

# How to Win AT TABLE TENNIS





# INTRODUCTION - WINNERS ARE GRINNERS

I love table tennis, and I like to win. A lot. How about you?

During my table tennis career, I have met a small handful of people who play table tennis purely for the love of the sport. For these players, the joy of playing the perfect forehand smash or the thrill in mastering a backhand loop is the ultimate reward.

For the rest of us, competition is where it's at.

And let's be honest - table tennis is *brutal*.

Ping-pong is the closest you'll get to hand to hand combat without actually having to touch your enemy. You're put into an enclosed space, only 9 feet away from your opponent, with just a paddle and your wits to help you get him before he gets you.

There's no judges holding up scores, no marks given for style, presentation or technique. You win the point by forcing a mistake from your opponent, via superior technique, skill, trickery, mind games, luck, or brute force. It's direct, in your face and clearcut - you come off the court a winner or a loser.

Win or lose, it's fun to compete. But let's face it, it's more fun when you win!

The fact that you are reading this eBook tells me that you want to win. Perhaps you want to be the best player in your family, or it could be that you want bragging rights at work. Maybe you've got plans to be the number one player in your city, your country, or maybe the whole darn world!

But whatever your table tennis goals, you have to be able to win. I'll show you how to do that.



## WHAT YOU NEED TO WIN AT TABLE TENNIS

In this eBook, I'm going to explain everything you need to know to start winning at table tennis. You'll be beating your family and friends like a rug in just a few weeks, with a minimum of effort.

But why stop there? Once you are the family champion, or the top dog at work, is that enough?

If you are like most people, and you've been bitten by the table tennis bug, you'll need new challenges to test your table tennis skills.

Clubs and organized competitions are what you are looking for. You'll meet new people, make friends, and be able to enjoy the thrill of competition against worthy opponents. I've been playing table tennis for over 25 years and I still get a kick from competing against the top players in my club and country.



*Get out of your basement and play at a club - you'll meet new people and make new friends for life! (Bruno Levis Soto and friend)*



## START OUT THE RIGHT WAY

If you have plans to enter organized competitions someday, then a few simple tips and tricks that work against raw beginners won't cut it. You'll need something more to defeat experienced table tennis players - you need high quality equipment, the technique to use and control it, and the tactical ability to choose the right stroke at the right time. To achieve all that, you'll need some proper training.

If you really want to compete at a high level, you can't afford to waste precious time and effort trying to teach yourself table tennis. It's all too easy to pick up bad habits that will halt your progress and which are difficult to get rid of later - believe me, I know!. You need to be doing the right things at the right time, right from the start.

That's where I come in. I've been there and done that, and I'll help you avoid the mistakes that will stop you from achieving your true potential. I'll explain what you need to do, why you need to do it, and how to learn to do it properly.



*Time to launch into your table tennis career, like Scott Houston launching into a forehand!*

All it takes is a little time, a little effort, and a little determination, and you can learn how to win at table tennis.

Shall we get started?



## HOW TO USE THIS eBook

This is not your average How-To eBook. But that's OK, since I'm not your average eBook writer, and you're not the average eBook reader.

Most How-To eBooks use words and images to explain their subject. And for many topics, this works just fine. When you are trying to explain how to bake a cake, balance your checkbook, or clean your carpet, a simple text explanation and a photo or two will do the trick.

Table tennis is bit more complicated than that - there are many aspects of table tennis where a few words and a photograph just aren't enough, and a slight misunderstanding can cause you to develop bad habits (like a mistake in your grip or stance) that will slow down your progress and be hard to get rid of later on.

## THE POWER OF VIDEO

Seeing is believing - and in this case, understanding.

For example, later on in this eBook I'm going to explain how you perform a forehand loop (the killer attacking shot in table tennis). I could use a thousand words and a hundred pictures, and that still wouldn't be a tenth as good as having you watch a 5 minute video showing correct and incorrect technique.

*If only there was a way I could actually show you what to do, and explain it at the same time? Wouldn't that be great? Hmmm...*

The chances are pretty high that you are reading this eBook on your computer, not in a hard copy. So I'm going to take advantage of that and include links in this eBook to videos that will explain and demonstrate crucial concepts. I'll still outline the basics in the text, but I'll use the video to make it crystal clear to you exactly what I'm talking about.

These videos will be downloadable, so you can save them on your computer the first time and watch them over and over again at your leisure. I'll provide you with some smaller video file sizes for those of you on limited bandwidth.



## INSTRUCTIONS FOR WATCHING THE VIDEOS

I have put copies of the videos on YouTube, so if you are connected to the Internet while reading this eBook, all you need to do is click on the appropriate link and you can watch the video via YouTube.

For those of you who would like to download the videos and watch them at your leisure, or when you are not connected to the Internet, I have also made the videos available through my website.

Click on the link to go to [How To Win at Table Tennis - Video Downloads page](#) on my website.

## FEEDBACK

I hope you will enjoy this eBook about How to Win at Table Tennis. But more important than just entertaining you, I hope you will put this advice into practice and start winning more matches.

This eBook is intended to be a living document which I will continue to improve and update in the future. So if you've got any constructive feedback to offer (positive or negative) that you think would make this eBook better, please feel free to visit my [How to Win at Table Tennis web page](#) and leave a comment. I'd love to hear from you.

## DON'T GET RIPPED OFF!

While I've tried to pack this eBook full of valuable advice, How to Win at Table Tennis is completely free. So if you've paid money for your copy, demand a refund and pick up the free version from the above link.

## DEDICATION

*To Nita, who has never once said "You can't do that!" to any of my ideas.*

*Thanks Lab.*



## TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION - WINNERS ARE GRINNERS.....	2
WHAT YOU NEED TO WIN AT TABLE TENNIS.....	3
START OUT THE RIGHT WAY.....	4
HOW TO USE THIS EBOOK.....	5
THE POWER OF VIDEO.....	5
INSTRUCTIONS FOR WATCHING THE VIDEOS.....	6
FEEDBACK.....	6
DON'T GET RIPPED OFF!.....	6
DEDICATION.....	6
CHAPTER 1- GET STARTED.....	11
FUNDAMENTAL #1 - GET THE RIGHT RACKET.....	12
Should You Buy a Premade or Custom Racket?.....	14
Your First Pro Racket - What To Look For.....	14
Testing for Touch and Comfort.....	15
Testing for Speed.....	15
Testing for Spin.....	16
Why More Power isn't Better.....	16
You Should Use Rubbers that are Legal for Competition.....	18
Rubber Types - Pips Out vs Inverted Rubber.....	19
Racket Recommendations.....	20
Premade Racket Recommendations.....	20
Custom Racket Recommendations.....	22
Blade Recommendations.....	22
Rubber Recommendations.....	22
FUNDAMENTAL #2 - GET YOUR GRIP RIGHT.....	24
Shakehand Grip Basics.....	25
Shakehand Grip - Mistakes to Avoid.....	27
FUNDAMENTAL #3 - HOW TO STAND.....	28
How to Perform the Basic Ready Stance.....	30
FUNDAMENTAL #4 - HOW (AND WHERE) TO MOVE.....	32
Shuffle Step Footwork.....	32
One Step Footwork.....	33
Hopping Footwork.....	33
Crossover Footwork.....	34
Where to Move.....	36
Rule #1 - Every Shot has an Angle of Play.....	37
Rule #2 - Be in the Centre of the Angle of Play.....	38
Rule #3 - For Weak Shots Come Forward, for Strong Shots Move Back.....	39
Rule #4 - Move to Your Best Ready Location.....	40
Where to Move - Summary.....	41
CHAPTER 2: GET BETTER.....	42
UNDERSTANDING SPIN.....	42
How Does Spin Work?.....	42
How do you Create Spin?.....	43
Putting No Spin on the Ball.....	43
Putting Speed and Spin on the Ball.....	45
Heavy Spin in a Forward Direction.....	46
How do you Use Spin?.....	49



How do you Read Spin?	50
Learning to Read Spin	50
How do you Handle Spin?	53
Creating and Handling Spin - Risk vs Reward	54
KEEPING YOUR EYE ON THE BALL	55
HOW TO PLAY THE BASIC STROKES	56
Advanced Strokes	56
Important Note	57
A Quick Note on Ball Timing	57
Hit the Ball Above the Net	58
Forehand Counterhit	59
When to Play the Forehand Counterhit	60
How to Play the Forehand Counterhit	60
Backhand Counterhit	61
When to Play the Backhand Counterhit	62
How to Play the Backhand Counterhit	62
Backhand Push	64
When to Play the Backhand Push	64
How to Play the Backhand Push	65
Forehand Push	66
When to Play the Forehand Push	67
How to Play the Forehand Push	67
Forehand / Backhand Block	69
When to Play the Forehand / Backhand Block	69
How to Play the Forehand Block	69
How to Play the Backhand Block	71
Serve	72
Double Bounce vs Long Serves	72
Forehand Pendulum Backspin/Sidespin Serve	75
Forehand Pendulum Topspin/Sidespin Serve	77
Learning Other Serves	78
Return of Serve	79
The Flick	79
When to Play the Flick	79
How to Play the Forehand Flick	80
How to Play the Backhand Flick	81
Time to Bring Out the Big Guns	83
Forehand Loop	84
Why Bother with the Forehand Loop?	84
Forehand Loop vs Backspin	86
When to Play the Forehand Loop vs Backspin	86
How to Play the Forehand Loop vs Backspin	86
Forehand Loop vs Topspin	88
When to Play the Forehand Loop vs Topspin	88
How to Play the Forehand Loop vs Topspin	89
Forehand Smash	90
When to Play the Forehand Smash	90
How to Play the Forehand Smash	90
TRAINING FOR TABLE TENNIS	94
Oh My God! I've Gotten Worse!	94

Don't Swap Back and Forth.....	95
A Quick Word on Drills.....	96
A Recommended 1 Hour Training Routine.....	97
Explanation of the Training Outline.....	98
How Often Should You Train?.....	103
On Table Training.....	103
Training at Clubs.....	104
CHAPTER 3: GET IT ON!.....	105
KILLER TACTICS FOR COMPETITION.....	105
Tactic #1 - Avoid Silly Mistakes.....	106
Tactic #2 - Serve and Follow Up.....	108
Tactic #3 - Return of Serve.....	110
Tactic #4 - Rallying Tips.....	112
Tactic #5 - Remember the Rules for Handling Spin.....	115
Tactic #6 - Trust in Your Technique and Training.....	116
IMPORTANT RULES.....	117
Racket Rules.....	117
Rubber Colours.....	117
ITTF Approved Rubbers.....	117
Racket Inspection.....	118
Leaving Your Racket on the Table.....	119
How to Serve Legally.....	119
Winning A Point.....	120
Moving the Table, Touching the Net, Putting your Free Hand on the Playing Surface.....	120
Obstructing the Ball.....	121
The Toss.....	122
Change of Ends.....	122
Racket Hand and Free Hand.....	123
Hitting the Ball.....	123
Double Hits.....	124
Breaks During Games.....	124
Rest Periods.....	124
Time-outs.....	125
Towelling Off.....	125
Warming Up.....	126
Clothing.....	126
How to Score in Table Tennis Singles.....	127
Calling a Let.....	128
Service Let.....	128
Interruptions and Disturbances.....	129
If You are Not Ready to Return Serve.....	129
EPILOGUE: NEXT STEPS.....	130
FINDING CLUBS AND COMPETITIONS.....	130
CONTINUED IMPROVEMENT.....	130
Get a Coach.....	130
Go To Greg's Table Tennis Pages.....	131
FEEDBACK.....	131
BONUS CHAPTER: DOUBLES PLAY.....	132
DOUBLES RULES.....	132

Serving.....	132
Order of Play.....	132
DOUBLES TACTICS AND TIPS.....	138
Doubles Serving Tips and Tactics.....	138
Returning Serve Tips and Tactics.....	140
Doubles - General Tips and Tactics.....	140
Doubles Footwork Patterns.....	142
Be Aware of Where Your Partner Is.....	142
Be Aware of Where Your Opponent is Likely to Hit the Ball.....	143
Circle Back and Around.....	143



*Simon Gerada on the attack*





# CHAPTER 1- GET STARTED

In order to *start* winning at table tennis, all you need are a few simple tips, tricks and techniques. But in order to *keep* winning at table tennis, you need to have mastered the basics so you can move on to more advanced techniques.

By the end of this chapter, you'll have a firm grasp of the four fundamentals of ping-pong, which are:

- How to choose the right racket
- How to grip your racket correctly
- How to stand
- How (and where) to move

This may sound all too simple, but trust me - this stuff is important.

Get the fundamentals wrong at the start of your career, and you'll struggle to get past an intermediate level of play. Table tennis is a sport where technique is just as important as athleticism, and these four fundamentals form the foundation of modern table tennis technique. They are the building blocks from which we later construct more advanced techniques and tactics. Master them and you'll find it easy to move on to more demanding strokes and strategies - ignore any of them and you'll handicap your progress. Believe me, I know from bitter personal experience - I only started playing my best table tennis in my late thirties, after I spent 3 frustrating months changing my sub-standard grip to a technically correct grip.

Don't make the same mistake I made - get it right from the start.



## FUNDAMENTAL #1 - GET THE RIGHT RACKET

With the many thousands of table tennis *rubbers* and *blades* out there, there are an overwhelming number of options to choose from.

In this section, I'm going to explain what to look for in a quality table tennis racket, and make a few specific suggestions about what to buy for your first proper ping-pong paddle.

**A rubber is a rubber covering put on a blade, which is used to hit the ball.**

I strongly recommend that you spend a little money and buy a high quality ping-pong paddle with plenty of speed and spin. New players should not use exactly the same turbocharged equipment that

**A blade is the wooden part of the racket, to which the rubbers are attached.**

advanced level players use, but they definitely need a racket with good grip and decent speed. A slow, non-grippy racket (what I'm going to call a *basement paddle*) just won't do. Don't worry, I'll tell you what to look for.

**Basement paddles have rubbers with very little grip, and very little catapult effect.**

But why can't you just keep using your trusty old Sportcraft \$2 paddle?

I could give you a long, detailed explanation why, but it all boils down to this:

*A match between a player using a basement paddle and a player using a high quality paddle is like somebody bringing a knife to a gun fight.*

*Want to guess which player has the gun?*

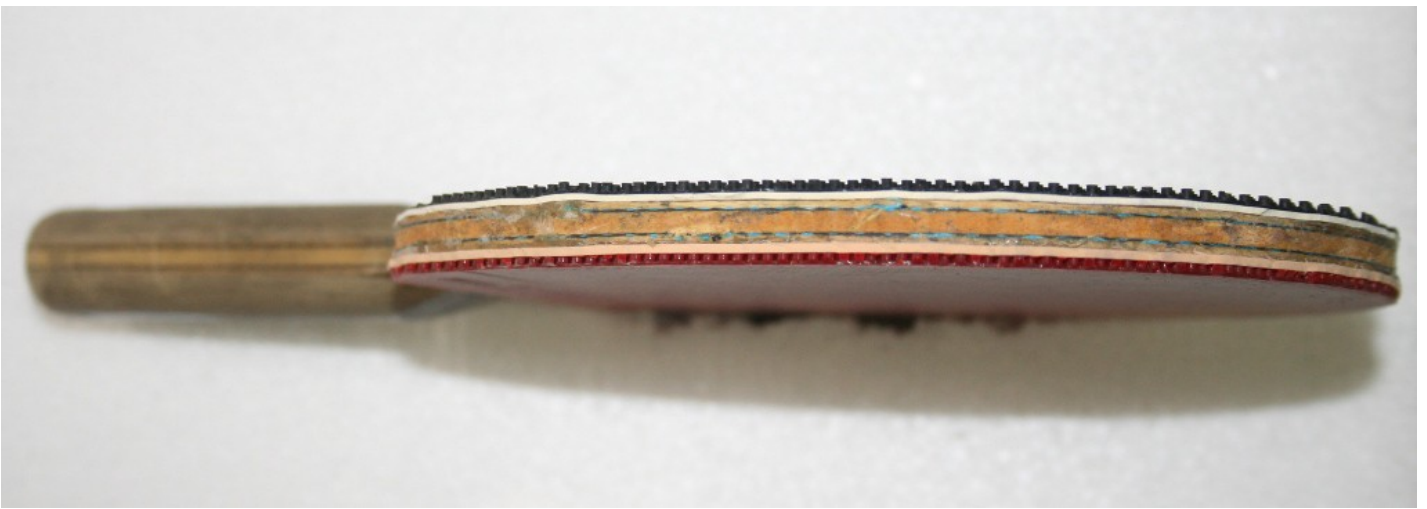
And just like a gun, a high quality paddle is dangerous to the person using it until he learns to control it and create spin, at which point it's game over for the other guy.

Spin is the tactical nuke of table tennis. Spin is what allows advanced players to hit the ball hard and fast, but still land the ball on the table. Without the ability to create and control spin, you won't

be able to keep up with your advanced opponents, and you won't win.

How do advanced players create that kind of spin? They use quality rackets with plenty of grip and power. These rackets use rubbers with sponge that are designed to allow the ball to sink into them at impact, allowing even more of the rubber to grip the ball, before the ball is catapulted off the racket towards their opponents loaded with spin and speed.

At the advanced level, make no mistake - spin is in.



*A custom racket with pips-out rubber on one side, and inverted rubber on the other. Note that the pips-out rubber has yellow 1.0 mm sponge underneath the black topsheet, while the inverted rubber has orange 1.5mm sponge underneath its red topsheet.*

If you are planning to play at your local club or take part in competitions, then you need to start using a high quality racket as soon as possible. You need to be on a level playing field with your opponents, and many of the important stroke techniques required for using advanced rackets are radically different to basement racket techniques. Why spend any more time than you have to learning stuff you don't need?

Trust me on this - you need a pro quality racket.



## SHOULD YOU BUY A PREMADE OR CUSTOM RACKET?

**Premade rackets are pre-assembled by the manufacturer.**

Some table tennis players are snobs who would turn up their nose at the mere idea of suggesting that a new player could buy a **premade racket** (I know, I used to be one of them!).

But after testing a few premade rackets recently which I thought were great for new players, I've changed my mind. Nowadays I see no reason for new players to avoid premade paddles, if they know what to look for.

A **custom racket** is simply a table tennis racket that you put together yourself.

Most intermediate and advanced players buy the rubbers individually, and attach

them to the blade with water based glue. It's not really a difficult process, and since table tennis rubbers only last around 3-6 months, it's handy to be able to change your worn-out rubbers yourself.

**Custom rackets are put together by the player.**

If you do decide to buy a premade paddle, plan to use it for around 6 months at most. By that time you'll be ready (and no doubt eager!) to move on to buying your blades and rubbers separately.

[Racket Parts, Premade vs Custom Rackets video - YouTube](#) - [Download Page](#)

## YOUR FIRST PRO RACKET - WHAT TO LOOK FOR

There are 5 things to look for when choosing your first high quality racket:

- The ability to produce speed
- The ability to create spin
- Good touch or feel
- A comfortable handle
- Same rubber on both sides

What you need is a racket that can produce good speed and spin (but not too much!), which gives a vibration that feels good to you when you hit the ball, and which is comfortable to hold in your hand while playing.

### Testing for Touch and Comfort

If you are buying a paddle which is premade (i.e. a paddle that has already had the rubbers attached to the blade), then the only way to test its touch and handle comfort is to get the racket out of the packaging and try it out for a few shots. An experienced player could also get a good idea of the speed and spin capability of the racket by doing this, but a new player will probably find it more difficult to judge speed and spin, since he doesn't know what he is looking for.

### Testing for Speed

The simplest way for a new player test the ability of a racket to produce speed is to put the bat down on a hard, flat surface with the handle positioned off the edge, so that one side of the bat is lying completely flat. Then drop a ball on the racket from 30cm high (around 1 foot), and with a ruler measure the height of the first bounce. Check that all parts of the racket are fairly similar.

You should get a first bounce of at least 10 cm (4 inches) high - any lower and the racket might be too slow. The first bounce should also be less than 20 cm (8 inches) high - any higher and the racket is too fast. The ball should then continue to bounce several more times. Repeat the test for the other side. If the ball does not bounce within this range or is very uneven in bounce, then don't buy the racket.

While you do want a rubber with good speed, new players should not use a rubber with too much power. The easiest way to make sure that you don't get a bat with too much speed is to grab a ruler and measure the **sponge** on each rubber. If the sponge on either side is over 1.7mm thick, then the racket might be too fast. New players should look for rackets with sponges around 1.5mm - 1.7mm thick.

**Sponge rubbers consist of a rubber topsheet with pips facing in or out, and a layer of cellular rubber (the sponge) that sits between the topsheet and blade.**



## Testing for Spin

The simplest way for a new player to test the ability of a racket to produce spin is to simply grab a ball, hold it firmly (so that it can't rotate) and drag it lightly along the rubber surface, testing all parts of the rubber. It is important to drag the ball rather than push it, since pushing the ball tends to force the ball down into the rubber, which can make you think the rubber is more grippy than it really is. The ball should slide along the rubber, but with noticeable friction providing resistance to the movement. All parts of the rubber should provide the same amount of resistance.

If the ball slides along the rubber with little or no resistance, the rubber will not grip the ball well, and you will not be able to spin the ball enough to play advanced strokes that require spin. On the other hand, if the ball sticks to the rubber and is very hard to move at all, the rubber is probably too grippy, and you will be affected by your opponent's spin too much.

## WHY MORE POWER ISN'T BETTER

Some people recommend that new players should begin with exactly the same equipment that professional players use. Their line of thought is that professional level equipment can be bought for quite reasonable prices, and once the student has learned to control the equipment, no further adjustments are needed.

I disagree with this approach, for one simple reason - human beings have a fear of failure, and using equipment that is too fast and spinny invokes this fear in new players, slowing their progress.

Some of the advanced table tennis stroke techniques I'm going to show you are not easy to perform. When I coach students, the biggest problem I face when students are learning a new technique is to get them to stop worrying about making mistakes.

For almost all my students, if their success ratio drops below a certain amount (which differs from student to student, but is generally



around 60-70%), then they invariably start choking up on their swing and trying to guide the ball, instead of simply taking note of the error and correcting it while performing another relaxed swing. The fear of failure gets in the way, and they start playing not to miss, instead of playing to win.

Now for my personal students, I can remind them to relax and focus on their technique. I'm not there when you are practicing, so I can't do that for you. So it's better for you to avoid using equipment that is too fast and spinny to control, so that you don't make too many mistakes and slow down your learning process.



*Melissa Tapper performing with power, precision and poise*

## You SHOULD Use RUBBERS THAT ARE LEGAL FOR COMPETITION

**The ITTF (International Table Tennis Federation) is the governing body for table tennis around the world.**

If you are only going to play at home or in clubs, then you can use any racket you like. But if you intend to play in tournaments that use the **ITTF** rules (such as most **USATT** sanctioned tournaments), then you need to use ITTF approved rubbers on your racket.

ITTF approved rubbers have the ITTF logo and the manufacturer's logo or trademark, which must be attached to the blade so that these identifying features are clearly visible near the handle.

**The USATT (USA Table Tennis) is the national organizing body for table tennis in the United States of America.**



**Air UpUpUpUp Rubber Logo - Note the ITTF Logo and Rubber ID Number on the left**



## RUBBER TYPES - PIPS OUT VS INVERTED RUBBER

The photograph on the previous page shows a typical pips out rubber, where the rubber is glued onto the blade so that the pips are outwards and will make contact with the ball.

