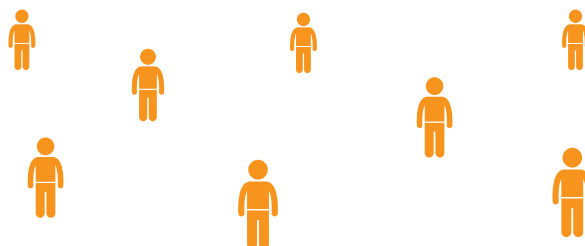
## WARM-UP 2: STRETCHING

### Equipment

None needed

### Setup

Players spread out throughout the space



### Stretches



Arm Circles



Side Bend



Lunge



Calf Stretch



## SKILL: PASSING & RECEIVING

### Equipment

- Paddle for each player
- Ball for each player
- Wall or floor markers

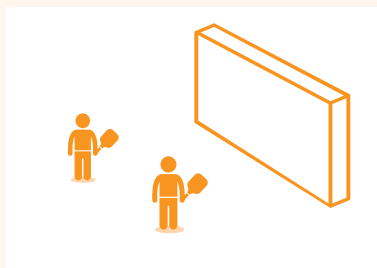
### Setup

See below

Coach demonstrates proper forehand and backhand.

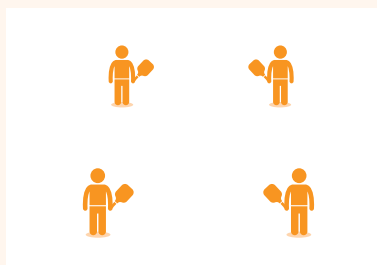
Players each get a paddle and ball and practice “flip flop” where they hit the ball into the air with one side of the paddle and then flip it to the other side to tap the ball with the other side of the paddle. Let players practice this for a couple of minutes before moving on to the drill.

**Drill Option 1:** Individual Wall Volley (if you have access to a flat wall):



- Players stand on a designated floor marker (about 10 feet from the wall, adjustable as needed).
- Players practice forehand and backhand swings, hitting the ball against the wall.
- Optional targets can be placed on wall for precision.

**Drill Option 2:** Individual Wall Volley (if you don't have access to a flat wall):



- Two players volley a ball back and forth from assigned floor makers (about 10 feet apart, adjustable).
- Each player uses a paddle to rally a ball to their partner.
- Modify this drill by adjusting the distance, ball size, or other elements based on player performance.

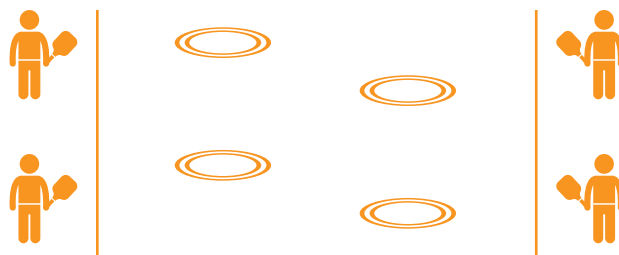
## GAME: HULA HOOP TARGETS

### Equipment

- Paddle for each player
- Ball for each player
- Hula hoops

### Setup

Divide players into two sides, each standing behind a line; place hula hoops between the two lines



### Rules:

- Players use forehand, backhand, and serving techniques to hit the ball into different hula hoops. Once they hit the ball, they can find another ball on their side of the court and continue.
- **Round 1:** Practice Round  
Players practice aiming for different hula hoops.
- **Round 2:** Color Practice  
Place floor markers inside the hoops so that players practice aiming for certain colors that you call out.
- **Round 3:** Points  
Place numbers inside each hula hoop and have players try to get the most points in a set amount of time.

Try a bonus round where you, the coach, run back and forth across the court. Bonus point for anyone who can hit you with the ball!

