



Creative Ways to Use Your New Ball Machine

By Joe Dinoffer, Founder and President, Oncourt Offcourt, Ltd.

PRACTICE BY YOURSELF

Ball machines are a wonderful way to play, improve, and have fun on your own. In just 15 minutes you can get some exercise and improve your game at the same time. You can also bring it to the courts before your “match” to warm up on your own. And, if you don’t want to leave your house, just open your garage door and set up the machine. You stand on your driveway and aim into your garage! It’s a great way to establish your rhythm and timing for the day, since machines throw with a consistency that no opponent or practice partner can offer.

PRACTICE WITH A PARTNER

For most people, practicing on a ball machine with a partner is more fun than alone. While that’s true, there is one additional benefit. With a partner, you can fill the machine with 100 balls and alternate hitting 5-10 each so you don’t get so fatigued that you get in sloppy practice habits. You can also set up targets, which is a great idea whether you are alone OR with a partner. Create a little fun competition by seeing how many times each of you can hit the target area you have created. Visit www.OncourtOffcourt.com for many inexpensive and colorful ways to create target areas with cones, court shapes, or targets windows above the net.

PRACTICE TIPS

There are virtually unlimited drills you can create, but here are a few to get you started. First, remember that the ball is not a dog! You have to move to it. It won’t come to you, especially in real play! Therefore, allow yourself a little extra time in between ball feeds so you can recover to a neutral position in between shots, again move into position and on balance to hit each shot, and then recover again. Remember that practice does NOT make perfect! Perfect practice makes perfect. How many shots should you hit in a row? Ideally, make your ball sequences as realistic as possible and do not just stand in one place and hit 50 balls in a row. After all, when will that ever happen in a match? Hit 5-10 in a row with a little movement to make your practice as realistic as possible. And, remember that you should set up realistic target areas and not aim too close to the lines (or the top of the net). Matches are NOT usually won by which player or team hits more winners, but by who makes fewer mistakes!

THREE PHASES OF A GOOD PRACTICE SESSION

PHASE #1 - WARM-UP and RHYTHM: How well you play on any given day is greatly affected by how you warm up. Incorporating a little light movement, making sure you are on balance with knees slightly bent, is your goal in Phase #1. Relax and swing freely while getting in a good rhythm while you hit your shots. Focus on one shot at a time and then switch to another shot. This is called blocked practice.

PHASE 2 - ADD MOVEMENT: Once you have a good feel for the ball, add movement and recovery for each shot. It can just be 2-3 steps, but avoid standing in one place without moving at all. You can also have the machine feed balls down the middle and move to alternate hitting forehands and backhands. This is called serial practice. Or, set up the machine to feed wide and move to the ball.

PHASE 3 – RANDOM: If your machine has the random function, this part of your practice is like a good dessert after a meal. Your body is warmed up, you are nearing the end of your practice, and you want to challenge your skills. Hit 10 balls in a row with the machine set to random. Since you won't know where the balls will be fed, you will have to react and move much more as compared to when the machine feeds to one predictable spot.

ADD FUN TO PICKLEBALL PARTIES AND EVENTS

Contests and team competitions with prizes are easy to organize at pickleball parties and events. Compete by age groups, set up colorful targets, and your event will be talked about for months! If you use cones as targets you can even put prizes under the cones! Even small prizes make competition more fun. Get a few local restaurants to donate a meal, or come up with other creative ideas. You can even have a “pay to play” activity to raise money for a local charity or for your own community pickleball club!

SET UP A WARM-UP COURT AT TOURNAMENTS

Pickleball tournaments need to offer warm up courts. How about putting a ball machine on one of the courts for players to use? Just put up a sign that says “Please be courteous to those waiting for the machine and do not use for more than 15 minutes!”

BALL MACHINE CLUBS

Ball machine clubs are a hit with tennis clubs. Pickleball facilities are no different. Charge a certain amount for monthly Ball Machine Club memberships and use the money to pay for the machine! Sign up 20 players with a prepaid membership fee of \$50 each. The fees could be \$10 per month per person as prepaid “founding members” and the fee for others could be \$15 per month otherwise. The monthly fee allows players to sign up for one hour of ball machine use each week. In no time, you can raise \$1,000 to buy a great ball machine and plenty of balls!

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