**The topsheet is the layer of rubber that is used to hit the ball.**

Pips out rubbers can be used with or without a layer of sponge underneath the *topsheet*. Both varieties are legal to use.

However, I would recommend that new players start with what is called inverted rubber, or smooth rubber, where the topsheet rubber has the pips facing inwards and the pips are glued to the sponge layer. Inverted rubber must be used with a layer of sponge between the topsheet and the blade, otherwise it is illegal.



*An inverted rubber on a custom blade. Note that although the pips of the red topsheet are facing inwards, they are still visible through the surface.*

Inverted rubber is by far most commonly used rubber, since it provides a mix of speed and spin that suits the style of play preferred by most table tennis players - fast speed with heavy topspin. It is easier to spin the ball heavily with inverted rubber than with pips out rubber, making it the better choice for most players. Inverted rubber is often just called rubber by most table tennis players.

In this eBook, the premade rackets that I recommend all use inverted rubbers. The custom rubbers that I suggest are all inverted rubbers as well.

## RACKET RECOMMENDATIONS

While there are plenty of online table tennis distributors, I'm going to simply recommend one that has given me good service over the last few years - [www.megaspin.net](http://www.megaspin.net). I've been using them to buy my own equipment for quite a while and not had a problem with them in all that time.

**Note:** *The above link and the links I provide to suggested equipment below are affiliate links - I get a commission on any equipment you buy from Megaspin after following a link.*

### Premade Racket Recommendations

For any new player looking for a premade racket to start serious table tennis play, I would recommend one of three different rackets, all of which I have tested myself. All of these rackets make excellent starting rackets for different reasons, and none of them are more than \$25 US, so they won't break the bank.

- **Killerspin Centric** - an excellent premade racket, which is the closest in performance to a high level custom racket. This level of performance makes it a little harder to control, so I'd only recommend this racket to new players if they are going to get some coaching lessons to help them learn to control the bat quickly. [Buy Killerspin Centric bat](#)
- **Butterfly 201 FL** - this racket has enough performance to do a decent forehand loop attack, but has a smaller sweet spot, which makes it obvious when you have hit the ball off centre. This actually makes it a bit better for learning correct technique, since you'll know straight away when you have got it wrong. [Buy Butterfly 201 FL bat](#)
- **Yasaka Attack** - a good choice for a new player who is looking to beat his family and friends, but who doesn't intend to get any personal coaching or dive into serious competition. It has enough performance to give you an



edge, but is not too fast or spinny, so it is still fairly easy to control the ball. [Buy Yasaka Attack bat](#)



**Five premade rackets that I tested. Clockwise from top left: The Butterfly 201 FL, the Killerspin Centric, the Yasaka Attack, the Donic Waldner 500. Centre: The Killerspin Jet 100**

*Just in case you are wondering about the other two rackets in the photograph, the Killerspin Jet 100 is also a good racket that I would normally recommend for new players, except for the green rubber which makes it illegal under ITTF rules. The Donic Waldner 500 racket that I tested was terrible in my opinion, and I wouldn't recommend it to anybody (well, anybody that I liked, that is!).*

Expect to get around 3-6 months of use out of these rackets, after which they can be thrown away and a new premade or custom racket purchased.

### **Custom Racket Recommendations**

If you are looking to buy a high quality custom racket, then you need to select your rubbers and blade separately, and then glue them together.

Fortunately the folks at Megaspin.net offer a free racket assembly service, where they will attach the rubbers to the blade for you. If you do want to learn how to glue the rubbers on your blade by yourself, check out my website for more details.

There are literally thousands of rubbers and blades out there to choose from - far too many for me to cover in detail. So I'm going to stick to making a few tried and tested recommendations that I know will get you off to a good start.

### **Blade Recommendations**

[Butterfly Timo Boll All](#), [Butterfly Andrzej Grubba](#)

[Stiga Allround Classic](#), [Stiga Allround Classic WRB](#)

[Donic Appelgren Allplay](#)

[Yasaka Extra 3D](#)

### **Rubber Recommendations**

[Butterfly Sriver](#), [Butterfly Flextra](#) , [Yasaka Mark V](#), [Friendship 729 Cream on Magic Red Sponge](#)

Any of these rubbers in around 1.5mm-1.7mm sponge thickness would be an excellent choice. Remember that you need 2 rubbers, one for each side of your blade!

When you buy a custom racket, you are generally paying more

money for the extra performance and quality of the materials. You can expect to use the blade for many years (although many players like to try new blades more often than that), while the rubbers will generally last from 3-6 months before they need replacing.

You can tell a rubber needs replacing by holding a table tennis ball firmly in your fingers, and dragging it over your rubber after the rubber has been cleaned. If the grip in the centre of the racket is significantly different to the grip around the edges of the racket, it's time to change! Also, if the bounce in the centre of the rubber becomes significantly less than the bounce around the edges of the racket, you need a new rubber.



*Nadine Bollmeier of Germany making her rubbers work hard!*





## FUNDAMENTAL #2 - GET YOUR GRIP RIGHT

The most important thing about your table tennis grip is that it should allow you to easily perform all the strokes you need to play. The second most important thing is that it should be comfortable.

Now if this eBook was unlimited in size, I could explain every ***grip variation*** on the planet, along with its pros and cons. But it's not, so I'm going to restrict myself to talking about the one grip that allows you to play every shot in the book with minimal limitations - the shakehand grip. It's the grip that I recommend to most new table tennis players, since it is easy to learn and use, and you'll have no problem finding a coach that can teach players who use this grip.

While the shakehand grip is simple to learn and instantly familiar to most Westerners, it is still easy to make mistakes with your grip that will very hard to shift later on. So it's well worth taking the time to get in right in the first place.



***Shakehand grip - front view***

**WARNING:** Comfortable is NOT the same as familiar. If you have already played some ping-pong with a different grip, or never held a racket before in your life, then the basic shakehand grip may feel a little strange or awkward at first. That's fine, as long as it isn't painful to use. If you continue to perform this grip correctly, you'll soon get used to it.



*Shakehand grip - back view*

## SHAKEHAND GRIP BASICS

Here's how to perform the shakehand grip correctly.

- Hold the racket around the edges with your free hand so that the edge is running vertically and the handle pointing towards you, then "shake hands" with the racket. Hold the racket in your playing hand so that your thumb is on one side of the racket, and your index finger is on the other side. For right handers, your thumb will be on the left side of the racket, and your index finger on the right side.
- The thumb and index finger should both point down towards the



ground. The thumb should be comfortably placed on the part of the handle that has been planed away, while the index finger should be on the rubber, running along the bottom edge of the racket face.

- Allow your other three fingers to wrap naturally around the handle.
- Keep your wrist relaxed, so that the tip of the racket points horizontally out in front of you, not upwards to any degree.
- The edge of the racket should still be vertical, and the line formed by the edge of the racket should run up the inside of your forearm.
- Experiment with moving your grip a little further back towards the bottom of the handle, and further up towards where the handle meets the racket face. Don't change the angle of the racket while doing so. Holding the racket with your hand slightly further down the handle generally gives more power and spin since you can use your wrist more, but less control, while holding the racket with your hand closer to the racket face gives more control, but less speed and spin.

[Shakehand Grip video – YouTube](#) - [Download Page](#)  
[Power Zones and the Playing Elbow video - YouTube](#) - [Download Page](#)

When performed properly, the shakehand grip allows for easy stroking of balls on the forehand and backhand sides of the player, and is equally good for topspin or backspin strokes.

The main disadvantage of the shakehand grip is the existence of a crossover point or *playing elbow*, which is the area where you have to decide between using a forehand or backhand stroke.

**Playing elbow - the area where a player has to decide between a forehand or backhand stroke.**

## SHAKEHAND GRIP - MISTAKES TO AVOID

Although the shakehand grip is relatively simple to learn, there are several basic mistakes that you should avoid, since they will make it harder to reach an advanced level later on.

- Keep the racket edge as close to vertical as you can. For a right handed player, turning the racket a little anti-clockwise will make your forehand stroke more powerful, but make playing a strong backhand much harder to do. Similarly, turning the racket a little clockwise will make your backhand strokes stronger, but make your forehand strokes much more difficult.
- Don't allow your thumb to point towards the tip of the blade, since this tends to make adjusting your racket angle and using your wrist more difficult.
- Don't allow your index finger to creep too far away from the bottom edge of the racket - this will make your forehand stronger, but greatly weaken your backhand strokes. It also makes it more likely that you will accidentally hit the ball with your finger when playing a backhand.
- Don't hold your racket too tightly - you will make your forearm muscles tense and rigid instead of relaxed and loose, and you will lose power and wrist flexibility.
- Don't change your grip around much during a point. Small natural shifts of your grip are common for most players, but the same basic racket angle should be maintained. Any large grip changes that change your basic racket angle should be avoided.



## FUNDAMENTAL #3 - HOW TO STAND

This may seem a bit of a strange fundamental - after all, we all know how to stand up, don't we?

But the basic ready stance for table tennis is much more than being able to stand up without falling over. It's a way of being ready for action that is specific to table tennis, and which puts you in the best position to play any stroke in the book.

Modern table tennis is a fast moving game, and when played close to the table there often is not enough time to switch stances between forehand and backhand strokes.



*Basic ready position - front view*



**In modern table tennis, the backhand is often played from a forehand stance.**

Fortunately, while the forehand attack requires a large body turn to play well, the backhand attack does not, so the modern stance has evolved to allow players to play both strokes from the same stance. In this stance, the right foot (for a right handed player) is placed some distance behind the left foot, to allow better weight shift and body rotation for forehand strokes while maintaining balance.

[The Basic Ready Stance video - YouTube](#) - [Download Page](#)



*Basic ready position - side view*

## HOW TO PERFORM THE BASIC READY STANCE

- Face an imaginary (or real) ball, so that your shoulders and upper body, and legs are square on to the ball. Let your arms hang by your sides, and let your toes point naturally.
- Place your feet shoulder width apart to begin with, and bend your knees slightly and lean forward slightly, so that your weight is mainly on the balls of your feet, and only fractionally on your heels. Again, your toes should be pointing in whatever direction is comfortable for you.
- Bring your hands out in front of your body, with a roughly 90 degree angle at the elbow. The racket tip should be pointing out in front of you, and around 1 foot / 30cm to the right of the ball.
- Now widen your stance until it begins to feel uncomfortable. Once this point is reached, narrow your stance a few inches / cms until you are once again comfortable, with no feeling of strain. For most new players, you should be looking for a stance that is at minimum a few inches wider than your shoulders, and at maximum around 1½ times your shoulder width. More advanced players use stances that are wider than this, but it is difficult to maintain a stance that wide throughout a match without special training to improve your leg strength.
- At this point, your center of gravity should be significantly lower than at the start.
- While keeping your upper body and shoulders still, move your right foot backwards around 6 inches / 15cm. Continue to allow your toes to point in the natural direction they wish to go.
- Allow your body to rock forwards and backwards, then right and left, and then in all directions. Try shifting your weight while rotating your hips and shoulders around 90 degrees at the same time. You should find that you are relatively stable in almost all directions, even while rotating your body.



- This is the basic ready position, but with the minimum amount of backwards positioning of the right foot. From this position, you will be able to play all the forehand and backhand strokes with a minimum of body adjustments.
- Some players prefer to place their right foot further back, to allow them to use more body turn when playing a forehand, thus generating more power. It does require a little more flexibility in the hips and upper body when hitting a backhand, so not all players will move the right foot further back. Let's give it a try now, so you can see how it feels.
- Move your right foot back another 6 inches / 15cm, keeping your upper body and shoulders facing the ball, and allowing your toes to point naturally. Try rocking your body and rotating in all directions again - how does it feel? In most cases, you should feel more stable, but you might feel more uncomfortable when turning to your left, if you do not have good flexibility.



*Michelle Beaumont demonstrating a square ready position during a rally, although ideally her racket would be pointing more towards the ball*

- Try different right foot positions between these two extremes, until you find one that gives you the best combination of stability and turning ability. This will be your basic ready position.

This basic ready position is the stance that has been adopted by almost all elite players, and with good reason - it allows you to perform powerful forehand attacks while maintaining your balance and recovering quickly. There is only a minor reduction in backhand power, which is compensated for by the removal of the need to switch between a forehand and backhand stance.



## FUNDAMENTAL #4 - HOW (AND WHERE) TO MOVE

Table tennis is one of the fastest ball sports on the planet, and if you want to play the game at a high level, you need to know the quickest, most efficient and most effective ways to move around the court. And while not everybody possesses fantastic natural speed - I certainly don't! - you can make up for a lack of athleticism by mastering a small number of basic footwork techniques, which are:

- Shuffle step footwork
- One step footwork
- Hopping footwork
- Crossover footwork

### SHUFFLE STEP FOOTWORK

Once you are in your basic ready position, you will be able to cover most of the court by using a simple shuffle step to your left or right. It allows you to easily get to balls that would otherwise be well out of your reach, while remaining balanced.

You perform a shuffle step by moving the foot that is furthest away from your destination towards your desired location, just far enough so that you can reach the ball without stretching. Just before putting that foot on the ground, lift your other foot and start to move it the same distance in the same direction. The first foot is then placed on the ground, followed by the second foot, and the stroke is played with both feet on the ground, when you are once again stationary.

That is the theory - but table tennis is a fast paced game, and in actual matches you will often find that you will be hitting the ball while you are in the middle of shuffle stepping. Don't worry about it, that is completely normal. Just remember to stay balanced throughout the stroke, and don't reach or lean over excessively.

[Shuffle Step Footwork video – YouTube](#) - [Download Page](#)



## ONE STEP FOOTWORK

One step footwork is often used to get to balls that are only just outside your normal reach. It's a quicker technique than shuffle stepping, but it does have some drawbacks.

To use one step footwork, you move the foot nearest the ball to the left or right as appropriate, which will widen your stance and allow you to reach the ball and play your stroke. Once your shot is completed, you push off that foot and return to your original position.

The benefit of this technique is that it is quick to execute, and when used properly, allows you to retain good balance throughout the stroke. It is also handy for playing balls that are only just a few inches out of reach, where a shuffle step would possibly be overkill.

One downside of this technique is that it requires good leg strength to perform, especially when used over and over again during a long match. Care must also be taken to keep your centre of gravity between your legs, and not to put all your weight on the leg that is moved, or else your recovery will be slowed down.

[One Step Footwork video – YouTube](#) - [Download Page](#)

## HOPPING FOOTWORK

Hopping footwork is most commonly used to quickly move backwards while staying crouched and facing the ball. It is not often used to move left or right, since the amount of extra time spent in the air when hopping makes shuffle stepping or one stepping a better choice.

When hopping backwards you generally push off both feet at once (although there are times when one foot is used), and both feet are moved backwards and land at the same time, in the same relative positions that they started from.

[Hopping Footwork video - YouTube](#) - [Download Page](#)



## CROSSOVER FOOTWORK

Crossover footwork is usually used to reach balls that have been placed far away from the player, usually on the forehand side. When moving forwards and backwards, simple running footwork can be used to move into position. But when moving sideways or diagonally, players will use a special form of crossover footwork.



*Chris Yan caught in mid-flight using crossover footwork*

[Crossover Footwork video](#)  
[- YouTube](#) - [Download](#)  
[Page](#)

For a right handed playing moving to his forehand (right) side, the body is turned at roughly a 45 degree angle to the right, and the left foot is swung in front and over the right foot in the direction the player wishes to go. At the same time, the player takes his back swing. The player then pushes off his right foot and starts his forward swing at the ball, turning his body back to his left, and hitting the ball in midair, before landing with his left foot first, and then swinging his right foot back into position to land. The player will have generated a lot of speed during the process, and the right leg is used as a brace to halt the player.

When moving to the backhand side, the same process is used in reverse, with one small (but important) change. Since most backhands are played with very little body turn, the body is only turned as far to the left as is necessary, usually much less than 45 degrees. A 45 degree turn would only be used if the player is desperate to reach the ball, since the extra turn would give the player a little more reach. But the stroke would be played without attempting to turn the body back during the swing.

Note that the backhand crossover footwork is rarely used, since most players prefer to cover most of the table with their forehand, and relatively less with their backhand. This allows the player to use shuffle stepping for moving to the backhand side, and crossover footwork for any balls wide to the forehand.



*Korea's Dong Hoon Kang showing excellent crossover footwork form*



## WHERE TO MOVE

A lot what is involved in table tennis is being in the right place at the right time, so that you can perform the right stroke.

Learning where to position yourself during a table tennis rally is a skill that requires many years to develop fully, and is affected by many different factors, such as the direction of the ball travel, the spin and speed of the ball, the depth the ball lands on the table, your opponent's ability to perform different strokes with varying spins, and your own abilities.

While this is all a bit too complicated for a player that is new to the sport, fortunately there are a few simple rules that you can follow which will get you pretty close to the right location almost all the time.

This is a huge advantage to have over your opposition, if they don't know the same rules!

In essence, these rules can be summed up as follows:

- Rule #1 - Understand your opponent's possible angles of play
- Rule #2 - Work out your correct left/right position
- Rule #3 - Work out your correct depth from the table
- Rule #4 - Move to that location

**Important Note:** Please bear in mind that I do not expect you to consciously run through each rule in your head during a rally - you won't have time for that. The idea is that if you understand the reasoning behind the rules, your brain will soon learn to apply these concepts automatically, and you will find yourself moving to the right location without thinking about it.

But if you don't understand these basic rules, it's likely that you'll continue to end up in the wrong place on the court.

### Rule #1 - Every Shot has an Angle of Play

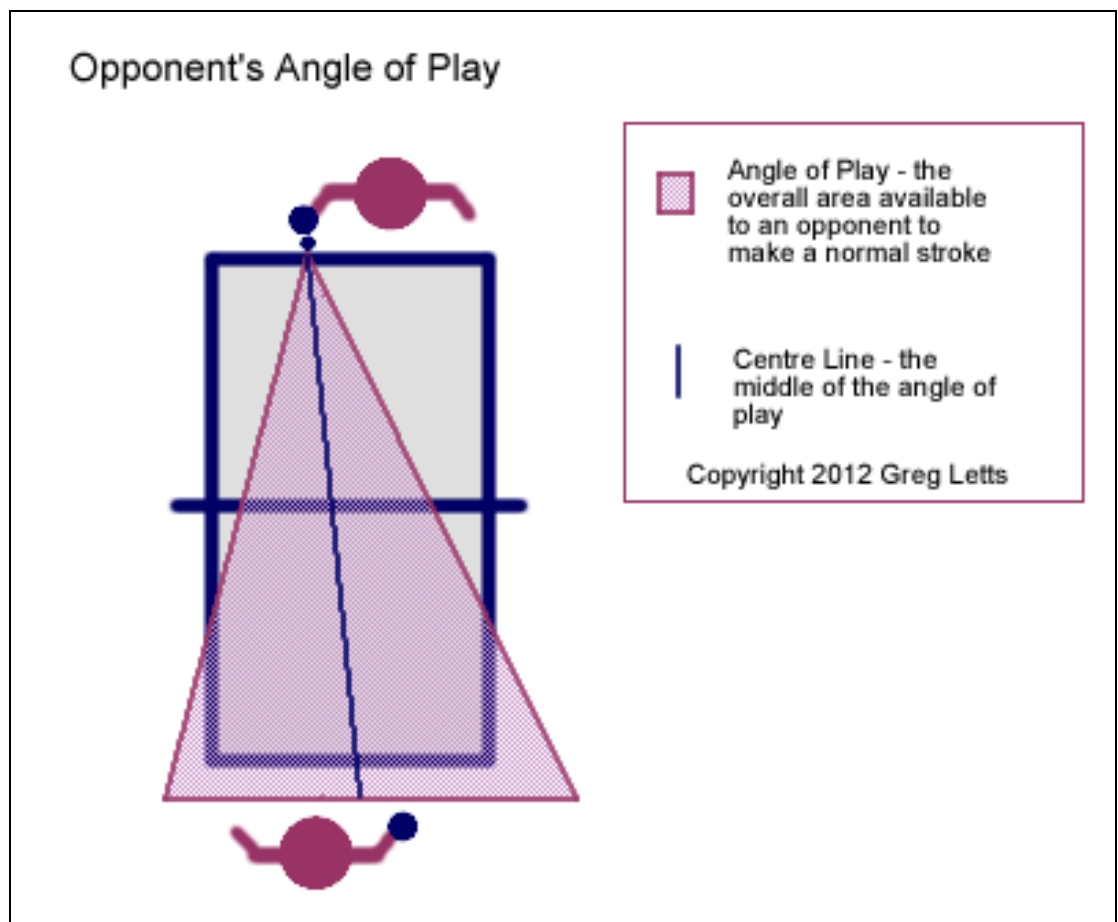
**Court is another name for the table tennis table. Half-court is one side of the table.**

In theory, your opponent can put the ball anywhere on your side of the **court** when hitting the ball. However, his practical target area will always be smaller than this, unless he is lobbing the ball high in the air and making it come nearly straight down on the table.

Why is this? Because your opponent has to get the ball over the net first, before he can land the ball on your side of the table. That little six inch net can greatly affect the target area your opponent has to work with.

Wherever your opponent is hitting the ball from, he is limited to a certain range of angles that he can play and still have a decent chance of hitting the table.

[Angle of Play video - YouTube](#) - [Download Page](#)



**Angle of play is the range of locations on the table that a player can hit the ball to with a high chance of success.**

As you get more experienced, you will get better at understanding what your opponent's possible **angles of play** are, depending on on the position of the ball and what stroke he is attempting.

But simply put:

- More powerful shots reduce the angle of play, since the ball will go further over the net before hitting the table.
- Using more topspin increases the angle of play, since the ball will drop faster after crossing the net.
- Higher balls increase the angle of play, since your opponent can hit the ball shorter on the table.
- Shorter balls increase the angle of play, since your opponent can hit the ball wider.

### **Rule #2 - Be in the Centre of the Angle of Play**

Once you have figured out what your opponent's possible angle of play is, you have to move towards the centre of that angle, at the right distance from the table, so that you are best positioned to handle any stroke your opponent makes.