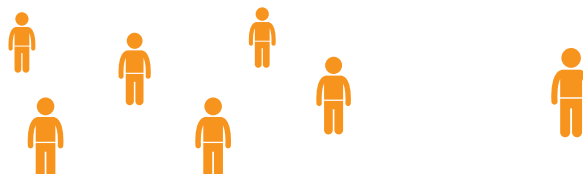
## COOL-DOWN: MIRROR GAME

### Equipment

None needed

### Setup

Players should spread out in the space, facing the coach



Players mirror the coach's movements to help focus on specific strokes or movements:

- Forehand
- Backhand
- Serving
- Take 2 steps then hit the ball
- Back up 1 step then hit the ball
- Be creative!

### Stretches



Toe Touch



Downward Dog



Tricep Stretch



Butterfly

### Lesson 3 Reflection

What strategies helped you hit the ball into the hula hoop? (Examples: point feet towards the hoop, hit the ball harder or softer, move body to face the hoop)

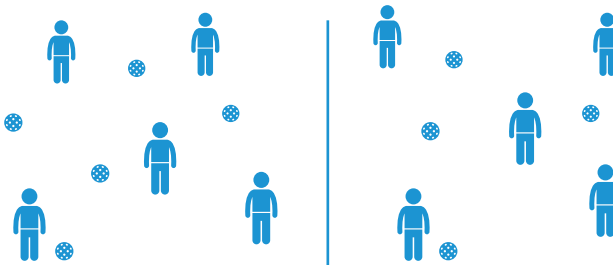
## WARM-UP 1: CLEAN THE COURT

### Equipment

- Pickleballs, tennis balls, foam balls
- Line or net

### Setup

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After 2-3 minutes (or longer), have them stop and count how many balls are on each side.

Repeat.

Have everyone help quickly clean up the balls when this warm-up is done.  
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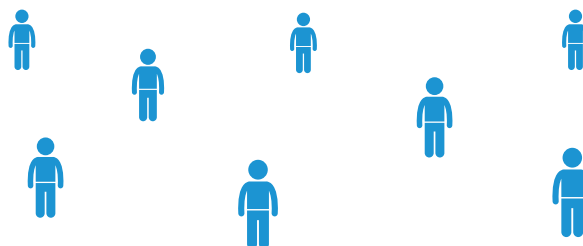
## WARM-UP 2: STRETCHING

### Equipment

None needed

### Setup

Players spread out throughout the space



### Stretches



Arm Circles



Side Bend



Lunge



Calf Stretch

## SKILL: SERVING OVER THE NET

### Equipment

- Net
- Paddle for each player
- Ball for each pair

### Setup

Players find a partner and stand on opposite sides of the net; have two sets of partners per net or more as needed



One player practices serving, forehand, and backhand while the player on the other side remains stationary.

The first player attempts to hit the ball over the net or floor line, aiming for it to bounce once before the other player catches it without moving.

The receiving player then serves the ball back to the first player.

Let players practice a few times, and walk around to coach individually.

To make this more fun, challenge the receiver to run toward the served ball and have the ball bounce between their legs. This helps the player learn how to move their feet to square up with the ball and understand where their body is in relation to receiving it.

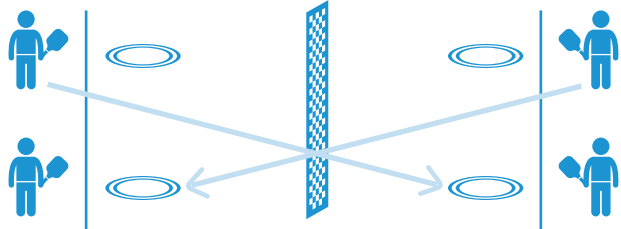
## GAME: SERVING SHOWDOWN

### Equipment

- Hula hoops
- Net
- Paddle for each player
- Balls

### Setup

Players and their partners stand on opposite sides of the net, diagonal to each other; place 2 hoops per side; have two sets of partners per net or more as needed



Similar to the game from Lesson 2, players partner up and take turns serving the ball into the hoop on the other side.

Players should aim for the hula hoop that is diagonal to where they are standing.

Players earn 10 points for their team (partnership) every time they hit it into the hula hoop.

Their partner will retrieve the ball and serve it back.

Make sure to talk about why the hula hoops are set up in those spots. When serving, the ball needs to go past the kitchen and move diagonally.