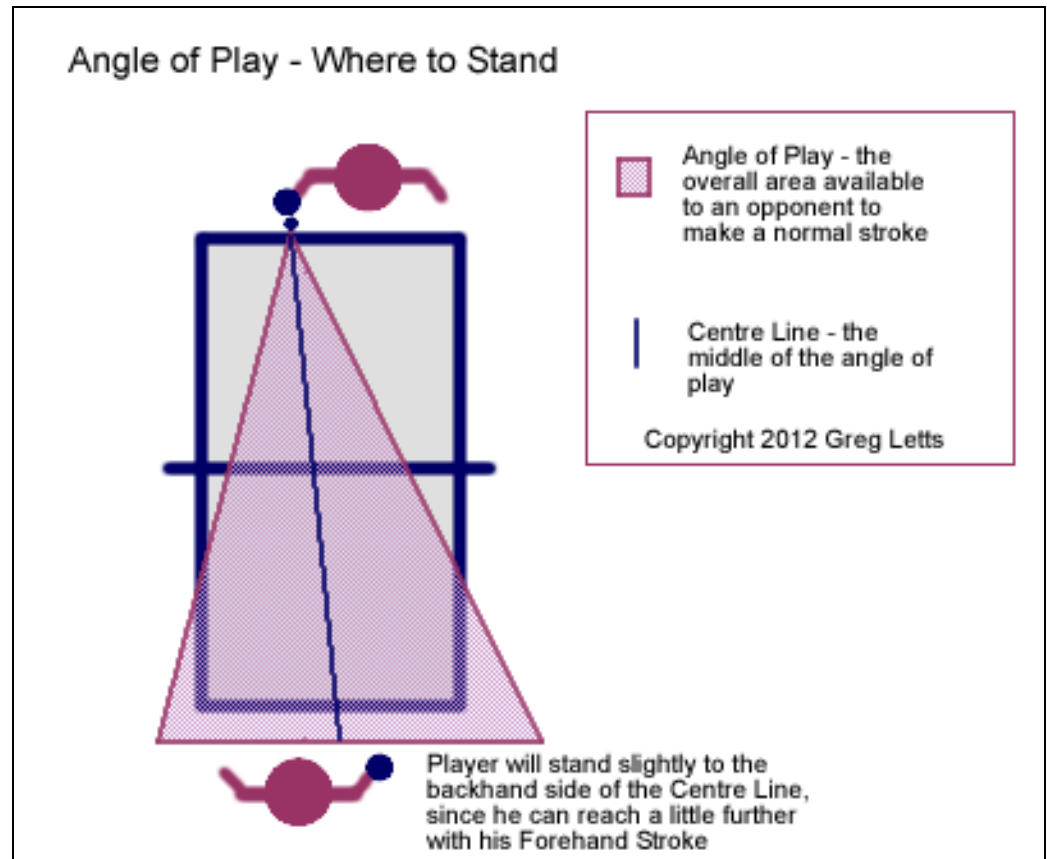
This involves two parts - moving to the centre of the angle of play, and moving to the right distance away from the table. I'll look at moving to the centre of the angle of play first.

Technically, moving to the centre of the angle of play is not quite correct - you should actually move so that your racket is positioned in the centre of the angle of play, not your body.

Why is this? Because you can actually reach much further to your forehand side than your backhand side, and your forehand is played out to the side of your body, while your backhand is played out in front of your body. It is also easier to use crossover footwork on your forehand side than your backhand side, which gives you even more reach on your forehand. If you put the middle of your body right in

the center of the angle of play, you are actually standing too far over to your forehand side.

Put simply, a right hander should stand a little to the left of the centre of angles available to his opponent.



One important note - when you move to your left or right, make sure that you keep facing the ball, not the endline of the table. If you keep facing the endline, you will end up with your body at the wrong angle when you move wide to your left or right.

### **Rule #3 - For Weak Shots Come Forward, for Strong Shots Move Back**

The final piece of the puzzle is to know how far away from the table to be. There's not much point being at the centre of the angle of play if you are standing right up at the table while your opponent smashes the ball, or 15 yards back from the table when your



opponent plays a drop shot.

The easiest way to reach the right depth is to watch your opponent closely to judge the type of stroke he is playing, and also get a good idea of the size of his backswing.

If your opponent is preparing to push or block the ball, you should be relatively near the table, say within or around a yard / metre or so, a little nearer for pushes and a little further away for blocks against strong attacks.

If your opponent is preparing to counterhit the ball, you will probably want to be within the yard or metre mark for a standard counterhit, and a little deeper if he is taking a bigger swing.

If your opponent is preparing to loop the ball, then stick to around a metre or so away, so that you can block the ball just as it gets above net height. More advanced players who wish to counterloop the ball should retreat to a depth of a two to three yards or metres back from the table, so that they can take the ball near the peak of its bounce, when it is nice and high and it has lost a significant amount of speed and spin.

If your opponent is preparing to smash the ball, you can either be aggressive and stay fairly close to the table and attempt to block the ball, or you can be defensive, retreat well away from the table and lob the ball back, hitting the ball high and with plenty of topspin to make the ball kick when it lands on your opponent's court.

#### **Rule #4 - Move to Your Best Ready Location**

Once you have made your decision about the best place for you to wait for the ball, use one of the four basic footwork techniques to move to that location.

[Move to the Best Ready Location video - YouTube](#) - [Download Page](#)

### Where to Move - Summary

You will soon get used to instinctively judging where the opponent is hitting the ball from, and what type of stroke he is preparing to play. This information will allow you to automatically work out where the centre of his possible angles of play will be, and what depth you should choose.

As I mentioned earlier, don't try to apply these rules step by step during a point. Just make sure that you understand the concepts, and take note when you accidentally move to the wrong location. Within a few weeks you'll find yourself moving towards the right spot without even thinking about it.



*Xuyen Tran moving forward in a hurry!*

Finally, remember that you are using these rules to help you to decide the best place to be while waiting for the ball to come to you. So once you decide on the location and move there, your job isn't finished! You still have to pay attention to where your opponent has actually hit the ball, and then use your footwork to move to the best place to reach the ball comfortably and play your stroke.



## CHAPTER 2: GET BETTER

### UNDERSTANDING SPIN

Why is spin important when choosing your first real racket? Because spin is the difference between pat-a-cake ping-pong played in living rooms and basements around the world and true table tennis played in sports stadiums in front of ten thousand screaming fans.

Spin is what allows you to make a ball sit up and do tricks, by revving it at around 150rps. You can curve a ball around the net, make it dip, rise, or bend like a banana through the air. All at speed of up to 70mph (112.5kph)!

Without the ability to create and control spin, you won't be able to keep up with your advanced opponents, and you won't win.

#### HOW DOES SPIN WORK?

When spin is put on the ball when playing a stroke, it makes the ball curve through the air. There are three main spins to understand in table tennis:

[Spin Types and their Effects video - YouTube](#) - [Download Page](#)

- Topspin - which makes the ball curve downwards, and bounce upwards off your opponent's racket. Topspin is what allows advanced players to hit a low ball hard and fast, but still land the ball on the table.
- Backspin - which makes the ball want to curve upwards. However, since the spin is fighting gravity, this usually makes the ball fall more slowly, or "float" in the air until the amount of backspin drops. Backspin makes the ball jump downwards off your opponent's paddle and go into the net.
- Sidespin - this makes the ball curve to the left or right, and jump sideways off your opponent's paddle. Sidespin

makes it harder for your opponent to hit the ball, and much more difficult for your opponent to guess how much backspin or topspin you have put on the ball.

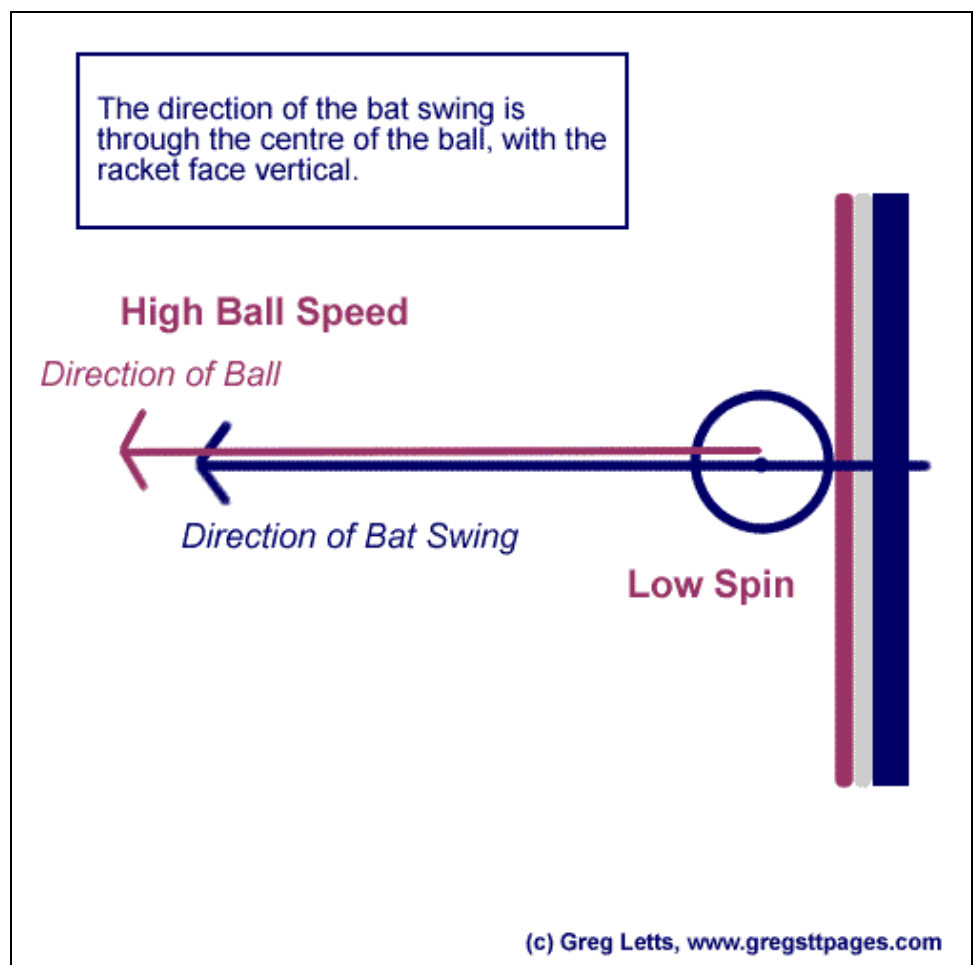
## HOW DO YOU CREATE SPIN?

To create spin, the ball is brushed or skimmed rather than hit flat. The easiest way to explain this is to get you to actually do it.

[Learning to Create Spin video - YouTube](#) - [Download Page](#)

## Putting No Spin on the Ball

Stand to the side of a table tennis table, but near the endline, and drop a ball on the table so that it bounces back up to around 30cm (1 foot) above the table. Holding your racket so the edge is vertical, swing your bat quickly forward in a straight horizontal line. The line formed by your racket swing will go right through the centre of the ball, and you will put a lot of speed and very little spin on the ball.



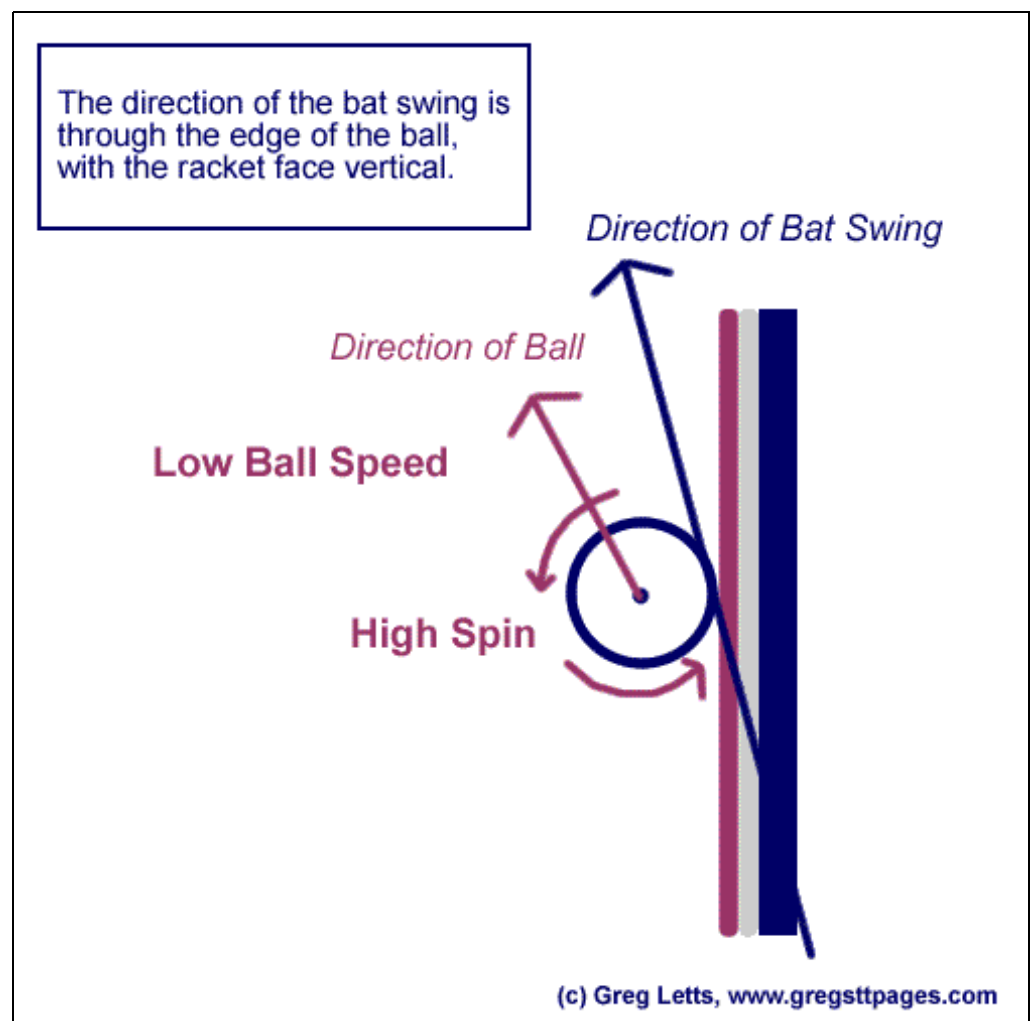


The ball should bounce quite quickly off your racket in a horizontal direction, and will probably fly well off the end of the table before being brought down by gravity.

### Putting Heavy Topspin on the Ball

Still hold your racket so that the edge is vertical, but now when you drop a ball, swing your racket mainly upwards and just a little bit forwards.

The line of your racket swing will now be very close to the edge of the ball, and you will put a lot of spin on the ball.



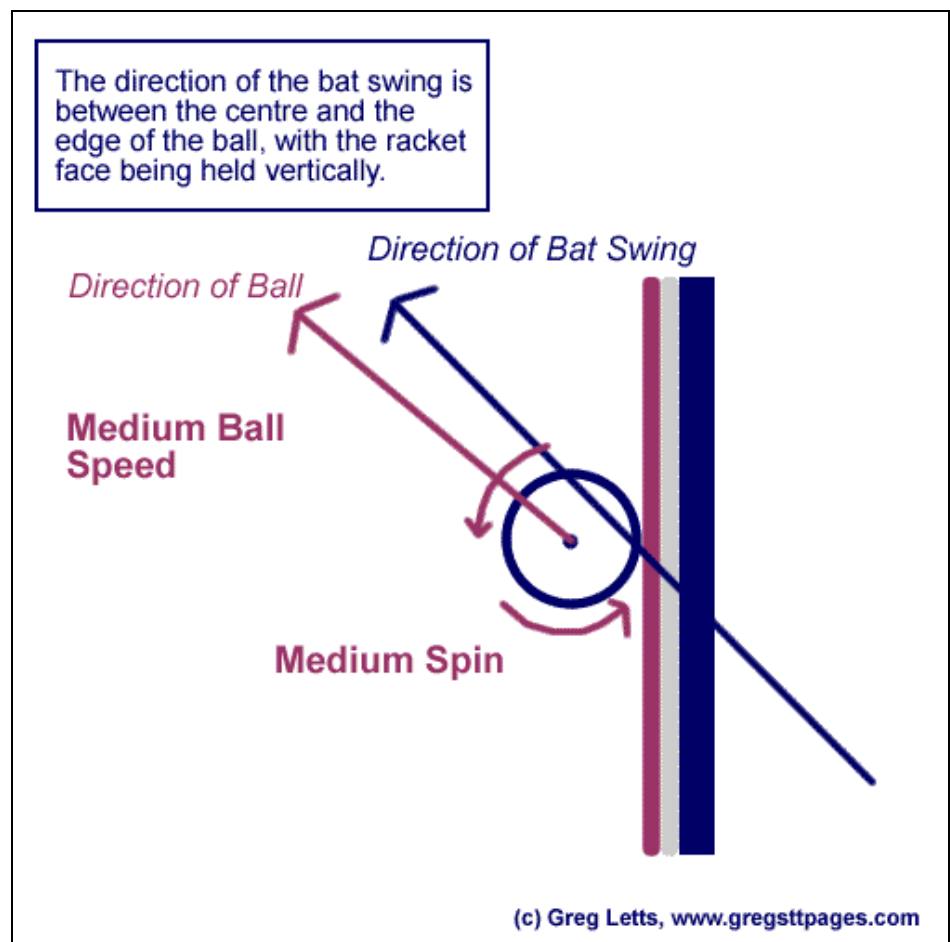
If you are using a grippy racket, then the ball will also go mainly upwards and a little bit forwards, and you will have put a lot of topspin on the ball.

## Putting Speed and Spin on the Ball

Now let's try putting some speed and spin on the ball at the same time.

Once again, hold your racket vertically, and drop a ball near the endline of the table. But this time swing at a roughly 45 degree angle upwards and forwards.

The line of your racket swing will be around the middle of the centre of the ball and the edge of the ball, and you will now put a medium amount of speed and a medium amount of spin on the ball.



Provided you are using a grippy racket, the ball should go mainly forwards and a little upwards, but with a good amount of topspin that will bring the ball down quickly towards the floor.

Don't worry about whether the ball actually hits the table or not, it's not important at this stage.

Try varying the angle of your racket swing a little bit, while still holding the racket vertically. You should notice that if you swing more horizontally, you generate more speed and less spin, while when you swing more vertically, you generate more spin and less speed.

You will also probably notice that the more horizontally you swing, the easier it is to actually make contact with the ball. When you swing mainly upwards, it's very easy to miss the ball completely, or hit it off the top edge of the racket.

Take special note of this - it is important and we will come back to this later in the eBook, when we use this knowledge to play the basic strokes of table tennis.

### **Heavy Spin in a Forward Direction**

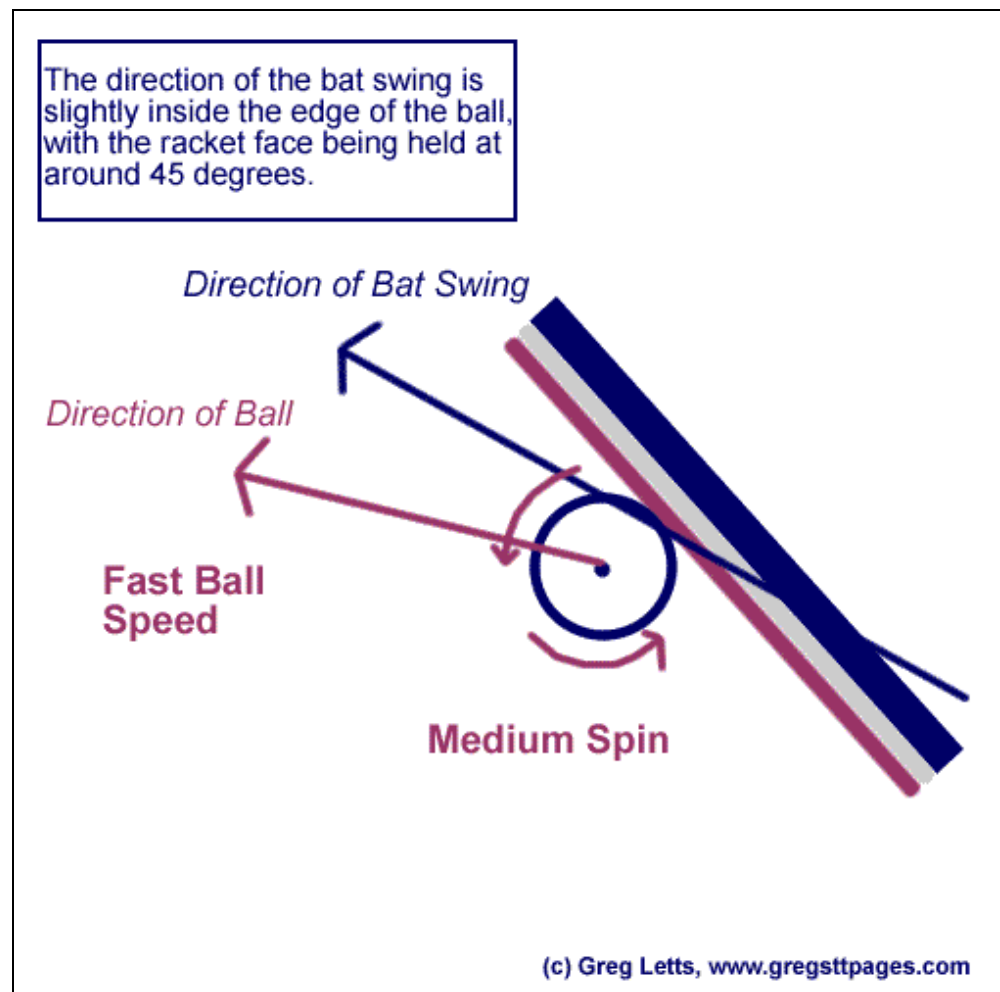
If you have ever watched high level players in action, you will have noticed that they can hit the ball hard and fast, but with plenty of topspin as well. Let's show you how that works.

Stand in the same place as before, but this time tilt your racket forward to about a 45 degree angle, so that the top of the racket is closer to the net than the bottom of the racket.

Drop the ball near the endline so that it bounces about 30cm high, and this time swing forward quickly at an angle slightly less than 45 degrees (be careful not to hit your racket on the end of the table).

If you make contact, the ball should travel quite fast and flat off your racket, before dipping quickly and landing on the table. If the ball goes up and off the end of the table, tilt your racket further forward, swing more forward, and the ball should go lower. If the ball goes into the net, tilt your racket a fraction backwards, swing a fraction more upwards, and the ball should go higher.





Don't worry if you miss the ball - it is very easy to miss during this exercise, because the ball is not travelling horizontally towards your racket, but just going up and down.

You have just performed a fast forehand topspin, or what is better known by table tennis players as a forehand loop. Later on in this eBook I'll teach you the correct technique for this killer stroke.

For the moment, try tilting your racket at different angles, and watch the results. Try to keep the angle of your racket swing fairly close to the angle you are holding your racket. You'll soon notice that you only have a fairly small number of racket and swing angles that will land the ball on the table. However, since your racket angle and swing angle are similar, the amount of speed and spin will also be fairly similar for each shot - only the ball trajectory should change significantly.

To finish our demonstration of creating spin, spend a few minutes holding the racket at one angle, while swinging the racket at a different angle. See what combination of angles still allows you to land the ball on the table, and take note of the different speed, spin and ball trajectories you produce.



*Shane Laugesen of New Zealand spinning a backhand loop*

Then try the same thing, but swing your racket at faster and slower speeds. Notice how hard it is to generate much spin with a slow swing. Also note how hard it is to land the ball on the table when hitting fast but without much spin, unless the ball is high. Notice that you can swing very, very quickly, but still produce a slow ball, provided you skim the ball enough.

Remember this stuff, because you'll need it later on when we start talking about reading spin, and risk vs reward when using spin.

## How do you Use Spin?

Using spin correctly is in many ways the heart and soul of modern table tennis, and is something that takes years to truly master. Fortunately, it doesn't take long to learn a few simple basics that will put you head and shoulders above other new players.