This is a great time to talk about the importance of communication. Since two or more players have a ball, they will need to talk to the other to make sure they take turns serving.



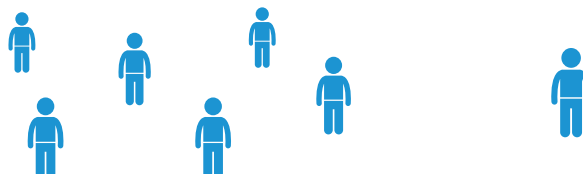
## COOL-DOWN: MIRROR GAME

### Equipment

None needed

### Setup

Players should spread out in the space, facing the coach



Players mirror the coach's movements to help focus on specific strokes or movements:

- Forehand
- Backhand
- Serving
- Take 2 steps then hit the ball
- Back up 1 step then hit the ball
- Be creative!

### Stretches



Toe Touch



Downward Dog



Tricep Stretch



Butterfly

### Lesson 4 Reflection

What was a challenge that you faced today with the skill and game?

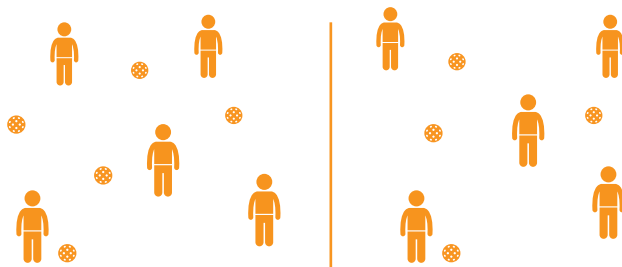
## WARM-UP 1: CLEAN THE COURT

### Equipment

- Pickleballs, tennis balls, foam balls
- Line or net

### Setup

Divide players into two groups on either side of a net or line



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After 2-3 minutes (or longer), have them stop and count how many balls are on each side.

Repeat.

Have everyone help quickly clean up the balls when this warm-up is done.  
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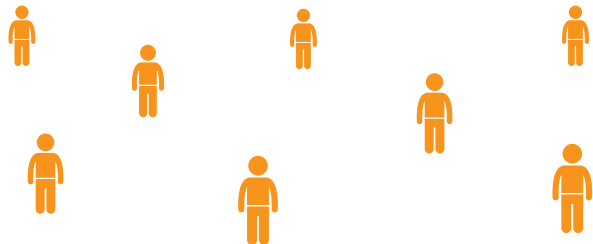
## WARM-UP 2: STRETCHING

### Equipment

None needed

### Setup

Players spread out throughout the space



### Stretches



Arm Circles



Side Bend



Lunge



Calf Stretch

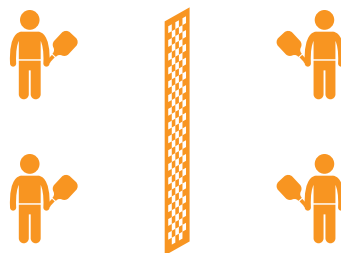
## SKILL: DINK SHOT

### Equipment

- Paddle for each player
- Ball for each pair

### Setup

Players stand about 10 feet apart or on either side of a net, facing each other



Demonstrate a basic dink shot, which is hitting the ball softly over the net to the other side.

Share how during warming up, the goal is to hit it directly to your partner because it practices ball control.

Let players practice dinking with each other. Remind them to hit it softly and stay in control!

Challenge players to “count” their consecutive hits in a variety of ways, like saying the ABCs, skip counting (2, 4, 6...), or naming colors (no repeats!).

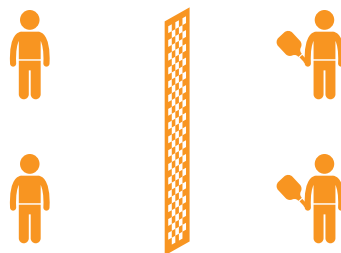
## GAME: DINK & CATCH

### Equipment

- Paddle for each pair
- Ball for each pair
- Optional:  
laundry basket  
or bucket

### Setup

Partners stand on either side of the net,  
one with a paddle and one without



### Rules:

- The partner with the paddle dinks the ball over the net so that it lands in the kitchen. The partner without a paddle tries to catch the ball.
- If the player hits the ball and it lands in the kitchen, they receive 1 point. If their partner catches the ball, they receive 2 points.
- The partner with the paddle gets 5 tries and then they switch.

Optional: if you have buckets or baskets, the player without the paddle can try to catch the ball in a basket instead of with their hands.

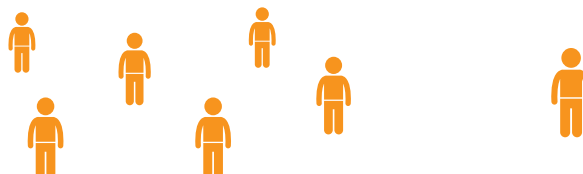
## COOL-DOWN: MIRROR GAME

### Equipment

None needed

### Setup

Players should spread out in the space, facing the coach



Players mirror the coach's movements to help focus on specific strokes or movements:

- Forehand
- Backhand
- Serving
- Take 2 steps then hit the ball
- Back up 1 step then hit the ball
- Be creative!

### Stretches



Toe Touch



Downward Dog



Tricep Stretch



Butterfly

### Lesson 5 Reflection

Why do you think it's important to practice a dink shot and when would you use it while playing pickleball?

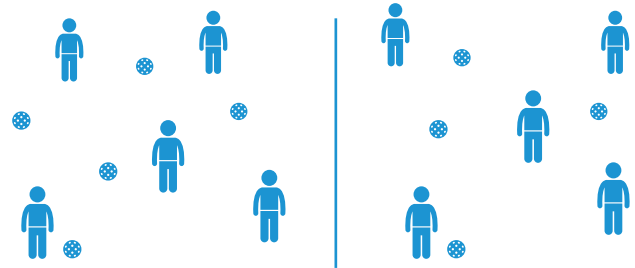
## WARM-UP 1: CLEAN THE COURT

### Equipment

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Repeat.

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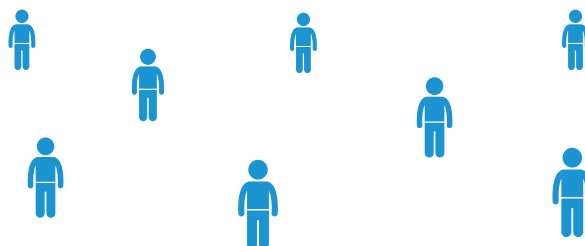
## WARM-UP 2: STRETCHING

### Equipment

None needed

### Setup

Players spread out throughout the space



### Stretches



Arm Circles



Side Bend



Lunge



Calf Stretch

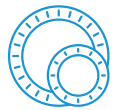
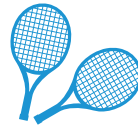
## SKILLS SHOWCASE: STRIKING STATIONS (OPTION 1)

### Equipment

- Balloons or beach ball
- 4 different types of implements: paddles, paper plates, noodles, rackets, bowling pins, etc.

### Setup

Place the 4 different implements in each corner of the room: a corner of paddles; a corner of rackets; a corner of bowling pins; a corner of paper plates



### Game setup:

- Players rotate between 4 different stations, each with a different type of implement or paddle/racket.
- After a player strikes the balloon 25 times at a station, they can move to the next station.

### Modifications:

- Change the paddles, or give choices for each player.
- Change the number of times they need to strike before moving stations.
- Change the ball and use a balloon, beach ball, or pickleball.

**Note:** This is option 1. Make sure you assess your athletes and pick the appropriate station activity for them.

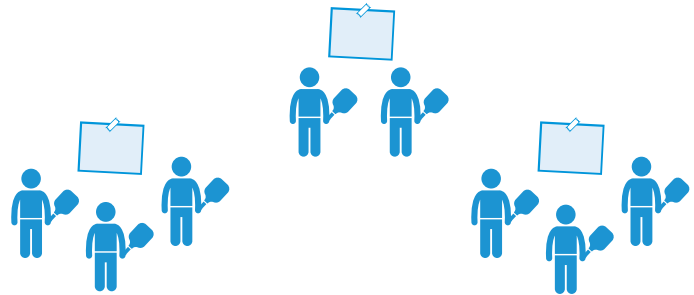
## SKILLS SHOWCASE: STRIKING STATIONS (OPTION 2)