- When you want to hit hard and aggressively, use topspin. If the ball is well above the net, you can hit flatter and with less topspin. If the ball is below the net, you will need to sacrifice some speed and put more topspin on the ball in order to hit the ball up over the net and still bring it down on the other side of the table. If the ball is at net height or a little higher, stick to a standard forehand topspin with your normal amount of spin and speed.
- You can use sidespin to make it harder for the opponent to judge the flight of the ball, and more difficult for your opponent to work out how much topspin or backspin is on the ball. However, putting a lot of sidespin on the ball can increase the chances you will make a mistake yourself, and it also reduces the amount of topspin and backspin you can create, so be careful not to overdo it.
- When the ball is low and over the **playing surface**, so you don't have a lot of room to swing upwards, use backspin or flatter strokes with less pace, to give the ball time to drop onto the other side of the table.

**The playing surface is the top of the table tennis table.**



## HOW DO YOU READ SPIN?

While creating spin is no doubt one of the most fun aspects of table tennis, the flip side is that reading your opponent's spin is probably one of the most difficult things to do in ping-pong. While in most cases it isn't that hard to determine the *type* of spin on the ball, determining the *amount* of spin against a crafty opponent can be very, very difficult.

And while creating spin might be the heart and soul of table tennis, the ability to read what spin your opponent has put on the ball is where the rubber meets the road. If you can't read spin well, you'll never make past low intermediate ranks. It's just that important.

[Reading Spin video - YouTube](#) - [Download Page](#)

## Learning to Read Spin

Nothing beats experience when it comes to reading spin. The more hours you spend out there on the table, the better you'll get at picking the spin on the ball.

And while you can't pack 20 years of experience into a few weeks, there are still a number of things you can do to greatly accelerate the learning process. Here's what I tell my beginner students to help get them up to speed (and spin!) faster:

- The most important bit of advice is to **PAY ATTENTION**. Pay attention to what spin you put on the ball. Pay attention to how your opponent swings his bat, and what racket angle he is using. Pay attention to how the ball moves off his racket after he makes contact. If you don't pay attention to these things, you'll never be able to use any of the other pieces of advice below. I know it sounds like a lot to keep track of, but pay attention consistently for a week or two, and you'll find it becoming second nature.
- The faster your opponent's bat is moving, the more potential



there is for him spin the ball. But it is his racket angle and swing angle that will determine exactly how much of his bat speed is turned into spin. Remember back to when you were practicing spinning the ball, and the difference it made when you changed the racket angle and swing angle?

- A heavily spun ball makes a different, softer sound than a solidly hit ball, which makes more of a harsh, slapping sound. Pay attention to what your opponent's contact sounds like.
- If your opponent's swing was fast, but the ball is travelling slowly, there is a lot of spin on the ball.
- If your opponent's bat is tilted forwards and is going upwards and forwards at contact, he is putting topspin on the ball.
- If your opponent's bat is tilted backwards and is going downwards and forwards at contact, he is putting backspin on the ball.
- If your opponent's bat is moving from your right to your left at contact, the ball will curve to your right, and when it hits your bat, it will jump sideways to your left, away from where you are aiming.
- If your opponent's bat is moving from your left to your right at contact, the ball will curve to your left, and when it hits your bat, it will jump sideways to your right, away from where you are aiming.
- When your opponent uses sidespin, the amount of topspin or backspin he will produce will be less than what you would normally expect for the speed of his swing and the type of contact he makes, since some of the normal topspin or backspin will now be sidespin.
- It's OK to make mistakes when trying to read your opponent's spin - it happens to everybody. But when you do make a mistake, you must learn from it and try to use that information to do better the next time. Just a few seconds of thinking along the

lines of "Hey, that shot had a lot more spin than I thought - I must have misjudged my opponent's racket angle," after each mistake will greatly speed up your learning process.



*"I'll get it next time!" - Sophie Shu with a rueful smile at the Australian Open*

## HOW DO YOU HANDLE SPIN?

Once you have made your best guess about the type and amount of spin that is on the ball coming towards you, your next priority is to decide what to do about it.

The more hours you spend on the table in intelligent practice, the better you will get at dealing with your opponent's spin. Here's how to learn to handle spin as quickly as possible:

**Tilting the racket forwards so that the top of the racket is closer to the opponent than the bottom is called closing the racket.**

- If your opponent puts topspin on the ball, the ball will grip your racket and bounce upwards more than normal. The more topspin on the ball, the higher it will bounce up. You can counteract this by tilting your racket so that the top of your racket is closer to your opponent. This is called **closing** the racket. The more topspin on the ball, the more you should close the racket.

- Backspin does the same thing, but in the other direction - down. You can counteract this by tilting your racket so that the bottom of your racket is closer to your opponent. This is called **opening** the racket. The more backspin on the ball, the more you should open the racket.

**Tilting the racket backwards so that the bottom of the racket is closer to the opponent than the top is called opening the racket.**

- As mentioned above, sidespin will make the ball jump to one side or the other. If the ball is curving to your left, you can adjust for this by bending your wrist a little and holding your racket so that the right side of your racket is a little in front of the left side, and swinging as normal. The more sidespin is on the ball, the more you should hold the right side of the racket in front of the left side. Similarly, if the ball is curving to your right, hold your racket so that the left side of the racket is in front of the right side, and swing normally.

## CREATING AND HANDLING SPIN - RISK VS REWARD

Spinning the ball aggressively is a calculated gamble - you risk missing the ball more often, but the reward is that you can hit harder and put your opponent under more pressure. Plus putting your own spin on the ball helps make your opponent's spin less important, so you don't have to get a perfect read of the spin on the ball.

Not spinning the ball at all makes it less likely you will miss the ball, and all you need is a decent read of opponents spin, but you aren't likely to put much pressure on opponent, unless you hit the ball hard.

Spinning the ball a little makes it unlikely that you will miss the ball, but makes it very important that you have read your opponent's spin correctly. If your opponent is using medium or heavier spin and you get it a little bit wrong, you are likely to hit the ball too high or too low, or off the side of the table.

A simple set of rules for creating and handling spin are as follows:

- When your opponent doesn't spin the ball, or puts only a little bit of spin on the ball, you can use as much or little spin as you want.
- When your opponent puts a medium amount of spin on the ball, either use no spin and control the ball with your racket angle alone, or use a heavy spin to help you override your opponent's spin, and use your best guess about the right racket angle.
- When your opponent uses heavy spin - use no spin and control the ball by just adjusting your racket angle.



## KEEPING YOUR EYE ON THE BALL

"Keep your eye on the ball!" is a common piece of advice given to new table tennis players around the world.

Unfortunately, it is only half right.

If you watch the ball all the time, you can only play reactive table tennis, not pro-active table tennis. You will always be reacting to what has happened, instead of being able to anticipate what is going to occur.

This is a crucial skill to develop. Without the ability to "read" the game, you will never rise to an advanced level of play.

Here's how to develop this ability quickly:

Once your opponent has hit the ball, it is very important to be watching the ball closely, so that you can judge the speed, spin and flight path of the ball. This will allow you to make a better decision about where to move to, and what stroke to play. Watching the ball closely up until just before you hit it is vital to ensure that you are swinging your bat at the right spot to make good contact.

But once you have hit the ball, watching the ball becomes the wrong thing to do. You should now be paying more attention to what your opponent is doing - where is he moving, what type of stroke does he appear to be preparing to play, and how big is his backswing. Check his body language - does he look like he is hitting cross court, down the line, or right at you? If you learn to pay attention to your opponent after you have hit the ball, you will soon develop the ability to anticipate what he is about to do most of the time.

So instead of just watching the ball all the time, watch the ball when it is coming towards you, and then pay more attention to your opponent once you have hit the ball. Within a few weeks your ability to "read" the game will have improved out of sight!



## HOW TO PLAY THE BASIC STROKES

In the section, I'm going to focus on the fundamental table tennis strokes that you will need to start winning. These strokes cover all the aspects of the game that a new player needs to master, and they are all important to learn.

The basic strokes that you need to learn are:

- Forehand and Backhand Counterhit
- Backhand and Forehand Push
- Forehand and Backhand Block
- Serve
- Serve Return - Push and Flick
- Forehand Loop against Backspin and Topspin
- Smash

## ADVANCED STROKES

There are some advanced strokes that I'm not going to cover in this eBook, such as the Backhand Loop or Topspin Lob.

I'm not covering these strokes for several reasons, including:

- I'm trying to help new players start winning as soon as possible. If you spend too much time trying to learn all the advanced strokes, you won't have put enough hours into mastering the basics.
- Some advanced strokes are quite difficult to perform, and require many months of diligent practice to learn well enough to use in a match.
- Some advanced strokes (such as the lob) are relatively easy to

perform, but require many hours of experience to know when the best time is to use that particular stroke.

I do cover all the other advanced strokes on my website, but I would recommend that new players don't attempt to learn these strokes until they have a solid grasp of the basics.

### Important Note

While you can certainly learn a lot about how to play the basic strokes from watching the videos and reading my explanations, it is still quite difficult to get adequate feedback about how well you are performing these strokes when you attempt to learn them.

These videos and explanations can get you most of the way towards mastering these strokes - certainly well enough to dominate your family, friends and work mates. But if you think you might want to take things further, I can't recommend strongly enough the benefit of having a coach to monitor and correct your technique. The habits you build while learning these strokes are difficult to break later on, which is why a good coach that can help prevent you from forming any bad habits in the first place is so important.

If you really want to go all the way to elite level, a good personal coach is a must.

### A QUICK NOTE ON BALL TIMING

Before we get into the explanations of the different strokes, it's a good idea to introduce the concept of ball timing.

When you hitting the ball, you have three options:

- You can hit it on the way up
- You can hit it at the peak of the bounce
- You can hit it on the way down.

For new players, I would generally recommend a mixture of hitting

the ball on the way up, and hitting the ball at the peak of the bounce.

Once you get familiar with playing the basic strokes, you will notice that there are certain ball heights that are more comfortable to play strokes from than other heights.

- If the peak bounce of the ball is going to be at a comfortable height for you, then hit the ball near the peak of the bounce.
- If the ball is going to bounce higher than you can comfortably play your stroke, it's usually better to hit the ball on the way up (when it reaches a comfortable height) than on the way down - this will put you closer to the table and put more pressure on your opponent.
- If the ball is not going to bounce high enough to play your stroke comfortably, then the peak of the bounce is as good as you can get.

### Hit the Ball Above the Net

One other thing you will notice is that it is almost always better to hit the ball at above net height. If you hit the ball at below net height, you have to hit the ball upwards to clear the net, and then still bring the ball down on the other side. To do this with decent speed requires quite a bit of topspin on the ball, which can be difficult to do if you are hitting the ball from over the table, without much room for a back swing.

If you make contact at above net height, you can hit the ball horizontally (or even downwards, if the ball is high enough), which greatly increases the power you can use.

That said, now it's time to look at each of the basic strokes in detail.



## FOREHAND COUNTERHIT

In recent years, the forehand counterhit was almost always the first stroke a new player was taught. There has been a growing trend amongst coaches to teach new players the forehand loop first, but I still prefer to begin with the forehand counterhit, since it is easier for new players to learn. Your early success in mastering this shot will build your confidence and make you eager to move on to new challenges.

The typical forehand counterhit is played with medium speed and enough topspin is put on the ball to bring the ball down safely on your opponent's side of the table.



*Stephanie Sang setting up for a powerful forehand counterhit. Hard counterhits are also known as drives.*

The forehand counterhit also forms the basis of many other strokes - if the swing is minimized, it becomes the forehand block. If the swing is lengthened and sped up, it becomes the forehand drive attack. If the swing is lengthened, sped up, and minimal topspin is put on the ball, so that almost all the racket speed is turned into ball speed, the stroke becomes the forehand smash.

So as you can see, the forehand counterhit is a very useful stroke to know!

## When to Play the Forehand Counterhit

The standard forehand counterhit with medium speed and a little topspin should mainly be used against balls with spins ranging from light backspin to medium topspin. It can be used against almost all ball speeds, except perhaps the extremely high speed of an opponent's forehand smash, where a block would probably be a better choice.

## How to Play the Forehand Counterhit

Please watch the forehand counterhit video now. This will show you the standard technique for the stroke.

[Forehand Counterhit video – YouTube](#) - [Download Page](#)

While a video is worth more than a thousand words, here are a few points that you should take notice of when looking at the video:

- Most of the work of swinging the bat is done by the turning of the upper body, and the movement of the forearm around the elbow joint. There is actually very little movement of the upper arm.
- Note the amount of shoulder turn, which is around 90 degrees - since you can see the player's body turn to face the camera at the end of the back swing.
- The right foot is placed a little further back than the left foot, to allow a comfortable and balanced body turn.
- Contact is made in front of the body, around in line with the left knee.
- The swing is compact, with the bat being taken back only as far as the right knee, and swung forwards and upwards to finish pointing out in front of the body.
- The free arm is held in position, and is turned by the motion of

the upper body only.

- The player watches the ball until it is very close to the racket.
- The bat is taken back to around table height (basically around 6-9 inches / 15-22 cm below the expected contact height), and then swung forwards for about a foot / 30 cm before contact is made.
- The racket is held so that it is tilted forward, and that racket angle is maintained throughout the stroke until well after contact with the ball.
- From the front view of the stroke, you can see that contact is made outside the right foot, far enough to the side that the right elbow is several inches away from the body.
- The racket is taken back so that the bat is placed in line with the flight path of the ball.
- The follow through is not past the mid-point of the body.

### BACKHAND COUNTERHIT

The backhand counterhit is the second stroke that I want you to learn, since it is also a relatively easy stroke to pick up, and gives you the ability to play a topspin stroke from both sides.

The typical backhand counterhit is played with medium speed and enough topspin is put on the ball to bring the ball down safely on your opponent's side of the table.

The backhand counterhit is like the forehand counterhit in that it forms the basis of many other backhand strokes, such as the backhand block, drive, and smash.

There are two main differences between the forehand and backhand counterhit:

- The backhand counterhit does not require any body turn.



- The backhand counterhit is played in front of the body, not out to the side of the body.

### When to Play the Backhand Counterhit

As for the forehand counterhit.

### How to Play the Backhand Counterhit

Watch the backhand counterhit video now, while keeping an eye out for the points below.

[Backhand Counterhit video - YouTube](#) - [Download Page](#)



*Miao Miao playing her trademark backhand counterhit*

- The bat is swung by moving the forearm around the elbow joint. There is very little movement of the upper arm.
- There is a minimal amount of shoulder turn. The right shoulder is brought forward a few inches in order to bring the right elbow in front of the body, making a larger backswing possible.



- Note that the backhand counterhit is played in essentially the same stance as the forehand counterhit, with the right foot a little behind the left foot.
- Contact is made in front of the body, around in line with the toes of the left foot.
- The swing is compact, with the bat being taken back only as far as the left knee, and swung forwards and upwards to finish pointing out in front of the body.
- The free arm is held in position, and is not moved at all.
- The player watches the ball until it is very close to the racket.
- The bat is taken back to around 6 inches / 15 cm below the expected contact height, and then swung forwards for about a foot / 30 cm before contact is made.
- The racket is held so that it is tilted forward, and that racket angle is maintained throughout the stroke until well after contact with the ball.
- From the front view of the stroke, you can see that contact is made in front of the body, generally between the navel and the left hip. This contact point puts the right elbow well outside the body at contact.
- The racket is taken back so that the bat is placed in line with the flight path of the ball.
- The follow through finishes when the right forearm and tip of the racket are pointing forward.

## BACKHAND PUSH

Once you can play a forehand and backhand counterhit, it's time to learn how to play a backspin stroke from both sides as well.



*Natalie Paterson playing a well balanced backhand push*

I want you to learn the backhand push as your third basic stroke. The backhand push is a very natural stroke to play, and it is easier to learn than the forehand push, which most players find a little bit more difficult due to the way our elbow joints work.

The typical backhand push is played with slow to slow-medium speed, and with a range of spin varying from very light to very heavy backspin.

### When to Play the Backhand Push

I recommend that you use the backhand push as a control stroke to return serves that have backspin, and to return your opponent's pushes while you wait for a ball that you can attack with confidence.

**A shot played with no spin is often called a float ball or dead ball.**

Remember to vary the spin on your pushes - I would recommend varying between *float*, light backspin and medium backspin. Heavy backspin can be used, but only if you have fully mastered the stroke, since it greatly increases the difficulty of the shot - you are more

likely to miss the ball, and more likely to accidentally hit the ball off the end of the table.

By changing your swing speed, racket angle and amount of wrist used, you can make it very hard for your opponent to know exactly how much backspin you have put on the ball, thus increasing the chances he will make a mistake.

### How to Play the Backhand Push

Watch the video for the backhand push, keeping an eye out for the points below.

[Backhand Push video – YouTube](#) - [Download Page](#)

- The bat is swung by moving the forearm around the elbow joint. There is very little movement of the upper arm.
- There is a minimal amount of shoulder turn. The right shoulder is brought forward a few inches in order to bring the right elbow in front of the body, making the swing more comfortable.
- Note that the backhand push is played in essentially the same stance as the forehand and backhand counterhit, with the right foot a little behind the left foot.
- Contact is made in front of the body, around in line with the toes of the left foot.
- The swing is compact, with the bat being taken back only as far as the left knee, and swung horizontally forwards to finish pointing out in front of the body.
- The free arm is held in position, and is not moved at all.
- The player watches the ball until it is very close to the racket.
- The bat is taken back to around the same height as the player wants to make contact, and then swung forwards for about 9

inches to a foot before contact is made.

- The racket is held so that it is tilted backwards, and that racket angle is maintained throughout the stroke until well after contact with the ball.
- From the front view of the stroke, you can see that contact is made in front of the body, generally between the navel and the left hip. This contact point puts the right elbow well outside the body at contact.
- The racket is taken back so that the bat is placed in line with the flight path of the ball.
- The follow through finishes when the right forearm and tip of the racket are pointing forward.

## FOREHAND PUSH

Once you have mastered the backhand push, it's time to move on to the forehand push. The forehand push is usually the stroke most new players have the most trouble with, since the optimal technique for this shot is not intuitive. An experienced coach can easily tell if a player is self taught just by watching him push a few balls with his forehand!

Don't worry, I'll show you the trick that you need to use to make your forehand push just as consistent as your backhand push. It's not hard to do, but it does feel a little against your natural instincts at first. Stick with it and you'll soon master this stroke.

The typical forehand push is played with slow to slow-medium speed, and with a range of spin varying from very light to very heavy backspin.



## When to Play the Forehand Push

As for the backhand push, but with an important exception. As your forehand loop and footwork improves, you will find it easier to attack balls that have been pushed to your forehand.

Only use the forehand push against those balls you do not feel confident of making a successful forehand loop attack. Any other long backspin balls should be attacked with your forehand loop.

## How to Play the Forehand Push

Watch the video for the forehand push, keeping an eye out for the points below.

[Forehand Push video – YouTube](#) - [Download Page](#)



*Scott Houston performing a deft forehand push*

- The main trick which you need to use to play the forehand push comfortably and consistently is this - make sure that you dip your right shoulder during your back swing. While almost all the other table tennis strokes are better played with the shoulders fairly level, the forehand push is best played with the playing shoulder lower than the free shoulder.
- The shoulder dip brings your forearm and elbow joint into a position where your bat can now be swung by moving the forearm around the elbow joint, as well as by turning the upper body. There is very little movement of the upper arm.

- There is a small amount of shoulder turn in the forehand push, around 45 degrees is fairly typical.
- Note that the forehand push is played in essentially the same stance as the forehand and backhand counterhits, with the right foot a little behind the left foot.
- Contact is made in front of the body, around in line with the left knee.
- The swing is compact, with the bat being taken back only as far as the right knee, and swung horizontally forwards to finish pointing out in front of the body.
- The free arm is held in position, and is not moved at all.
- The player watches the ball until it is very close to the racket.
- The bat is taken back to around the same height as the player wants to make contact, and then swung forwards for about a 9 inches to a foot before contact is made. After contact, the bat moves upward, which is the natural path of the swing.
- The racket is held so that it is tilted backwards, and that racket angle is maintained throughout the stroke until well after contact with the ball.
- From the front view of the stroke, you can see that contact is made outside the right foot, far enough to the side that the right elbow is several inches away from the body.
- The racket is taken back so that the bat is placed in line with the flight path of the ball.
- The follow through is not past the mid-point of the body.
- From the front view, the amount of dipping of the right shoulder is obvious.

## FOREHAND / BACKHAND BLOCK

Now that you can perform the basic topspin and backspin strokes from both sides, I want you to learn the forehand and backhand block.

I want you to learn the block before tackling the forehand loop for a couple of reasons:

- The block is a pretty simple stroke to pick up quickly, since it requires little or no swing, just the ability to set the correct racket angle.
- Learning the block will allow you to handle any strong attacks from your opponent.

The block is an extremely shortened version of the counterhit, with a swing length ranging from a few inches to no swing at all.

### When to Play the Forehand / Backhand Block

The block is your bread and butter answer to any strong attacks from your opponents. It should be used to return heavy topspin balls (fast or slow loops), or fast attacks from your opponent when you don't have time to move back from the table.

### How to Play the Forehand Block

Watch the video for the forehand block, keeping an eye out for the points below.

[Forehand Block video – YouTube](#) - [Download Page](#)

- You will see that the basic forehand block is not that different from the forehand counterhit - in fact, it can be hard to tell the difference between an aggressive block and an ordinary counterhit - the length of the back swing is the best clue.
- The amount of back swing for the forehand block is less than for a forehand counterhit. The racket is basically brought back into

the position where contact will be made.

- Note that the bat is still brought back into position via the turning of the body and waist, at least against balls that land deep on the table.
- Against balls that land short on the table, you will need to reach forward to hit the ball at just above net height. These balls should still be played out to the side of your body for easy control. If you play the ball directly in front of your body, you will have to bend your wrist a lot to make the shot, increasing the chances of making a mistake. For short balls that you want to block down the line, you may need to bend your wrist a little to get the right bat angle.
- Try to make contact with the ball at a little above net height, so that you can hit the ball forwards. If you hit the ball at below net height, you have to hit the ball upwards to get it over the net, limiting how fast you can block the ball on aggressive blocks.
- Don't bother trying to apply topspin yourself when blocking the ball - this makes it more difficult to get the contact right, which is the last thing you need when you are trying to block a ball that has been hit quickly or with heavy spin. Just tilt the bat forward to control the topspin on the ball, and let it bounce off your bat. If you want to add a little more pace, swing forwards a few inches before making contact.
- Although the forward swing is short, notice that the short follow through is blended straight into the process of moving the bat back into the ready position. Once you have hit the ball, don't hold your bat there for a long time - get back into your ready position.



## How to Play the Backhand Block

The backhand block is very similar to the forehand block, so I'll just mention the important differences below.

[Backhand Block video – YouTube](#) - [Download Page](#)

Watch the video for the backhand block, keeping an eye out for the points below.



*Justin Han controlling the ball with a solid backhand block*

- The contact point is the same as for the backhand counterhit - between your navel and left hip. Once again, the typical contact point is a little further in front of the body (from a side view perspective) for the backhand block as compared to the forehand block.
- The bat is brought back into position by moving the right shoulder and elbow forward a little, then swinging the bat to the left around the elbow joint.

## SERVE

The serve is definitely one of the most important strokes in table tennis, and I'd recommend that you don't wait to start practicing it. Make sure that every training session you do has some service practice included.

When it comes to the serve for new players, I'm a firm believer that quality is more important than quantity - being able to only serve a few serves perfectly is much better than being able to serve twenty different serves badly. So I'm going to focus on one basic serve technique - the forehand pendulum serve - which can easily be used to serve almost any mixture of backspin, sidespin, and topspin.