### Equipment

- Paddle for each player
- Ball for each player

### Setup

Set up 4-5 stations around the space with visual posters so students know what to do at each one



Game setup:

Players rotate between the following stations:

- Tap and catch
- Flip flop
- Self floor volley
- Self wall volley
- Optional coach-led station: coach provides targeted instruction, assesses performance, or assists players with specific skills

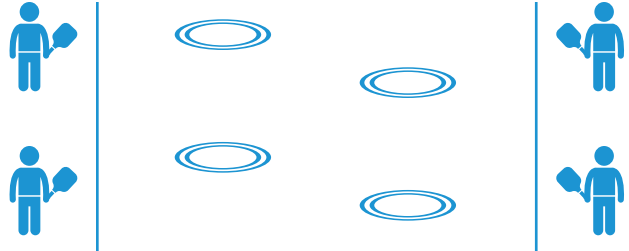
## SKILLS SHOWCASE: PICKLEBALL BULLSEYE

### Equipment

- Paddle for each player
- Ball for each player

### Setup

Divide players into two sides, each standing behind a line; place hula hoops between the two lines



### Rules:

- Players use forehand, backhand, and serving techniques to hit the ball into different hula hoops. Once they hit the ball, they can find another ball on their side of the court and continue. They must hit it from behind the line.
- Place different numbers in each of the hoops and have players keep track of their points. They cannot hit it into the same hoop two times in a row; they have to make it in another hoop before they can go back to a hoop.

Play some fun music during this and have players encourage each other!

Instead of competing against each other, have players add up all their totals together!

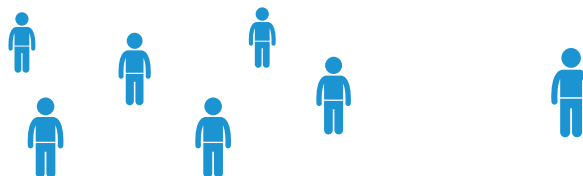
## COOL-DOWN: MIRROR GAME

### Equipment

None needed

### Setup

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- Back up 1 step then hit the ball
- Be creative!

### Stretches



Toe Touch



Downward Dog



Tricep Stretch



Butterfly

### Lesson 6 Reflection

What is one area that you want to continue to practice?

## WRAPPING UP THE SKILLS SHOWCASE

**Thank you for your dedication to the Junior Athletes program.**

As you close out the Skills Showcase, be sure to highlight the next steps in your participants' Special Olympics journey. Junior Athletes is a multi-sport experience designed to introduce children to a variety of activities—not just one sport. Use this moment to inspire families and help them see what comes next. Here are some ideas to help you plan:

- **Promote What's Next:**

What sport will your Junior Athletes learn about next? Create a simple way for parents to sign up or learn more—whether it's a flyer, a sign-up sheet, or a QR code linked to more info. Don't forget to collect emails if you don't already have them!

- **Celebrate Every Athlete:**

Hand out certificates to recognize each child's achievement. Take photos to send to families as a fun and meaningful wrap-up.

- **Recognize All Pathways:**

Congratulate every athlete and share that while some may continue with Junior Athletes, others might be ready for competitive play—and no matter what, there's a place for everyone in Special Olympics.

- **Invite a Local Program Staff Member:**

Having someone available to answer questions about area teams, how to start competing, or how to get involved can make a big difference for families.

- **Include a Guest Athlete Speaker:**

Invite a Special Olympics athlete to speak about their own journey. Hearing firsthand experiences can help parents understand the possibilities for their child's future in the program.



Special Olympics  
Junior Athletes

# **CERTIFICATE OF ACHIEVEMENT**

**PRESENTED TO:**

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**FOR:**

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**CONGRATULATIONS ON A FANTASTIC SEASON!**

**COACH'S SIGNATURE**

**COACH'S SIGNATURE**





Special Olympics  
**Junior Athletes**