In order to teach the serve, it is useful to break it up into two simple variations, which allow the slight differences in technique to be seen. These variations are:

- Forehand Pendulum Serve with Backspin/Sidespin
- Forehand Pendulum Serve with Topspin/Sidespin

## Double Bounce vs Long Serves

Before I start demonstrating the forehand pendulum serve, I need to give you a quick explanation of double bounce and long serves. You must understand the difference between a good double bounce or long serve, and a bad serve that is too short or mid table.

**A double bounce serve would bounce twice on the opponent's side of the table, if not played by the opponent.**

A **double bounce serve** is a serve that if left alone by the opponent, would bounce twice on his side of the table, with the second bounce a few inches inside the endline. Ideally, the serve should also be low over the net. The bounce on your side of the table should be around mid-table.

Double bounce serves are currently the main option used by most advanced table tennis players, and with good reason, as I'll explain below.

- Double bounce serves are difficult to attack strongly. Your opponent cannot use a loop to attack the ball, since there is no room to take a back swing, provided the ball is served low and with the second bounce a few inches inside the endline.
- If your opponent uses a flick or counterhit to return the ball, he will have contact the ball at below net height. This will reduce the amount of speed he can put on the ball, since he must hit the ball up to get it over the net, and without much topspin to bring the ball down, since he hasn't got much room to take a back swing.
- A serve that is too short allows your opponent to hit the ball from near the net, giving him more angles to exploit, and making it much easier to drop the ball short himself, preventing you from attacking his return. A good double bounce serve forces the opponent to return the ball from quite far away from the net, reducing his possible angles, and making it very difficult for him to drop the ball short enough to make it bounce twice on your side of the table. This means the chances are high that the ball will bounce only once on your side of the table, giving you plenty of room to take a big back swing for your forehand loop.

**Long serves bounce only once on the opponent's side of the table, but the bounce should be near the sideline or endline.**

In contrast, a *long serve* should only bounce once on the opponent's side of the table, but that bounce should be as close to the endline (for relatively straight serves) or sideline (for widely angled serves) as possible. If the first bounce is more in the middle of the table, this is very easy for your opponent to attack without having to shift his position much, and you will be starting the rally on the defensive.

In order to achieve a good long serve, the ball is usually hit near your own endline first, and with plenty of spin and speed.

Since a long serve will always give the opponent the chance to take a full swing, you must make the serve as difficult to hit as possible, by using one or more of the following methods:



- Surprise the opponent - make your service motion look like that for a double bounce serve, then sneakily add some extra pace by using some extra wrist snap or swing speed. You can catch unsuspecting opponents as they step into to receive your short service.



*Kane Townsend serving. Note the loosened grip on the racket.*

- Vary the placement - aim wide to the sidelines, or straight into his playing elbow. Flatfooted opponents can often be caught standing still.
- Vary the spin type - fast long serves don't give the opponent much time to read the spin on the ball, and the long serve gives the ball plenty of chance to curve in flight and kick off the table too - switch between backspin/sidespin and topspin/sidespin serves.

It's difficult to give an exact figure for how often you should serve double bounce serves vs long serves, since a lot depends on the quality of your serves, and your opponent's ability to handle short and long serves. But if you start with a ratio of say 80% double bounce serves to 20% long serves, and then adjust up or down depending on how well your opponent is dealing with your short vs long serves, you won't go far wrong.





*William Henzell in the middle of a high toss pendulum serve*

## Forehand Pendulum Backspin/Sidespin Serve

The serve is called a pendulum serve because the movement of the racket looks like the pendulum of a grandfather clock.

When performing this serve, it is normal to use different mixtures of backspin and sidespin, which make it harder for the receiver to work out just how much of each type of spin is on the ball. The serve can be performed with pure backspin, but that generally makes it easier for the opponent to read the spin, so this variation is not used as often.

Watch the video for the forehand pendulum serve, keeping an eye out for the points below.

[Forehand Pendulum Serve video - YouTube](#) - [Download Page](#)

- You will perform the serve from your backhand corner. The sidespin you put on the ball will make it difficult for the opponent to hit the ball wide to your forehand. Most returns

from your opponent should land between the middle of the table and your backhand.

- Relax your thumb and index finger on the bat, and loosen the bottom three fingers of your hand, to allow your bat more freedom of movement. The bottom three fingers can also be clamped shut just before contact to add to the snapping of the racket head. Other players prefer to drop the bottom three fingers from the handle completely while serving, to give even more freedom of movement.
- The height of the ball toss is up to you. A higher ball toss with give more downward speed when the ball falls, allowing more spin to be applied, but at the risk of serving long due to the extra speed it gives the serve. I'd recommend sticking to a consistent service height, so that your opponent cannot tell what type of serve you are using by the height of your toss.
- While learning the serve, you may find it useful to watch the ball in order to get more consistent contact. Once you have mastered the serve, you probably won't need to look at the ball, since you will control the position of the ball via your ball toss.
- Try to make contact with the ball just a few inches higher than the net. If you hit the ball at below net height, you'll tend to hit the ball into the net a lot. If you hit the ball more than 6 inches or so above net height, you'll find it difficult to keep the serve low and short.
- Note that for double bounce serves the ball is hit down into the table, landing around mid table on the server's side. Don't hit the ball too near your endline or the net, and don't try to hit the ball up and let it drop on the table, since a small mistake in contact will result in you serving a fault. Just spin the ball directly into the middle of the table.

- Don't try to barely skim the ball while first learning the serve. Start with a small amount of wrist and a fairly solid contact that gives a little spin, and as your consistency improves, try to skim the ball a little more.
- Once you have achieved consistent success at skimming the ball, work at steadily increasing the amount of wrist snap you use, to increase the amount of spin you can produce.
- Note that contact is made with the bat pointing downwards and sideways. The more horizontal the racket is, the more backspin will be on the ball. The more downwards the racket is facing, the more sidespin will be produced.
- You can make the serve even more difficult to read by changing the amount of wrist snap you use, as well as the speed of your swing. These are advanced techniques that increase the risk of making a mistake, so only use these when you have completely mastered the basic serve.
- Once you have finished the serve motion - don't just stand there! Start anticipating your opponent's return, and move towards the best location to handle it.

### Forehand Pendulum Topspin/Sidespin Serve

The forehand pendulum topspin/sidespin serve is essentially the same as the backspin/sidespin serve, but with topspin in place of backspin.

One thing to be aware of is that the use of topspin tends to make the ball kick forward a little more, making it much more difficult to keep the ball short, especially when serving down the line. So always be ready for the possibility that you might make a mistake and serve a fraction too long, which your opponent can then attack.

Here are the important differences between the topspin/sidespin serve and the backspin/sidespin version.

**When you serve, deceiving your opponent about the amount and type of spin is more important than just spinning the ball heavily.**

- You can see that although the bat is usually quite angled underneath the ball when serving backspin and sidespin, I don't actually angle the bat all that much on top of the ball when serving topspin. This is because I want my topspin/sidespin serve to look quite similar to my backspin/sidespin serve, increasing the chances that my opponent will make a mistake in reading the spin. It also means that I am less likely to have the topspin carry the ball off the end of the table on the first bounce if I make a small mistake in my contact with the ball.
- If your opponent reads the serve correctly, he is likely to flick the ball (if it is short) or attack the ball (if it is long). So be ready to have a fast topspin return come back at you!
- It is very difficult to produce a pure topspin ball with this serve, since you would have to hold your bat at a fairly awkward angle. Most topspin/sidespin serves have a good amount of sidespin, with light to medium amounts of topspin.

### Learning Other Serves

There are many other types of serves that can be used, all of which can be useful. Once you can perform the forehand pendulum serve consistently with good spin variation, you should definitely start expanding your repertoire of serves - the more serves you can master, the better!

Once you have mastered the forehand pendulum serve, I'd recommend visiting my website to check out demonstrations of the other main serves used in table tennis today.



## RETURN OF SERVE

While you are learning to serve properly, you should also be spending some time with your training partner learning to return serve well.



*Wade Townsend preparing to play a forehand flick*

Against short or long serves with backspin, the forehand and backhand push will serve you well to begin with (once you have mastered the forehand loop, long backspin serves to your forehand and middle can be attacked). Against long topspin serves, you can use a counterhit or loop. But against short serves with topspin or with topspin and sidespin, there is another technique you can use - the flick (or flip).

### The Flick

The flick is basically a mini-topspin that is played over the table against low balls, where you don't have much room to take a back swing due to the table surface getting in the way.

### When to Play the Flick

I'd recommend that new players should only use the flick against short serves that have sidespin or a mixture of sidespin and topspin. New players could also use the flick against serves with light backspin or light backspin and sidespin, but there is a significant risk

that you might misread the amount of backspin on the ball, and end up hitting the ball into the net. So only try the flick against light backspin balls if you are certain about how much backspin is on the ball.

### How to Play the Forehand Flick

Watch the video for the forehand flick, keeping an eye out for the points below.

[The Forehand Flick video - YouTube](#) - [Download Page](#)

- You will need to take a big step in with your right foot to reach the ball. This will automatically turn your body so that your right shoulder is well in front of your left shoulder.
- Stay low when reaching for the ball, and maintain your forward lean.
- Drop your racket so that it is just above the table, and give your racket a slight forward tilt. Keep your racket elbow well above the table, since this will give you a better forearm snap and put more power and spin in your flick.
- You can cock your wrist to allow the wrist to be snapped through the stroke as well. I'd recommend making sure that your wrist is snapped in the same direction as your forearm is moving, otherwise you can reduce your consistency.
- The stroke is very short, but it should feel quick and smooth, not jerky.
- The swing is forwards and upwards. It should be a little more upwards against backspin balls, and a little more forwards against topspin balls.
- Because of the position of your body and playing arm, you will need to bend or "break" your wrist to flick down the line. Make

sure that when you snap your forearm and wrist, you snap them towards your target for as long as you can.

- The front view shows that the ball is still taken out to the side of the body, not directly in front of the body.
- Don't start pushing off your right leg to get away from the table until you have completed the stroke, or else you risk pulling away from the ball before you have hit it, which will hurt your consistency.

### How to Play the Backhand Flick



*David Powell performing a backhand flick from his forehand corner*

In this video demonstration, I'm showing the traditional version of the backhand flick that has been used for many years. There is a more recent and more aggressive version known as the "banana" or "chiquita" flick, but this version is a little outside the skill set for new players, as it takes much longer to master.

Watch the video for the backhand flick, keeping an eye out for the points below.

[The Backhand Flick video - YouTube](#) - [Download Page](#)



- You will notice that the backhand flick can be performed by stepping in with your left or right foot. Either method is perfectly acceptable, but they have different advantages and disadvantages.
- If you step in with your left foot, it's a little more difficult to flick down the line, but recovery is a bit easier, since you are basically facing in the right direction for your next stroke.
- If you step in with your right foot, it's easier to flick down the line, but you have to make sure that you recover quickly, since your body is facing in the wrong direction for your next stroke.
- Drop your racket so that it is just above the table, and give your racket a slight forward tilt. Keep your racket elbow well above the table, since this will give you a better forearm snap and put more power and spin in your flick.
- Because of the way your wrist works, you have much more ability to use wrist snap on your backhand flick compared to your forehand flick. Most players will point the racket tip straight down towards the table at the end of the back swing, and some players will cock the racket even further back than that, so that the racket tip actually points towards their right.
- Again, I'd recommend making sure that your wrist is snapped in the same direction as your forearm is moving, otherwise you can reduce your consistency.
- Stay low when reaching for the ball, and maintain your forward lean.
- The stroke is very short, but it should still be smooth and not jerky.
- The swing is forwards and upwards. It should be a little more upwards against backspin balls, and a little more forwards against topspin balls.



- If you step in with your left foot, you will probably need to bend or "break" your wrist to flick down the line. Make sure that when you snap your forearm and wrist, you snap them towards the target for as long as you can.
- The front view shows that the ball is taken out in front of the body, generally between your navel and left hip.
- Don't start pushing off your front leg to get away from the table until you have completed the stroke, or else you risk pulling away from the ball before you have hit it, which will hurt your consistency.

### TIME TO BRING OUT THE BIG GUNS

At this stage, if you have spent time mastering the above basic strokes, you would be able to go into competition with other new players and win more than your share of matches. You won't have any holes in your game that another new player can exploit, and you'll be able to handle whatever your opponent can throw at you, while still being able to attack yourself when you get the chance.

But instead of stopping there, let's take things one step further and add a couple of strokes to your arsenal that will give you the ability to use overwhelming force against your opponent. If you have put in the work to master the other basic strokes, you won't find it too difficult to extend what you have already learned and apply it correctly to help you learn these strokes quickly.

These killer strokes are the Forehand Loop, and the Forehand Smash.

**Important Note:** The type of contact used in the forehand loop involves much more brushing of the ball compared to a counterhit. The video below demonstrates a quick and easy way to learn the basic loop brushing technique.

[Learn to Forehand Loop Drill video - YouTube](#) - [Download Page](#)

## FOREHAND LOOP

If there is one stroke that you could say revolutionised the game of table tennis, it is the forehand loop. Make no mistake, this is the killer stroke of table tennis. Nothing will move you up from beginner to intermediate ranks faster than being able to forehand loop consistently.

**Important Note:** While the forehand loop uses many of the same fundamentals that you learned for the forehand counterhit, there is one major difference between the two strokes - the skimming of the ball which produces the high amount of topspin required.

When you play a forehand counterhit, you are concentrating on producing a ball with medium to high speed, and just enough topspin to bring the ball safely down on the table. Although your racket is tilted slightly, you are basically swinging your racket through the flight path of the ball for quite a significant amount of time around the point of contact, which gives you a large margin for error.

When playing a forehand loop, things are different. Since the emphasis is now on producing extremely heavy topspin along with medium to fast speed, your racket only intersects the flight path of the ball for a very brief time. Add to the fact that you are now trying to skim the ball more instead of making solid contact, and you can see that your chances of missing the ball increase significantly.

While you are learning the forehand loop, you will find yourself hitting the top edge of your racket much more often, as well as completely missing the ball. This is a normal part of the learning process, so don't panic!

### Why Bother with the Forehand Loop?

If the forehand loop is so difficult to play, why does anybody bother learning it? The answer is simple - once the basic technique is mastered, the hugely increased reward you get for playing this stroke greatly outweighs the moderately increased risk of making a mistake.

Put plainly, once you have learned the basic forehand loop technique, your ability to hit winners or set up easy attacks goes up like a rocket, while your chance of making a mistake goes up only a little.

The trick is surviving the sometimes frustrating process of mastering the basic loop technique!

While the forehand loop is one basic stroke, there are some important differences in how you play it against backspin balls, and how you play the stroke against blocked or topspin balls.

We'll take a look at both versions of the stroke, starting with the forehand loop against backspin.



*Kim Min Hee of Korea playing a powerful forehand loop vs backspin*

## Forehand Loop vs Backspin

Most players learn to loop against blocked or topspin balls first, since it is easier for their training partner to block their loop back - it makes for a simple training drill.

I want you to learn to loop against a backspin ball first, for one main reason - in most rallies, the first loop that you will play will be against a pushed ball from your opponent. Your opponent will then block, counterdrive or **counterloop** the ball, and you will now continue to loop against block or topspin.

If you can't loop this first pushed ball consistently, you will never get to the part of the rally where you loop against a blocked or topspin ball.

## When to Play the Forehand Loop vs Backspin

In matches, if you are just starting to learn the forehand loop against backspin, you should restrict yourself to only using this shot when the ball is easy for you to attack. This usually means that the ball is landing mid-table, and placed so that you do not have to move your feet much to reach the ball, without too much spin on the ball.

As you improve your technique and footwork, you will find that the range of balls that you can attack will widen. Once you have mastered the stroke, you will be able to attack almost any backspin ball that bounces off the end of the table between the middle of your body and your wide forehand - around three quarters of the table.

## How to Play the Forehand Loop vs Backspin

Watch the video for the forehand loop against backspin, keeping an eye out for the points below.

[The Forehand Loop vs Backspin video - YouTube](#) - [Download Page](#)

- The same basic ready stance is used, with some small but

**You perform a counterloop when you return your opponent's loop with a loop of your own.**



important modifications. The knees are bent a little more to allow the player to get lower and push up during the forward swing, adding to the lift on the ball. The right foot is also turned during the back swing so that the toes point out to the side, allowing the player to comfortably bend his right knee and put more weight on the right leg.

- The bat is brought back behind the right knee via the turning of the body and the lowering of the forearm. Note that there is not much movement of the arm around the shoulder joint itself.
- The forward swing is started by pushing off with the legs and turning the waist and shoulders, with the snapping of the forearm next, and the snapping of the wrist last. You can see this effect in the slow motion part of the video - watch how the distance between the free arm and playing arm suddenly widens at the beginning of the forward swing, then contracts as the forearm is snapped through the ball and the right arm catches up to the left arm again.
- Contact is made with the ball at around waist height, in line with the left knee from the side view perspective.
- Note that not all players jump in the air when rotating their body back during the forward swing. It's perfectly OK to keep the feet on the ground if you prefer - the jump in the air is just the way I was taught when first learning to loop, and it's stuck with me over the years.
- The forward swing stops at around head height, with the playing elbow stopping below shoulder height.
- The swing is forwards and upwards in a relatively straight line until just after contact, at which point the swing naturally curves upwards.
- Note that the lifting of the left shoulder during the forward swing

is not recommended - it is better to keep both shoulders relatively level throughout the swing. The left shoulder lift is a bad habit I developed when learning the shot that has proven difficult to get rid of.

- The ball is given plenty of clearance over the net - at least 6 - 9 inches to allow for any misreading of the amount of backspin.
- From the front view, it is clear that contact is made well to the side of the body, with the playing elbow being kept well clear of the body to give an unobstructed swing.
- Even though the swing is large and fast, it is clear that the racket does not cross the centre line of the body. The player finishes the stroke in a balanced position.

### Forehand Loop vs Topspin

Once you can successfully perform a forehand loop against a push at least 80% of the time, you are ready to start practicing your forehand loop against a block or topspin.

### When to Play the Forehand Loop vs Topspin

I'd recommend that new players stick to using the forehand loop vs topspin against any blocked balls from their opponent, as well as against any counterhits that are slow enough to give you plenty of time to complete the larger loop swing.

Against very fast counterhits, it is probably better to counterhit or block the ball, since you may not have enough time to set up your swing.

Against loops from your opponent, I would recommend blocking the ball. More advanced players often move back from the table and counterloop the ball back, but this requires very consistent technique and excellent footwork which is usually beyond the ability of a new player. Stick to blocking the ball for now.

## How to Play the Forehand Loop vs Topspin

The forehand loop vs topspin is fairly similar to the loop vs backspin, so I'll just point out the important differences.

Watch the video for the forehand loop against topspin, keeping an eye out for the points below.

[The Forehand Loop vs Topspin video - YouTube](#) - [Download Page](#)

- The same basic ready stance is used as for looping against backspin, but you'll notice that the amount of knee bend is less, since the topspin ball is bouncing higher than the backspin ball.
- The bat is still brought back behind the right knee from the front view, but a little higher - around mid-thigh - via the turning of the body and the straightening of the playing arm.



*Teng Teng Liu of New Zealand about to play a strong forehand loop*

- Note that the racket finishes further in front of the head, since the swing is a little more forwards than against backspin.
- The tilt of the racket is slightly further forward compared to the racket angle vs backspin.

## FOREHAND SMASH

The final basic stroke I recommend that you learn is the forehand smash against high balls. By high balls, we are talking chest height or higher.

### When to Play the Forehand Smash

Typically, the forehand smash is set up in one of two ways:

- Your opponent has deliberately moved back from the table, and is lobbing the ball high in the air (usually with a lot of topspin), so that the ball bounces high and deep on your side of the court, and the topspin on the ball makes it kick forward as well.
- You have played a strong loop attack, and your opponent has made a mistake in reading of the spin, and has set his bat angle incorrectly, so that the ball pops up high from his bat.

While it is possible to smash balls that are a bit lower than chest height (and you can certainly do so if the ball lands near the net), in general, I'd recommend that new players should continue to loop balls that bounce below chest height, since it means that you don't have to change your stroke, and usually gives you more margin for error. Changing from a fairly spinny loop swing to a flat smash is something that causes many new players to make a mistake, since they don't always make the proper adjustments.

### How to Play the Forehand Smash

Like the forehand loop, the smash uses a long, fast swing, but for the smash the racket speed is turned mainly into ball speed, with minimal spin. Since the smash is usually played against high balls, the ball is hit directly down deep into the opponent's court, with no need to worry about clearing the net.





*Kim Min Hee of Korea putting everything she's got into a forehand smash*

Watch the video for the forehand smash against high balls, keeping an eye out for the points below.

[The Forehand Smash video - YouTube](#) - [Download Page](#)

- The same basic ready stance is used as for the forehand loop, with some small but important modifications. Since the ball is high, there is not too much need to get a deep knee bend. However, some knee bend is still needed to allow you to push your body weight forward to add power to the stroke.
- The right foot is also turned during the back swing so that the toes point out to the side, allowing the player to comfortably bend his right knee and put more weight on the right leg. Much more body weight is put on the back foot during the back swing

for the smash, when compared to the forehand loop. This extra weight shift takes longer, but this is OK because you will have more time to play the higher ball. Also, pay attention to how the player finishes with all his weight on his left leg, before the right leg is quickly brought down.

- You can see that I bring my bat back down to waist level, before lifting my elbow up and raising my racket during the forward swing. I use this method due to many years of playing with slow rubbers, which made it difficult to generate good power when smashing. This technique allowed me to add significant topspin and sidespin to my smash without sacrificing much speed, making it harder for my opponent to return the ball due to the amount of kick off his racket. Many other players will prepare to smash the ball by taking their racket straight back to shoulder level, allowing them to swing directly forward and down, giving maximum power. When combined with a fast blade and fast rubbers, this results in a devastatingly fast smash.
- Note that there is much more swinging of the upper arm around the shoulder joint than for the forehand loop, resulting in a follow through that crosses far to the left of the player. This takes longer to recover, but this is compensated for by the fact that you have more time to get back into position since your opponent is far away from the table.
- For very high bouncing balls, it's best to stick with a consistent contact point. You can notice that I prefer to hit these high balls just above head height.
- The forward swing should be forwards and downwards, at such an angle that the ball will land deep on the opponent's court, but not right on the endline. If you aim too deep, you risk missing the table, while if you land the ball too short on the table, the ball will go too much downwards and not enough forwards, making it bounce high in the air and giving your opponent plenty

of time to chase the ball down and do another lob if he has plenty of court space.

- If court space is limited, it can sometimes be useful to hit the ball more downwards than forwards, in the hope of bouncing it over your opponent's head, since he won't be able to get far enough back to wait for it to come down. This method can also be used to hit smashes that are highly angled to the sides of the court, forcing your opponent to jump barriers to reach the ball. A very useful technique if you are on a court lined with spectators or a wall!



*David Zalcberg is the king of swing!*





## TRAINING FOR TABLE TENNIS

Why do you need to bother with training for table tennis? The reason is this:

*Table tennis training helps you get closer to your goals, faster.*

If you have no goals, or don't care about how fast you achieve them, then you don't need to train.

But if your goal is to win more often, and you are in a hurry to start winning, then training is a must.

In order to get you winning as quickly as possible, you need to be working on the things that are essential to that process, and forget about the things you don't need.

In this section, I'm going to outline a plan for a simple 1 hour training session that covers all the essential skills you'll need to start winning right away. You'll practice the basic stroke techniques that you'll need to hit the ball correctly, you'll train the simple footwork steps that will allow you to move around the court quickly and efficiently, and you'll learn to put all of these together to form the basis of a solid table tennis style.

### OH MY GOD! I'VE GOTTEN WORSE!

To begin with, don't be surprised if you actually get worse while you are learning these new techniques. You'll struggle to win a game against family members and workmates that you used to beat with ease.

Don't panic, and don't give up and change back to your old ways. After a little while longer, you will start to adjust and your game will improve in leaps and bounds.

What happens is that while you are learning and grooving these new techniques into your brain and nervous system, you are having to consciously think about what you are doing, in order to do things



correctly. While your conscious mind is busy thinking about using the correct stroke technique, or moving your feet properly, it is no longer able to do its main job properly, which is to watch and analyze what is going on during your match. In addition, your sub-conscious wants to go back to its comfortable old habits and techniques, so part of your conscious mind is actually fighting against your unconscious mind.

**The Result:** You have only a fraction of your conscious mind paying attention to important things like watching your opponent's body language, stroke technique, and the behavior of the ball. Your unconscious mind actually wants to play your old style.

Is it any surprise you end up playing badly?

But as you master these new techniques, your sub-conscious mind will start to get a handle on them, and your conscious mind will be able to take a back seat again. Your conscious mind will now be able to get back to doing what it is supposed to do, so playing will get much easier, and as a bonus you will be using the correct techniques, which will work much better.

This is the point where your table tennis game will suddenly "take off", and you'll quickly outstrip your family members and workmates.

How long this process takes can vary. I've seen individuals who train several times a week and who didn't have many bad habits reach this point in only a few weeks, while others may take 3 - 4 months.

### **Don't Swap Back and Forth**

The people that I've seen struggle to get to this point are the ones who keep switching back and forth between their old style and new techniques. They keep sabotaging the grooving process by changing how they play, so of course they never manage to get to the stage where the unconscious mind can take over stroke production, and the conscious mind can focus on what is going on.

## A QUICK WORD ON DRILLS

**Drills** are training routines used by table tennis players to allow them get more practice of different parts of their game (e.g. stroke techniques, or footwork) in less time. The number or type of strokes used in the drill are restricted, so that each player gets to focus on what he wants to practice.

For example, a standard simple training drill that is often used is one where one player hits a forehand loop cross court to the other player, who hits a forehand block back to the first player's forehand, so that he can loop it again. Other strokes are not used, and the ball placement is restricted to each player's forehand, so both players can use a forehand all the time. Each player is working on a specific part of their game - the first player is practicing his forehand loop, and the second player is working on his forehand block.

Drilling allows players to practice and improve their stroke techniques (or footwork, or other aspects of their game), while increasing their ability to perform under difficult conditions. So when you are able to perform a particular drill nearly perfectly, it's time to make it harder!

Try to achieve around a 70-80% success rate when you are performing a drill in which you are attacking the ball. In drills where you are playing smaller strokes such as pushes, blocks, and counterhits, aim for at least an 80-90% success rate.

If you are making too many mistakes, either the drill is too hard or you are trying to hit the ball too hard or with too much spin. On the other hand, if you are getting it right nearly 100% of the time, you aren't being pushed hard enough, and you should make the drill harder.

**A drill is a training routine with a certain amount of repetitive elements, which allows players to focus on one aspect of their game.**

**If you can do a drill perfectly, it's too easy!**



## A RECOMMENDED 1 HOUR TRAINING ROUTINE

This is a tried and tested one hour training routine for new players. It covers all the essential strokes that you need to be practicing, adds in some footwork practice, and includes two of the most important strokes that new players never practice enough - the serve and serve return. Every drill has you doing something that is important to your game, and it also makes sure that both you and your training partner work equally hard.

I'll outline the session first, then explain it in more detail afterwards.

### Pre-Session

*Warm up*

### 0 Minute Mark

*Forehand to Forehand Counterhit - 2½ min*

*Backhand to Backhand Counterhit - 2½ min*

### 5 Minute Mark

*Forehand Loop to Forehand Block - 5 min*

*Swap roles 5 min*

### 15 Minute Mark

*Forehand Loop to Backhand Block - 5 min*

*Swap Roles 5 min*

### 25 Minute Mark

*Pushing everywhere - 5 min*

### 30 Minute Mark

*Forehand Loop off backspin ball, Forehand Block, Forehand Loop, Forehand Block, Forehand Loop etc - 5 min each*

### 40 Minute Mark

*Forehand Loop off backspin ball, Backhand Block, Forehand Loop, Backhand Block, Forehand Loop etc - 5 min each*

The player who makes the first attack in a rally is said to open the attack, or open up.

Dynamic stretches involve stretching the muscle through movement, but not through jerky bouncing!

### 50 Minute Mark

Serve, Return, **Open**, play out point - 5 min

Swap roles - 5 min

### 1 Hour Mark

Cool down

## EXPLANATION OF THE TRAINING OUTLINE

### Pre-Session

#### Warm up

It doesn't matter what level you are, you should always warm up before exercise. Nothing halts your progress faster than getting injured, so spend at least 5 minutes in aerobic activity to get a sweat up and warm up your muscles (10 would be better), then perform a few simple stretches - I like to use **dynamic stretches** rather than static stretches before a training session, but that's getting a bit outside the scope of this eBook. Google it.

### 0 Minute Mark

Forehand to Forehand Counterhit - 2½ min

Backhand to Backhand Counterhit - 2½ min

The idea behind this counterhitting drill is to use the first 5 minutes to ease into your on-table training, and also get adjusted to the conditions, before doing anything too intense. If you've skimped on your warm up, it's also a safety buffer.

Focus on correct technique and consistency when hitting the ball - try to go the whole 2½ minutes without missing the ball.

I only use 2½ minutes per drill because you can often hit a counterhit here and there in later drills. If you've got an extra few minutes, then it's never a bad idea to do 5 minutes of each drill.



**5 Minute Mark***Forehand Loop to Block - 5 min**Swap roles - 5 min*

This is where the real work begins. One player should be using his forehand loop to hit the ball to his training partner's forehand. Then the training partner should block the ball with his forehand, back to the first player's forehand, and the first player should forehand loop the ball again. The looping player should aim at different locations on his opponent's forehand court, while the blocking player should try to return the ball to the same location as much as possible.

Start the drill with a simple long topspin serve without any sidespin, which will allow either player to serve the ball, and makes it easy to get the drill started. If the player that is supposed to be looping serves the ball, the other player should counterhit the ball with medium pace back to the first player, and after that he should stick to blocking, with an occasional counterhit for variety.

If the player that is supposed to be blocking serves the ball, the player that is supposed to be looping should still loop the ball, but be aware that the ball will bounce a little lower since it has been served and not blocked.

The player doing the looping should aim for success ratio of around 80%. If he is missing more than that, he should either hit with a little less power, or ask his partner to slow down his block return, or both. If he is looping the ball on the table 95% of the time, he should probably try to either hit the ball harder and spinnier, ask his partner to block or counterhit the ball back faster, ask his partner to move his block around the forehand court, or any combination of the three!

**Important:** Do not switch off when you are the player who is blocking. At lower levels, your best answer to your opponent's strong attacks is a good block. So pay attention!

**15 Minute Mark***Forehand Loop to Backhand Block - 5 min**Swap Roles 5 min*

This is essentially the same drill as before, but the looper is now aiming into the backhand side of his opponent.

It's also not a bad idea to change one of the above two looping drills every so often so that you practice hitting the ball to your partner's wide forehand, wide backhand, or playing elbow. This gives you more practice at hitting to the locations you need to aim at during games.

**25 Minute Mark***Pushing everywhere - 5 min*

You will probably be ready for a rest at this point, and this drill allows you to take a breather while still getting in some valuable practice.

Push the ball all around the table, and don't forget to vary the amount of spin and speed that you use. Practice going down the line, cross court, into the playing elbow, and cutting the sideline. Practice pushing deep and short - try to stay away from the middle of the table. Don't forget to use proper footwork as much as possible.

Pushing isn't always exciting, but it is still a vital stroke that you must be able to play consistently at all levels. It is an even stronger stroke at lower levels, where a player that has a consistent push with good spin variation, and a decent block, can literally demolish an opponent without ever playing an attacking stroke (I know, because this is how I actually started to play table tennis myself!).

**30 Minute Mark**

*Forehand Loop off backspin ball, Forehand Block, Forehand Loop, Forehand Block, Forehand Loop etc - 5 min each*

Not that you've a few minutes to catch your breath, it's back to work. You should be well adjusted to the conditions by now, and your body should be nice and warm, so it's time to train the most difficult shot in your repertoire - the forehand loop against a backspin ball.

The forehand loop against backspin is the most commonly used stroke to start attacks in intermediate and higher level play, so it's important to master this shot. Many players also have difficulty adjusting their racket angle between the first loop against backspin, and the next loop against a block, so this drill is ideal for practicing this transition.

If the looper is serving, he should use a simple backspin serve, and his partner should push the ball around the forehand court so that ball will only bounce once on the table. The first player should then loop the ball to the second player's forehand side, who then should block the ball back to the first player, and so on.

If the blocker is serving, he should use a backspin serve that only bounces once on the looper's side of the table. The looper should then loop that ball, the other player will block, and so on.

**40 Minute Mark**

*Forehand Loop off backspin ball, Backhand Block, Forehand Loop, Backhand Block, Forehand Loop etc - 5 min each*

This drill is the same as the previous drill, but going down the line instead of cross court. It is important to be able to hit your attacks to all locations on the court, not just cross court.

As I mentioned earlier, it's also not a bad idea to change one of the these two looping drills every so often so that you practice hitting the ball to your partner's wide forehand, wide backhand, or playing

elbow. This gives you more practice at hitting to the locations you want to aim at during games.

### **50 Minute Mark**

*Serve, Return, Open - 5 min*

*Swap roles*

For the last 10 minutes of the session you will work on the crucial skills of serve and serve return. Now is the time to use all your best serves, and don't forget to ask your training partner to do the same!

**A third ball attack occurs when a player serves and then attacks his opponent's return.**

One player serves and the other receives. The server should then be trying to attack the next ball (called a **third ball attack**), while the receiver should be trying to stop the server from attacking. If the receiver can stop the server from attacking, he should then try to attack himself (called a **fourth ball attack**). Play out the rest of the rally as if you were playing a real game.

This drill will allow you to practice serving and returning serve, as well as the important skill of getting the first attack in a rally.

If you are having trouble returning a particular serve, ask your training partner to repeat the serve while you try different returns, until you find one that works best for you. And of course, you should be prepared to do the same for your partner! While this means that your partner may get used to your serves, it works both ways. More importantly, when either of you play other people, both of you will be better at returning serve, so you both benefit from this arrangement.

**A fourth ball attack occurs when the receiver returns the ball so that the server cannot attack it, and manages to attack the server's next shot.**



**1 Hour Mark***Cool down*

Take 5-10 minutes to cool down after your training. The idea is to allow your heart rate to slowly drop down towards your normal rate. It's also not a bad idea to do some more stretching.

**HOW OFTEN SHOULD YOU TRAIN?**

In order to improve quickly, I'd suggest playing at least twice a week, for a couple of hours each time. New players will find that doing the 1 hour sample training session first, then playing an hour of games using the techniques you have just practiced, will work quite well.

If you'd like to play or train more often, then go ahead! Playing four or five times a week is ideal for just about everybody who has the time. If you are really keen, then you can play 6 or 7 times a week, but make sure you are getting plenty of rest, and if you find yourself not looking forward to playing, take a day or two off.

**ON TABLE TRAINING**

New players should be out there on the table playing whenever they can. In the early stages, it's all about hitting a lot of balls to help learn the basic techniques faster. Technique trumps fitness at this stage.

Provided you can get through your training session without becoming exhausted, you can put off-table training on the back burner, until you reach the mid-intermediate levels of play, at which point physical fitness starts to become more important.

## TRAINING AT CLUBS

If you do most of your table tennis playing at clubs, you may find it more difficult to get a full hour long training session with your training partner, since busy clubs usually don't like people using a table for that long. Here's a few tips to work around this problem:

- Break up your training into three 20 minute blocks, or four 15 minute blocks. Do the first 20 minutes of your training routine, then allow other club members to have the table, then when you next get a table do the second twenty minutes, and so on. Many busy clubs simply tell their club members to play a quick warm up and a best of 5 match, which usually takes around 15-20 minutes, so you should be able to do this with a minimum of fuss.
- If you are at a club and you don't have a training partner, ask somebody if they would mind doing some practice instead of playing a game. While not everybody will oblige, there are usually quite a few people who will be happy to feed you for a drill, if you are willing to do the same for them. Start with practicing your forehand loop against backspin, then the forehand loop against a block, then counterhitting, then pushing. You can probably save your serve and serve return practice for when you have to play a game with someone.
- If nobody is willing to do some training with you, then play games, but use the games as an opportunity to practice in a match situation. It's easy to practice serve and serve return and pushing. Or try to attack every long backspin ball to your forehand. Forget about the score and just focus on your techniques.



## CHAPTER 3: GET IT ON!

While you are doing all that practicing and training, you should not forget that it is all done for one purpose - to use your skills in competition. At some point you have to step out on the table and put it all on the line, whether it's in your basement, a club, or a tournament stadium.

Competition advice is a massive topic worthy of a book of its own, and the right advice will differ at different levels of competition, so in this section I'm going to focus on giving you simple to use but highly effective tactics and tips for competition.

Then I'll explain the most important rules that you should know, so you don't get taken by surprise when you start to compete.

### KILLER TACTICS FOR COMPETITION

In order to use these tactics successfully, you will need to have a basic skill set that you will have developed by reading and applying the advice I've written earlier in this eBook.

Put simply, you need to be able to:

- Create, read, and handle spin.
- Play your basic strokes consistently. You should be able to hit a forehand loop against backspin and block, counterhit, push, smash, and play your serve and serve return without making many unforced mistakes.
- Use the correct stance, perform the four simple footwork techniques properly, and position yourself correctly during a point.

If you can do these things right most of the time, you'll be able to make the most of this advice, and start winning.

## TACTIC #1 - AVOID SILLY MISTAKES

*At the beginner level, the secret to winning more matches is to make less mistakes.*

That seems so obvious it's almost useless, doesn't it? But this is the most important bit of match advice I can give you. If you can understand and use this tactic successfully, I can guarantee you be moving into the intermediate ranks in record time, simply because 99% of your fellow new players don't realise the importance of this tactic.

Let me put this another way -

*At the beginner level, most matches are lost through a player's own mistakes, instead of through good shots by his opponent.*

Think about this - at the beginner level, everybody makes a lot of mistakes. It's natural - that's why you are a beginner!

**A forced error is a mistake caused by a good shot from the opponent.**

So during a match between beginners, both players are going to make a lot of errors. Some of the errors will be caused by a good shot from the opponent, which is what we would call a **forced error**.

But the overwhelming majority of mistakes are made because the player did something wrong without any real pressure from his opponent - these are what we call **unforced errors**.

Now some of these unforced errors happen simply because the player is still learning the game and his technique is a bit shaky at times. A player will get his bat angle a bit wrong, or hit the ball with his finger or thumb, or misread the spin a little. That's fine - it happens.

**An unforced error occurs when a player makes a mistake without any pressure from his opponent.**





*"I can't believe I just did that!" Fabian Moritz lamenting a poor shot.*

But a lot of these unforced errors are plain old silly mistakes. The player tries to hit the ball one inch from the sideline, and misses the table. Or tries to hit the ball one inch above the net, and hits the ball into the net instead. Or tries to power loop a ball that is below table height. Or tries to run way out to his backhand side to hit a forehand, and gets hit by the ball. Or tries to forehand loop his opponent's forehand loop, instead of blocking it back. Or gets bored and decides to hit the next ball that comes over the net, no matter where it goes. Or...

Anyway, I think you get the point. These are the mistakes that can be easily avoided if:

- You know what to do; and
- You are able to stay focused and stick to your game plan.

In a typical match between beginners, let's take a look at a hypothetical game. During this game, each player will, on average:

- Make three or four forced errors from good shots by his opponent.
- Make six or seven unforced errors.
- Of these unforced errors, around three will be silly mistakes, caused by bad decisions. That's three points given to the opponent for free!

Remember, a game in table tennis only goes up to 11 points. If you have two players that are evenly matched in ability, they'll end up with scores around 10-8, 10-9, or 10-10 a lot of the time.

Now if one of these players can reduce his silly mistakes from three to one just by knowing what to do and paying attention, who do you think is going to win most of these games?

Exactly.

**The Bottom Line:** At the beginner level, the secret to winning is to make less silly mistakes yourself, while making sure you only attack balls you are confident of hitting successfully. If you are attacking and making too many errors, only attack easy balls. The idea is to reduce your silly errors, win the easy points, and get given a lot of mistakes by your opponent.

As you move into intermediate levels of play, it becomes more important to force mistakes from your opponent, since you will both make less unforced errors. Your technique will be better and more consistent, and you should attack more. Intermediate level tactics are beyond the scope of this eBook, please refer to my website where I discuss higher level tactics in more detail.

## **TACTIC #2 - SERVE AND FOLLOW UP**

The idea behind this tactic is to use a good serve to get a return you can forehand loop with a high rate of success, so that you can dominate the point. Only use your forehand loop against balls that you are confident you can attack successfully, otherwise you will give too many easy points to your opponent from your mistakes.

This is going to be your bread and butter tactic that you are going to try to use as often as possible. Against other new players, a successful forehand loop will usually win the point outright, or set up an easy ball that can be easily hit for a winner.

- When serving, you will serve a double bounce serve, and you will be ready to attack your opponent's return with a forehand loop.
- If you are better at looping balls with backspin, use mainly backspin and backspin/sidespin serves, so that your opponent will push the ball back most of the time.
- If you are better at looping balls with topspin or little spin, use mainly sidespin/topspin serves with only a little spin (if you use too much topspin, it is very difficult to make the ball bounce twice on your opponent's side), so that your opponent will tend to flick or counterhit the ball.
- If your opponent's return looks like it will bounce only once on your side of the table (or it is very high so that you can swing freely), and it is easy for you to reach, then attack it with your forehand loop.
- If your opponent's return is too short to attack, or placed to your backhand, or is too difficult to attack comfortably, then push the ball back (if he hit a push) or counterhit or block the ball back (if he hit a topspin), and get ready to loop the next ball. Keep pushing, counterhitting or blocking until you get a ball you feel able to forehand loop successfully.
- Once you have made a successful forehand loop, get ready for an easy return that you can either forehand loop for a winner, or smash.

While this tactic seems simple, it is in fact very difficult for the opponent to deal with, and will work against almost any opponent, provided the double bounce serve is performed correctly. I still use this tactic extensively after over 25 years of play.

### TACTIC #3 - RETURN OF SERVE

The server usually has the advantage when the rally begins. As the receiver, your job is to try to nullify that advantage, and then take control of the point.



*Shibaji Datta taking care with his return of serve*

- The first rule of returning serve for new players is to **get the ball back on the table at all costs**. Remember that new players will make many unforced errors, so even if you make a weak return, there is still a chance that your opponent will make a mistake when he tries to hit a winner. At the lower levels of the game, it is better to make a weaker return that goes on the table most of



the time, than a stronger return that only goes on the table some of the time. So if you are struggling to return a particular serve at all, then aim to hit the ball slower and higher over the net, and land it in the middle of your opponent's table. This will increase your chances of getting the ball back.

- If you are not sure what spin is on a particular serve, make your best guess, and then pay attention to what happens when you return the ball. If the ball jumps up, it had more topspin than you thought. If the ball jumps down, it had more backspin. If the ball jumps to the left or right, then it had more sidespin of either type. The next time you see your opponent use that serve, you will know better what to expect, and you can adjust accordingly.
- When your opponent throws the ball up, don't pay too much attention to the ball - but watch his racket like a hawk. You must know what angle, direction and speed the racket has when it hits the ball. This will greatly help you to read the spin.
- If the serve goes to your forehand, and is long and not too spinny, then you should try attacking it with your forehand loop. The ball will generally bounce a little lower since it has been served and not played during a rally, so use a little more topspin, and a little less speed than normal. If you are successful with most of your attacks, then continue to forehand loop. If you are making too many mistakes, then use a simple counterhit for long topspin serves, and a push for long backspin serves.
- Long backspin serves to your backhand should be pushed back, while long topspin serves should be counterhit at medium to fast speed.

**When returning serve, watch your opponent's racket, not the ball!**

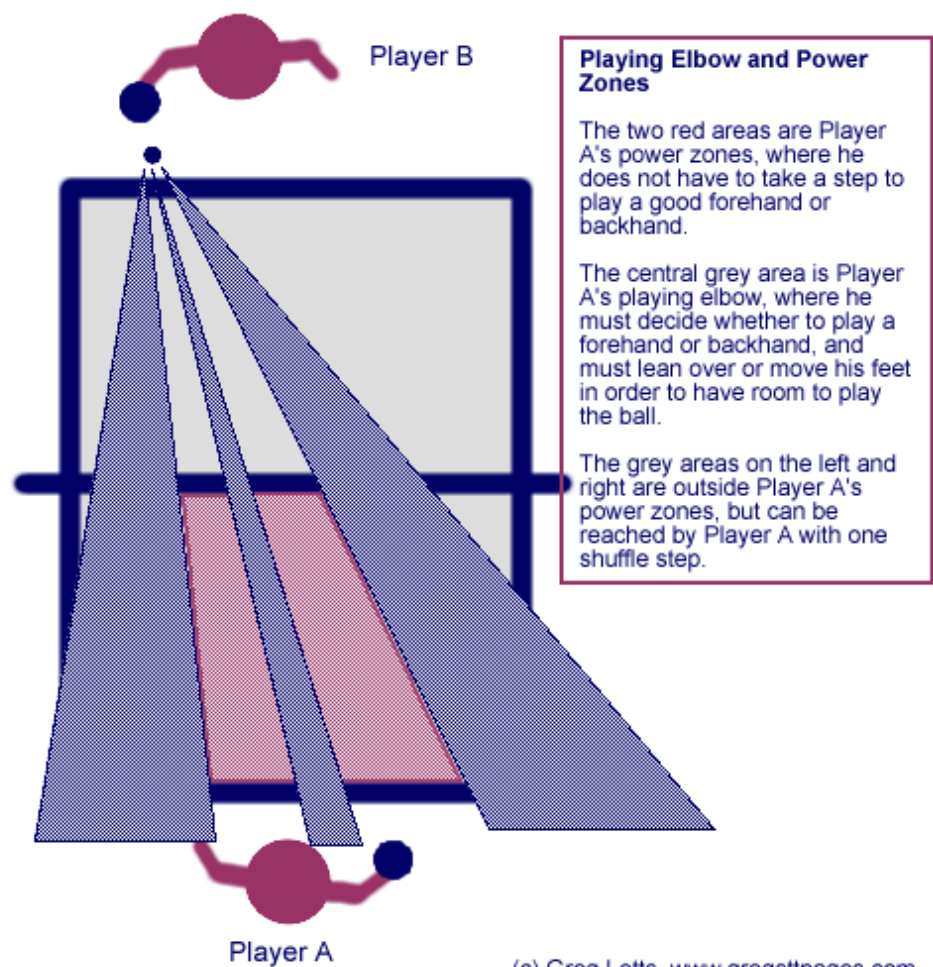
## TACTIC #4 - RALLYING TIPS

While every rally in table tennis is unique, it is possible to state some general tips that will work well for beginners in almost all situations.

- Don't aim too close to the sidelines or endline of the table. The reward in landing the ball one cm from the sideline isn't worth the increased risk of making a mistake and missing the table completely.
- Your opponent has two **power zones**, which are areas where he can play a good forehand or backhand without having to move his feet to reach the ball. Most new players make much more errors when they have to move and hit the ball. So try to keep the ball out of your opponent's power zone.

**Power zones are the areas where your opponent can reach the ball and play a normal swing without having to move his feet.**

[Power Zones and the Playing Elbow video - YouTube](#) - [Download Page](#)



(c) Greg Letts, [www.gregsttpages.com](http://www.gregsttpages.com)

- The area in the middle of your opponent's power zones is called the playing elbow, and is the area where he has to make a quick decision to hit the ball with his forehand or backhand, and also has to move to hit the ball. This is a very good place to hit the ball, but be aware that it is a fairly small and moving target. In contrast, the areas to your opponent's wide forehand and backhand are usually larger and easier to hit, but your opponent does not have to decide whether to play a forehand or backhand. He will have to move to reach the ball though.
- The natural tendency of most players is to return the ball back to where it came from, since this is usually the easiest shot to play. Be aware that your opponent is likely to do this, and make sure that you move the ball around the whole table yourself.
- Don't try to hit the ball half an inch above the net when rallying. A few inches above the net works just as well, and you'll make less mistakes.
- Many beginners (and even higher level players) often struggle to return short serves to their forehand well, since this serve is not always used that often (it is risky, because if you make a mistake and serve the ball long, your opponent can attack it with a strong forehand loop). So if you have a good short forehand serve, try it out on your opponent!
- While it seems logical to play to your opponent's backhand to stop him from hitting strong forehand attacks, this tactic is used so often that many players actually become very good at stepping over to their backhand side and hitting their forehand. If you are having trouble with stopping your opponent from hitting forehand attacks, try hitting the ball wide to his forehand instead. Many players are much worse at hitting the ball with a forehand loop when moving to their forehand side. If your opponent gets his shot on the table, then hit your next ball wide to his backhand, and he won't be able to run around and hit it

with his forehand.

- If you find that your opponent has a weakness that you can exploit, attack it mercilessly, until he is forced to adjust his game to cover it up, or until you have won. Don't save it for later on, attack it straight away.
- If your opponent has a powerful but erratic attack and makes lots of mistakes, tempt him a little by hitting higher pushes with lots of different spins during the rally. But be ready to block his attack if he does get it on. If you are feeling particularly sneaky, saying an occasional "Nice shot!" to your opponent when he makes a great attack can encourage him to keep attacking, even though he is missing most of the time.
- If your opponent has a bat with very different rubbers on each side (called a **combination bat**, usually with one normal side and one side with **long pips** or **antispin**), but he doesn't twiddle his bat around much, pick one side and play to that side as much as possible, and only hit to the other side when you are trying to hit a winner.
- If your opponent uses a combination bat and does **twiddle** his bat around, you are probably better off using as little spin as possible during the rally, until you get an easy ball that you can hit for a winner. Try to hit your strong attack to his normal side if you can.

**A combination bat usually has one side with normal inverted rubber, and one side that plays very differently, such as a long pip or antispin rubber.**

**Long pips rubber has longer than normal pimples facing out, which produce effects on the ball that are quite different to inverted rubbers.**

**A player twiddles his bat by turning it around in his hand, so that the normal forehand side is now on the backhand side.**

**Antispin rubber looks like a normal rubber, but the rubber has very little grip, so it plays very differently to normal inverted rubbers.**



**TACTIC #5 - REMEMBER THE RULES FOR HANDLING SPIN**

A simple set of rules for creating and handling spin are as follows:

- When your opponent doesn't spin the ball, or puts only a little bit of spin - use as much or little spin as you want.
- When your opponent puts a medium amount of spin on the ball, either use no spin and control the ball with your racket angle alone, or use heavy spin to help you override your opponent's spin, and make your best guess about the right racket angle.
- When your opponent uses heavy spin - use no spin and control the ball by just using your racket angle.



*En garde! Kyle Davis keeping a close eye on the ball's spin*

## TACTIC #6 - TRUST IN YOUR TECHNIQUE AND TRAINING

The final thought I want to leave you with is this - if you have done the hard work in the training room, trust yourself and play in a match just like you do in practice. Stick to the same techniques and play them as well as you know how. Don't start second guessing and changing back to your old habits - you'll get your conscious and unconscious minds working against each other, and you'll just make things worse!

Remember, *nobody* wins every time. Even the world champion gets beaten now and then. Each match is a step towards your long term goals, so don't slow down your progress by reverting to old habits just to try to win a match here and there. Do your best with your new techniques, and pretty soon you'll be moving up to stronger competition!



*Trust in your technique and training, and soon you'll be celebrating just like David Zalcborg!*



## IMPORTANT RULES

In this section, I will be referring to two important sets of rules laid out by the ITTF, the governing body of table tennis worldwide.

The first is the [Laws of Table Tennis](#) - the most current set can be found by following the above link. I'll refer to these as (*Law X.X.X*). The laws of table tennis set out the rules for the game, as decided by the ITTF - the governing body for the international game of table tennis.

The second is the regulations laid out in the [ITTF Handbook for Match Officials](#), which is a PDF document that can be viewed by following the above link. I'll refer to these as (*Point X.X.X HMO*). The regulations found in the Handbook for Match Officials further explain, clarify and expound on the basic Laws of Table Tennis, and are written for the benefit of umpires and referees. However, they are also quite useful for players to take a look at too!

## RACKET RULES

### Rubber Colours

If your racket has a rubber on each side, one rubber must be a non-glossy red, and the other rubber must be a non-glossy black.

If your racket has only one rubber, then that rubber can be either red or black, and the other side of the racket (which you cannot use to hit the ball) must be the other colour. (*Law 2.04.06*)

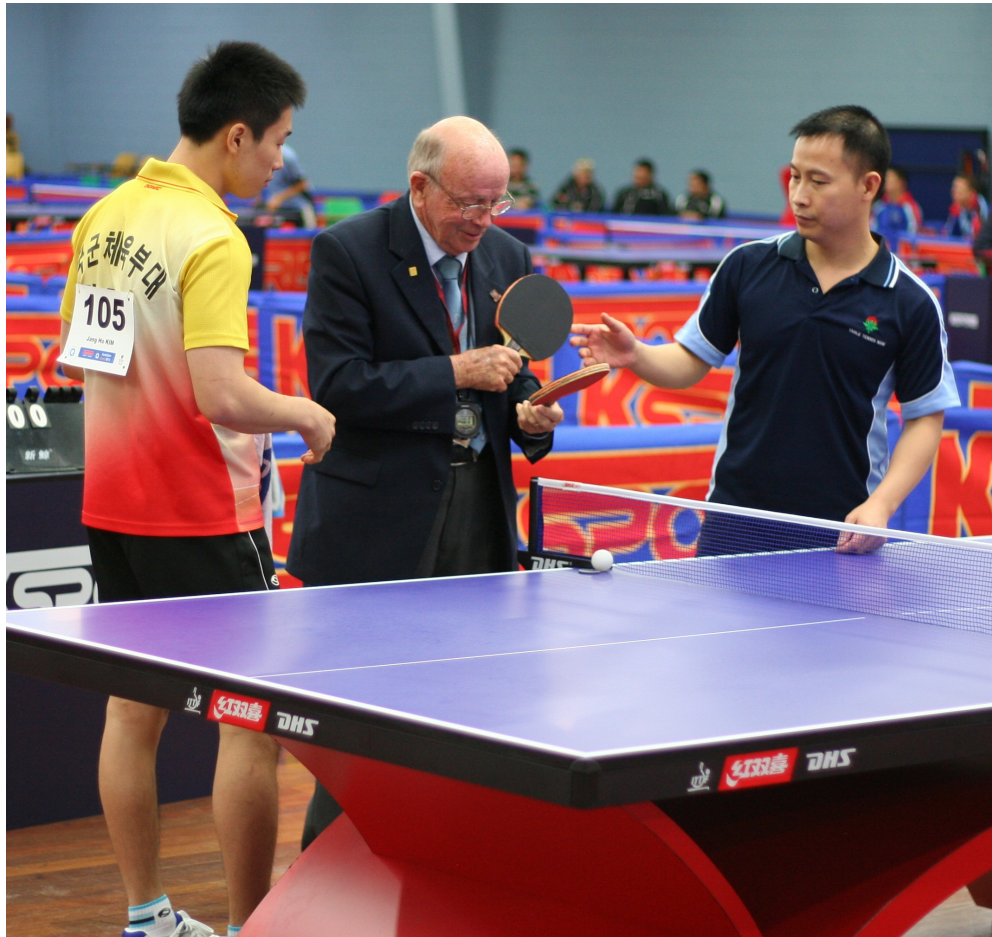
### ITTF Approved Rubbers

In competitions run under ITTF rules, the rubbers on your racket must be approved by the ITTF. ITTF approved rubbers have the ITTF logo and the manufacturer's logo or trademark, which must be attached to the blade so that these identifying features are clearly visible near the handle. (*Point 7.01.02 HMO*)



## Racket Inspection

Before the match begins, the umpire will normally check your racket to make sure it is legal. Your opponent also has the right to examine your racket.



**You must allow the umpire and your opponent to examine your racket before the start of a match**

This does not mean that you have to let your opponent touch your racket, it is perfectly OK to hold on to your racket and simply show your opponent each side of your racket. (*Law 2.04.08, Point 7.03.01 HMO*).

It is common for opponents to swap rackets for inspection, but it is considered bad manners to run your fingers over another player's rubbers, since you will leave grease marks on the rubber.

A small feel of the rubber at the bottom near the handle would generally be acceptable to most players, but be warned, some players are very touchy(!) about other players putting their fingers on the rubber. If in doubt, ask for permission.



## Leaving Your Racket on the Table

During a competition under ITTF rules, you must leave your racket on the table between games or other intervals such as time-outs, unless you get the permission of the umpire to remove it. (*Law 3.04.02.05, Point 7.03.04 HMO*)

## HOW TO SERVE LEGALLY

According to the Handbook for Match Officials, *"the primary requirement of the current service law is for the server to ensure that the receiver can see the ball throughout the service."* (*Point 10.05.01 HMO*)

The service rules have been modified quite extensively over the last 20 years or so, and are now quite a complicated set of laws, which are not easy to explain in just a few paragraphs. I've demonstrated how to follow the service rules as well as answering some of the common questions about service in the accompanying videos, but a nutshell version of the service rules is shown below:

- The service must start with the ball resting on the open palm of the free hand, which must be stationary.
- The server must throw ball near vertically upwards without putting spin on the ball, so that it rises at least 16cm after leaving his palm. The ball must start to fall before being struck.
- The ball must hit the server's court first, then go over or around the net, and hit the receiver's court.
- The ball must be above the level of the playing surface, and behind the endline, from the time the service motion begins, until the ball is struck. The receiver must be able to see the ball at all times during this period.
- Once the ball has been thrown up, the server must immediately remove his free arm and hand from the space between the ball and net.

- It is up to the server to serve so the umpire is satisfied that the serve is legal. The umpire may warn the server once if he is not sure whether a serve is legal, but if a serve is clearly illegal the umpire should call a fault.

[How to Serve Legally video - YouTube](#) - [Download Page](#)

[Common Service Questions Video - YouTube](#) - [Download Page](#)

## WINNING A POINT

### Moving the Table, Touching the Net, Putting your Free Hand on the Playing Surface

**The net assembly is the net and the clamps that attach the net to the table.**

While the ball is in play during a rally, you are not allowed to move the table (*Law 2.10.01.08*), touch the **net assembly** (*Law 2.10.01.09*), or put your free hand on the playing surface (*Law 2.10.01.10*).

Note that while no part of your body or anything you wear or carry may touch the net assembly, the only part of you not allowed to touch the playing surface is your free hand. So it is perfectly legal to jump up on a table, or sit on a table during a point, provided you don't actually move the table. You can also use any part of your body to balance yourself on the playing surface, except for your free hand.

Note that the playing surface is defined as only being the upper surface of the table, not the sides (*Law 2.01.01*) so it is OK for your free hand to touch the sides of the table, provided you don't actually touch the top surface of the table.

One common issue to look out for is when you are smashing a lob from your opponent, and you get off balance and need to steady yourself. You can fall on the table surface with your body, provided you don't move the table or touch the table top with your free hand. Or you can use another part of your body to steady yourself - you will sometimes see players use their forearm to do so, or even their racket hand, both of which are perfectly legal to do provided the table

does not move. Or you can wait until the ball is no longer in play (i.e. it has bounced for a second time), then use your free hand to steady yourself, since the point was over once the ball bounces a second time.

A second common situation that can cause arguments is when a player accidentally moves the table while hitting the ball, which is the automatic loss of the point. This happens quite often when smashing the ball or returning drop shots, so be aware of the table's original position so you can detect if your opponent has moved the table. It is also a good idea to always put the brakes on any table with roller wheels, since without the brakes set these tables are much more prone to being moved accidentally.

### Obstructing the Ball

If the ball is in play, any player who obstructs the ball loses the point.

You obstruct the ball if you, or anything you wear or carry, touch the ball while it is in play and above or travelling towards the playing surface, and the ball has not yet touched your side of the table. (*Law 2.05.08*) Note that when the ITTF say that the ball is above the playing surface, they mean actually directly on top of the playing surface itself, not just above the level of the playing surface, but off to the side of the table.

If the ball has gone over your endline without touching your side of the table, you have won the point, and you cannot obstruct the ball.

If the ball has passed over the sideline of your side of the table without touching your court, and is now going away from the table, you have won the point, and you cannot obstruct the ball, even if the ball has not reached your endline yet.

If the ball is travelling away from the playing surface without ever crossing the playing surface, then you cannot obstruct the ball.

## THE TOSS

If you have an umpire present for your match, he will usually toss a coin or a plastic disc with different colours on each side to determine the player who has the right to choose whether to serve, receive, or start at a particular end.

If there is no umpire present, another common method of performing the toss is for one player to put both hands below the endline of the table, while holding a ball in one hand. He will then shuffle the ball between his hands, before holding his hands wide apart while still keeping them below the endline. The opponent will then try to guess which hand is holding the ball, in order to win the toss.

The winner of the toss has three choices: (1) to serve; (2) to receive; or (3) to start at a particular end. Once the winner makes his choice, the loser of the toss has the other choice. (*Laws 2.13.01, 2.13.02*)

So if the winner chooses to serve or receive first, the loser of the toss gets to choose which end he wants to start from. If the winner chooses to start at a certain end, the loser then has the choice of whether he wishes to serve or receive.

## CHANGE OF ENDS

In the final possible game of a match (i.e. the 5th game of a best of five match, or the 7th game of a best of seven match), the players are supposed to change ends when the first player or team reaches 5 points.

If the players forget to change ends, then the players should change ends as soon as the mistake is noticed. The score will remain at whatever it was at the time the mistake was discovered, so if the score was 9-4 when the mistake was noticed, the players should change ends and resume with the score still at 9-4. (*Laws 2.14.02, 2.14.03*)



## RACKET HAND AND FREE HAND

Your racket hand is your hand that is carrying the racket, while your free hand is the hand not carrying the racket. *(Laws 2.05.05, 2.05.06)*

**It is legal to hold the racket in both hands, except when serving, when one hand must be used to hold the ball and toss the ball up.**

Some players argue that this means that you cannot hold the racket in both hands, but there is no specific ITTF law banning the use of both hands to hold the racket. It is much more likely that the ITTF simply consider you to have two racket hands if you use both hands to hold the racket, and no free hand. The only exception to this is during the service, where you must have a free hand, since the free hand is used to hold the ball when serving. *(Law 2.06.01)* Players with physical disabilities are able to be given special exceptions. *(Law 2.06.07)*

You may also swap the racket between hands if you wish, and play with your other hand, in which case your racket hand now becomes your free hand, and vice versa. *(Point 9.03 HMO)* But you are only allowed one racket - you may not use a racket in each hand.

## HITTING THE BALL

You can legally hit the ball with the fingers of your racket hand, or your racket hand below the wrist, or with any part of your bat (except for an uncovered side of the blade). When the ITTF say racket hand below the wrist, they mean your hand, from the wrist up to the tips of your fingers. *(Law 2.05.07)*

This means that it is legal for you to return the ball by hitting it with the back of your racket hand, hitting it with the edge of your bat, or even hitting it with your racket handle.

However, you can't drop your racket and hit the ball with your hand, because as soon as you drop your racket, you no longer have a racket hand. *(Point 9.02 HMO)*

You also cannot return the ball by throwing your bat at the ball, since you must be holding the racket when the racket hits the ball. *(Point 9.03 HMO)*

## DOUBLE HITS

**The rule on double hits was changed by the ITTF in 2011 to make things simpler - be aware that your opponent may not know of this change.**

The ITTF has recently changed the rules on double hits to make things much easier to understand and enforce.

The new rule is that a double hit is perfectly legal, provided that it is accidental, not deliberate. (*Law 2.10.01.06*)

So if the ball hits your finger on your racket hand and then goes on to hit your racket, or hits your racket and finger at the same time, or you accidentally manage to mis-hit the ball and hit it a second time during the same swing, this is OK, provided the umpire believes it to be accidental, not intentional, which is usually an easy decision to make.



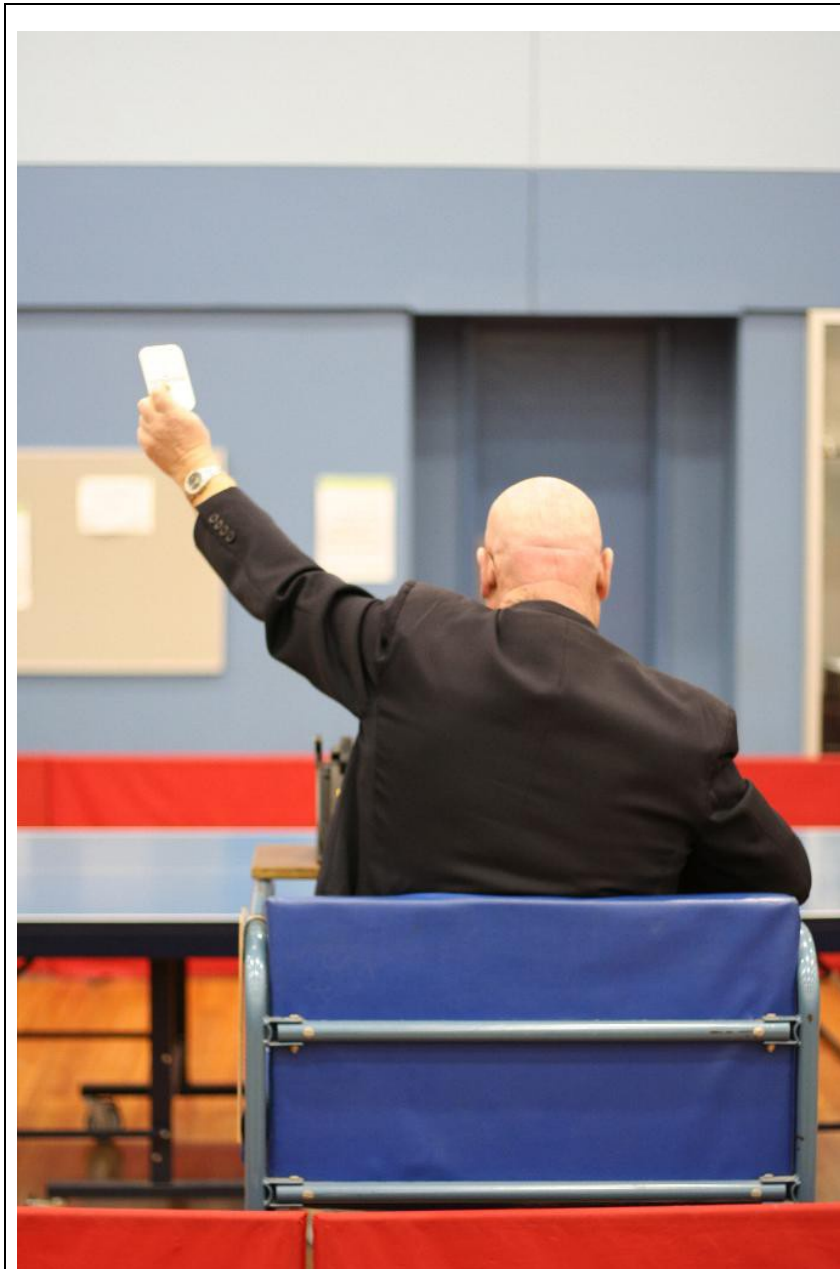
*Time-out called at a crucial stage. Note the racket left on the table.*

## BREAKS DURING GAMES

### Rest Periods

You are allowed a maximum rest period of 1 minute between the games of a match. (*Law 3.04.04.01.01, Point 13.07.01 HMO*)

During this rest period you must leave your racket on the table, unless the umpire gives you permission to take it with you. (*Law 3.04.02.05, Point 7.03.04 HMO*)



*You are allowed 1 time-out of 1 minute during a match*

### Time-outs

Each player (or team in doubles) is allowed to claim 1 time-out period of up to 1 minute during a match, which is done by making a T-sign with the hands. Play resumes when the player(s) who called the time out are ready, or when 1 minute has gone by, whichever happens first. (*Laws 3.04.04.02, 3.04.04.02.03, Point 13.01.01 HMO*)

### Towelling Off

You are allowed to towel off every 6 points during a match, starting from 0-0. You are also allowed to towel off at the change of ends in the last possible game of a match. (*Law 3.04.04.01.02*)

The idea behind this restriction is to prevent towelling from being used as a delaying tactic, so you can in fact towel off at other times provided you are not interrupting the continuity of play (*Point 13.03.03 HMO*), such as when the ball goes out of the playing area and your opponent leaves the court to retrieve it.

If you wear glasses and get sweat on your lenses, most umpires will allow you a short break to clean the sweat off the lenses, and

probably give your face and head a quick wipe to help stop it from happening again. This does not mean that they will necessarily allow you to perform a full towel down of your hands, arms and legs as well! *(Point 13.03.02 HMO)*

If sweat gets on your rubber, simply show the rubber to the umpire and you will be permitted to clean the sweat off. In fact, you are not supposed to play with any sweat on the rubber, due to the effect this will have on the ball when hit.

### Warming Up

Players have a maximum of 2 minute practice period on the table before starting a match, and may not receive instructions from coaches or advisers after this practice period. You can start after less than 2 minutes if both players agree, but you are still not allowed to get any advice. *(Law 3.04.03.01, Point 13.02.02 HMO)*

### CLOTHING

You are not allowed to wear a tracksuit during a match unless given permission to do so by the referee. *(Point 8.05.01 HMO)* Wearing bike shorts underneath your normal shorts is generally OK, but they should be the same colour as the normal shorts. Again, the referee has the final word. *(Point 8.04.06 HMO)*



## HOW TO SCORE IN TABLE TENNIS SINGLES

- The first thing to do is check whether the match is best of 5 games or best of 7 games. In theory, any number of odd games is legal, but in practice, almost every match will be either best of 5 or best of 7.
- In either case, the winner will be the player or team who is first to reach over half the number of possible games (i.e. 3 games in a best of 5 match, 4 games in a best of 7 match).
- The game score begins at 0-0.
- The server gets to serve twice, and then the other player gets to serve twice. Then the original server gets to serve two serves again, and so on.
- The server's score is always called first.



*Appreciate the hard work that your referees and umpires do so that you can enjoy your table tennis. Don't forget to thank them.*

- When a point is won by a player, he adds a point to his score. The game is won by the first player to reach 11 points, with a lead of at least 2 points. If both players reach 10 points, then each player now only serves once, and the game is won by the player who achieves a 2 point lead.

## CALLING A LET

According to the ITTF, the main purpose of a let is to end a rally without awarding a point when something has happened that might affect the result of the rally. Although there are some other technical times a let may be called which we won't worry about in this eBook, you can see that the idea behind a let is to ensure that everything remains fair for both opponents.

The most common types of lets that you will encounter are:

### Service Let

A service let occurs when the ball touches the net assembly while passing over it during the service, and then lands correctly in the receiver's court, or is obstructed by the receiving player. (*Laws 2.09.01, 2.09.02*)

It is a very common practice for players who believe that the ball touched the net during the service to put their free hand up to indicate this, or to call "Let" out loud, or to even catch the ball and ask the umpire for a let.

The ITTF encourages umpires to go along with the player calling a let unless the umpire is certain that the ball did not touch the net, especially if the both opponents agree. But keep in mind that the umpire does not have to go along with the players who believe that the serve was a let, and may decide that the serve was good. In this case he may penalize the player who catches the ball or calls out loud. (*Point 11.02.04 HMO*)

When you are playing, I would recommend that the best course of action to take if you believe a serve has hit the net is to silently raise your free hand to indicate you believe the serve is a let, but play the ball as if it was a good service. The umpire will then be free to take action as he sees fit. If he decides the serve was a let, then everything is OK. If he decides the serve was good, then you have played the ball correctly and not interrupted the point by catching the

ball our calling out loud, so the point can continue.

### Interruptions and Disturbances

When a disturbance that may affect the outcome of the rally occurs, the umpire may decide to call a let. Such disturbances include sudden noises that may distract the players, a ball coming onto the court from another table, or a player from another table entering the court. (*Laws 2.09.01, 2.09.02.04, Points 11.03.01, 11.03.02 HMO*)

In these situations, it is usually best to play on and let the umpire make the call, since if you attempt to call a let and the umpire disagrees with you, you will lose the point for distracting your opponent and disturbing play.

### If You are Not Ready to Return Serve

If your opponent serves when you are not ready to return the serve, you should make no attempt to return the ball, raise your hand, and ask for a let. The umpire will then decide whether you were truly not ready to return the ball (in which case he will call a let), or whether you simply didn't want to return the ball (in which case he will award the point to your opponent). (*Point 11.04.01 HMO*)

Don't even hit the ball back to the server so that he can serve again, since this might be misinterpreted by the umpire as an attempt to return the ball. Just leave the ball alone, then pick it up and throw it back.

Don't try to use this as a tactic to avoid difficult serves. It is there to prevent a server from fast serving and unfairly rushing the receiver before he is ready to return. A good umpire will not allow you get away with this, and will be likely to give the point to the server if you try it too often.



## EPILOGUE: NEXT STEPS

### FINDING CLUBS AND COMPETITIONS

If you are living in the USA, it's pretty easy to find a club near you - you can check out the USATT's Club Finder, which is located at <http://www.teamusa.org/USA-Table-Tennis/Clubs-and-Colleges.aspx>

Simarly, USA competitions are also catered for on the Events / Leagues / Ratings page, which you can find at <http://www.teamusa.org/USA-Table-Tennis/Events-Leagues-Ratings.aspx>

If you are located elsewhere around the world, a good starting point is to visit the [ITTF's Directory of National Associations](#), which will have the contact details for your country's National Association, including an email contact and in many cases, a national website.

### CONTINUED IMPROVEMENT

#### GET A COACH

While I have attempted to give you a solid introduction to the fundamentals of modern table tennis in this eBook, there is no doubt that almost all players will improve faster under the supervision of a good coach.

Once again, USA players are fortunate to have a list of qualified coaches available at <http://www.teamusa.org/USA-Table-Tennis/Coaching-and-Tips/Coaches-List.aspx>

For players in other countries, I would usually recommend asking around at your club - there is usually a coach or two that are well known in local table tennis circles.



## Go To GREG'S TABLE TENNIS PAGES

While I strongly believe that a good coach cannot be equalled when it comes to getting results faster, not everybody has the time, money, or access to get personal one-on-one coaching.

In which case, you can still make improvements to your game by learning online. Please feel free to visit my website at [www.gregsttpages.com](http://www.gregsttpages.com), where I will continue to share more advice about improving your table tennis game.

## FEEDBACK

I hope you have enjoyed this eBook about How to Win at Table Tennis. But remember that this advice is useless unless you actually get out there on the table and put it into practice!

This eBook is intended to be a living document, where I can continue to improve and update it over time. So if you've got any constructive feedback to offer (positive or negative) that you think would make this eBook better, please feel free to visit my [How to Win at Table Tennis web page](#) and leave a comment. I'd love to hear from you.

Thanks,

Greg Letts  
August 2012



*Thanks from yours truly!*



## BONUS CHAPTER: DOUBLES PLAY

When you play doubles in table tennis, there is much more to it than just finding another good singles player and assuming you'll make a great team.

Besides the fact that there are several significant differences between the rules of doubles and singles, the addition of an extra player on your side of the court and the need to take turns when hitting the ball, makes good teamwork a must.

In table tennis, the team that plays the best wins, not the team that has the best players!

But before we start discussing ways to improve your doubles play, you should understand the differences in rules for doubles.

### DOUBLES RULES

#### SERVING

***Law 2.06.03 As the ball is falling the server shall strike it so that it touches first his or her court and then, after passing over or around the net assembly, touches directly the receiver's court; in doubles, the ball shall touch successively the right half court of server and receiver.***

This rule makes it clear that when serving in doubles, you must bounce the ball in your right hand half court, and the second bounce must be in your opponent's right hand half court. Note that unlike tennis, the left hand half courts are never used.

#### ORDER OF PLAY

***Law 2.08.02 In doubles, the server shall first make a service, the receiver shall then make a return, the partner of the server shall then make a return, the partner of the receiver shall then make a return and thereafter each player in turn in that sequence shall make a return.***

This law is a complicated way of saying that the server and his partner must take turns in hitting the ball, and the receiver and his partner must also take turns in hitting the ball.

***Law 2.10.01 Unless the rally is a let, a player shall score a point***

***Law 2.10.01.11 if a doubles opponent strikes the ball out of the sequence established by the first server and first receiver;***

These rules make it clear that if a player hits the ball when it is not his turn, his team loses the point.

***Law 2.13.04 In each game of a doubles match, the pair having the right to serve first shall choose which of them will do so and in the first game of a match the receiving pair shall decide which of them will receive first; in subsequent games of the match, the first server having been chosen, the first receiver shall be the player who served to him or her in the preceding game.***

***2.13.05 In doubles, at each change of service the previous receiver shall become the server and the partner of the previous server shall become the receiver.***

***2.13.06 The player or pair serving first in a game shall receive first in the next game of the match and in the last possible game of a doubles match the pair due to receive next shall change their order of receiving when first one pair scores 5 points.***

These rules deal with the serve and return sequence during a match, which must swap between games and when the first team reaches 5 points in the final possible game. These rules cause many umpires and players a lot of confusion, but there is a simple way to keep track of who should be serving to who (or whom!).

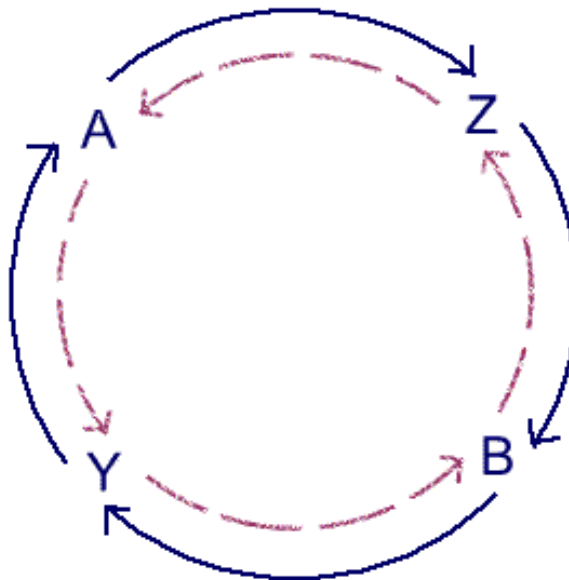
On a piece of paper (the back of the score sheet usually works well), write the original order of serving and returning in a clockwise fashion, joining them with solid arrows. This is the order of serve and return in odd-numbered games.

Use dashed arrows going anti-clockwise to indicate the order of serve and return in even numbered games.

### Doubles Serving Order

Blue Arrows - Odd numbered games and start of final game up to the change of ends

Red Arrows - Even numbered games and final game after change of ends



(c) Greg Letts, [www.gregsttpages.com](http://www.gregsttpages.com)

In the final game of the match, start with the clockwise sequence, and when one team reaches 5 points, have the teams swap and then whoever is supposed to be serving must now serve to the player indicated by the anti-clockwise sequence. The rest of the final game is played in an anti-clockwise sequence.



Here's an example to show how it all works:

Imagine a best of 5 doubles match between Team 1 (Player A and B) and Team 2 (Players Y and Z).

### First Game

Team 1 wins the toss and decides to serve first. They choose Player B to serve first. Team 2 then decides that Player Y will return serve first.

So during the first game, Player B serves two serves to Player Y. Player Y then serves two serves to Player A. Player A then serves two serves to Player Z. Player Z then serves two serves to Player B, and so on.

### Second Game

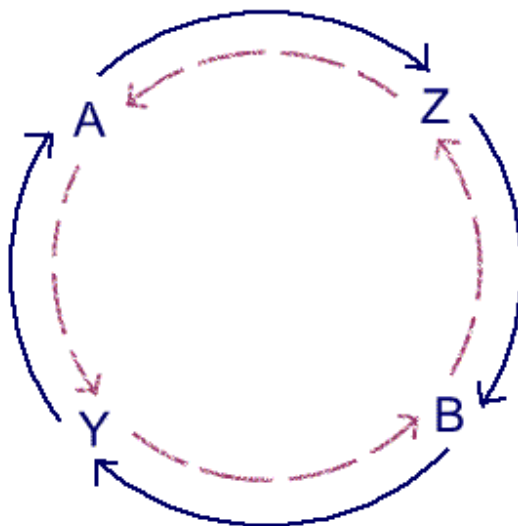
At the beginning of the second game, it is now Team 2's turn to serve first. They can choose either Player Y or Player Z to serve first. They choose Player Z to serve first.

Since Player Z served to Player B in the previous game, he must now serve to Player A. So the second game will begin with Player Z serving to Player A. If Team 2 had chosen Player Y to serve first, he would have had to serve to Player B.

#### Doubles Serving Order

Blue Arrows - Odd numbered games and start of final game up to the change of ends

Red Arrows - Even numbered games and final game after change of ends



(c) Greg Letts, [www.gregsttpages.com](http://www.gregsttpages.com)

### Third Game

In game 3, Team 1 gets to serve first again, and now they can choose either Player A or Player B to serve first. If they choose Player A to serve first, he must serve to Player Z, and if Player B serves first, he must serve to Player Y, exactly the same sequence as for the first game.

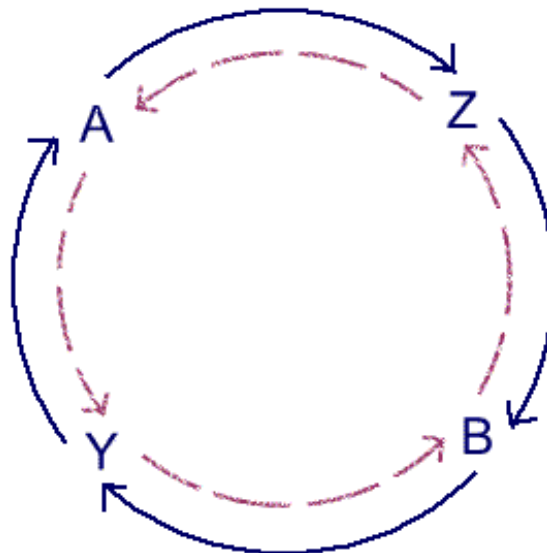
### Fourth Game

If the match goes to a fourth game, it will be Team 2's turn to serve first again, and once again they can have either Player Y or Player Z to serve first. The sequence is the same as the second game, where Player Y must serve to Player B, or Player Z must serve to Player A.

#### Doubles Serving Order

Blue Arrows - Odd numbered games and start of final game up to the change of ends

Red Arrows - Even numbered games and final game after change of ends



(c) Greg Letts, [www.gregsttpages.com](http://www.gregsttpages.com)

### Fifth Game

If the match goes to a fifth and final game, Team 1 serves first, with the same sequence used in the first and third games, and with the ability to have either Player A or Player B serve first. Let's say that Player A is chosen to serve first, so he must serve to Player Z.

Team 1 (A & B) win the first 2 points, score is 2-0 in their favour, and now Player Z must serve to Player B.

Team 2 (Y & Z) win the next 2 points, score is now 2-2, and Player B must serve to Player Y.

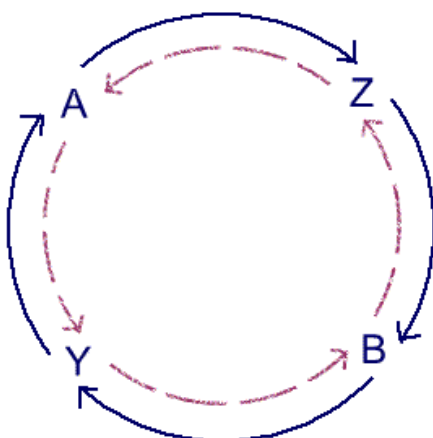
Team 1 (A & B) win the next 2 points, score is now 4-2, and Player Y must serve to Player A.

Team 2 win the next point, score is now 4-3 in favour of Team 1, Player Y is still serving to Player A.

Team 1 win the next point, score is now 5-3 in favour of Team 1, and it is now Player A's turn to serve.

#### Doubles Serving Order

Blue Arrows - Odd numbered games and start of final game up to the change of ends  
Red Arrows - Even numbered games and final game after change of ends



(c) Greg Letts, [www.gregsttpages.com](http://www.gregsttpages.com)

Since Team 1 have reached 5 points, the players swap sides. It is still Player A's turn to serve, but now the receivers must change their order of returning. Player A must now serve to Player Y, instead of Player Z.

Once player A has served his two serves, Player Y must now serve 2 serves to Player B. Then Player B must serve 2 serves to Player Z, and Player Z must serve 2 serves to Player A, and so on in this sequence until the match is won.

## DOUBLES TACTICS AND TIPS

In doubles, teamwork between you and your partner is essential if you want to play well together. You must be aware of your partner's strengths and weaknesses, instead of just playing the same way that you would in a singles match.

Here's some useful tactics and tips that will help you become a better doubles player.

### DOUBLES SERVING TIPS AND TACTICS

- Since you only have half a court to serve into, your ability to trick your opponent with side to side placement is limited. Your opponent can also cover the whole area with just his forehand or backhand, so your chances of cramping him up by serving to his playing elbow is small as well. These two factors reduce the effectiveness of serving long, so you should mainly stick to double bounce serves.
- Remember that your partner has to play your opponent's return of serve. So use serves that increase the chances of your partner getting a return that he likes. If your partner is good at attacking backspin balls, use more backspin serves, while if your partner is better at attacking topspin balls, use short sidespin/topspin serves to encourage your opponent to flick the ball.
- It is a good idea to use simple signals to tell you partner what serve you are about to do. Just before you get ready to serve, put your hand under the level of the table so that only your partner can see it, and make the signal. I personally use a fairly simple system, where I point down with my index finger to indicate backspin, up with my thumb to indicate topspin, and use a fist to indicate no spin. For sidespin, I point with my index finger or thumb in the direction that my sidespin will travel when my opponent hits the ball. Since most of the time I am serving



double bounce serves, I don't need a signal to indicate a short serve, my partner can assume that is what I am going to do. If I want to serve long, I point horizontally towards my opponent after making the first signal.

- Most of the time the server will make the signals about which serve to do. But if you are serving and your partner wants a particular serve, then he can use the same signalling method to tell you what serve he would like.



*Use signals to inform your partner about what serve you are going to do*

## RETURNING SERVE TIPS AND TACTICS

Return of serve can be the deciding factor in a doubles match, since the server has less chance to force a mistake from the receiver. A player who returns serve well in doubles can take the initiative away from the serving pair, stopping them from attacking, and making it easier for his own partner to make the first attack.

Here's some handy tips for returning serve well in doubles.

- Try to return the ball so that your opponents play a stroke that suits your partner. If your partner has a strong forehand loop off backspin, play more short pushes crosscourt, which will encourage your opponent to push crosscourt back to your partner's forehand. If your partner is weak against backspin, use more flicks and fast long returns to all angles, so that your opponent can attack with topspin, but not with a powerful attack, since he will have to move to reach the ball.
- Remember that you must place the ball to make things difficult for the server's partner, not the server! Keep an eye on where the server's partner is standing, and his ready position, which will help you decide where to play the ball.

## DOUBLES - GENERAL TIPS AND TACTICS

- Hitting the ball at the opponent who played the last shot is a good tactic, since he must now get out of the way before his partner can play a decent stroke. This can be especially useful if the player who just hit the ball is off balance, which will make him slow to move out of the way.
- Be aware of your opponent's playing level when compared to each other. If one opponent is much weaker than the other, then make sure that you and your partner play strong but consistent attacks to the weaker player (giving him the chance to make a mistake as often as possible), while you can be more aggressive against the stronger player.

- Also, take note of your opponent's strengths and weaknesses, since they are likely to be different for each player. But also keep in mind that it is no good attacking the weakness of your opponent, if it results in him playing a return that your partner is weak against too!
- If you are playing with a weaker partner, you must attack as strongly as you can as often as you can, to try to win the point or get a weak return that is easier for your partner to handle. If you can't attack strongly, you must then make it as difficult as possible for your opponents to attack your partner, or for them to give him returns that he doesn't like.
- If your partner is much stronger than you, then your number one priority is to get the ball back on the table any way you can, so that your partner gets another opportunity to make a strong attack. Only attack the balls you are confident you can hit easily - don't take unnecessary risks. But it is important to attack any easy balls as hard as you can - don't be scared. Hit the easy balls hard, and put everything else back on the table with minimal risks, and you will be doing your job well.
- For the weaker player, avoiding silly mistakes and sticking to the basics is always a good idea. When serving, stick to a basic double bounce serve that you can do well every time. Serving a fault is a huge no-no - since it means that your better partner never got the chance to use his skills. Likewise, when returning serve, the main thing is to get it back on the table somewhere, so that your partner gets the chance to play the ball. Don't try to hit winners when returning serve, just focus on getting the ball back first, and if you can, putting it in a tough place for your opponent to attack strongly.
- While it's fine to criticize yourself when playing singles, it can be a bad idea to criticize your doubles partner, since you can quickly destroy his confidence. Stick to praising your partner

and making positive suggestions about what he should do, which will relax and encourage him, rather than criticizing his mistakes and telling him what he shouldn't do, which will make him nervous and tense.

- If you or your partner are having a particularly bad day, then the other player may need to decide to take more risks and play more aggressively in order to compensate. If you do decide to use this approach, then the player who is having a bad day should take less risks and only attack easier balls, and the rest of the time just focus on placing the ball so it is difficult for the opponents to attack. If the player who is struggling starts to find some form again, then the player who is being more aggressive should start to return to his normal game.

## DOUBLES FOOTWORK PATTERNS

There are many complicated theoretical methods of moving around your partner in doubles, but in practice it boils down to a few simple rules which are easy to follow:

- Be aware of where your partner is
- Be aware of where your opponent is likely to hit the ball, and stay out of that area
- Once you have hit the ball, get out of the way fast, and circle back and around so that you ready to move back in to play your next stroke.

### Be Aware of Where Your Partner Is

When you are hitting the ball, it is important to have a rough idea of where your partner is, since that will help you decide whether to move to your left or right to get out of the way.

By taking note of which direction your partner moved after playing his last stroke, you should have a pretty good idea of where he is likely to go while waiting for his next stroke.



Obviously you shouldn't be looking behind you to check on your partner when you are supposed to be watching the ball coming towards you, but over time you will develop the ability to predict the likely place that your partner will be waiting while you play your shot.

### **Be Aware of Where Your Opponent is Likely to Hit the Ball**

When you are playing your stroke, you should hopefully have a location in mind for where you are sending the ball, and you know what type of stroke you have played. If you are also aware about where your opponents are, you will have a pretty good idea about where your opponent is likely to hit the ball from. This in turn will give you a pretty good idea about his likely angles of play.

Knowing this information is important, since it will also help you decide whether to move to your left or right.

Funnily enough, whereas in singles you want to move to the centre of your opponent's angle of play as quickly as possible, in doubles you actually want to get away from that location as quickly as you can, so your partner can get there instead!

A good rule of thumb to follow is that if you are moving with significant speed in a particular direction when you hit the ball, it is probably better to keep moving in that direction to get out of the way, since that will get you clear faster, even if you cut across the opponent's angle of play. If you are relatively stationary when playing the ball, then move sideways in whichever direction gets you out of your opponent's angle of play the fastest - don't cut across it.

### **Circle Back and Around**

Once you have moved sideways, your job isn't over - you can't just stay there. This is a common mistake made by inexperienced doubles players, who you can see moving sideways to get out of the way, then standing still, then moving sideways to get back to play the next stroke.

Instead of moving sideways and standing still, start circling around so that you actually move backwards and sideways back towards the centre of your opponents angle of play, but several steps behind your partner. You don't actually want to reach the centre of the angle of play, but stay a little to the side of it that you are already on, so that you are behind and a little to the side of your partner.



*Once you have hit the ball, circle around to a position behind and to the side of your partner*

When your partner hits the ball, pay attention to what direction he has hit it, and use that information to judge your opponent's likely angle of play. Then start moving towards the centre of that angle, just like you would in a singles match.

Meanwhile, your partner should be doing the same thing you just did - circling out to one side or the other, and coming around back



behind and a little to one side of you.

These simple rules will work for most of the time in doubles matches, if both you and your partner understand them and use them consistently. The only common exception that springs to mind is when your opponents are smashing the ball and you are lobbing the ball back from the barriers at the back of the court.

In that case, it may be a better idea to move sideways and forwards to get out of the possible angles your opponent can hit to, because if you try to hide in a back corner, your opponent will be able to hit the ball straight at you, making it difficult for your partner to make a clean stroke.



*William Henzell returning serve while Robert Frank is ready to step in*