



# **Instructor's Guide to Table Tennis**

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*Coaches are welcome and encouraged to print out and/or use this manual  
in any way that will promote table tennis.*

# Introduction

It's the most popular racket sport in the world. The second most popular participation sport. Ask most people to name this sport, and they'd immediately name that other well known racquet sport. But they'd be wrong.

You know what sport we are talking about or you wouldn't be reading this. Most people think of table tennis as "ping pong" - a game where a small white ball is patted back and forth until someone misses.

At the recreational level, about all anybody does is pat the ball back and forth. This is where its image as an easy sport probably came from, as it does take practice to learn to keep the ball going at a fast pace. But once learned, it's a skill for life. It is hoped that this guide will help you to help others in developing this skill. Perhaps it will help you as well.

USA Table Tennis (USATT) has over 7,000 sanctioned tournament players and 230 clubs nationwide. They participate in over 250 USATT-sanctioned tournaments annually.

USATT Headquarters is located at the Olympic Training Center in Colorado Springs, Colorado. If you have questions or problems, feel free to call or send a letter:

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Certification as an instructor is open to those with any coaching or teaching experience with children and who take the USATT's youth instructor certification test. If you wish to further your coaching education, the USATT has five levels of certification for coaches:

1. *Youth Instructor*
2. *Club Level Coach*
3. *State Level Coach*
4. *Regional Level Coach*
5. *National Level Coach*

Higher certification involves further requirements. Contact USATT for additional information.

It is assumed that the reader has had some experience with table tennis, whether that be from regular play at a club and tournaments, from USATT's three-hour instructor's course, or even just an impromptu demonstration by a local player. However, you do not need to be an expert on table tennis to teach the game. What is important is a desire to teach table tennis and an enthusiasm about the sport. If you have these characteristics, the students will pick up on it and they too will be enthusiastic. Then a table tennis class will be a rewarding and enriching experience, both for you and for those you coach.



# Coaching Philosophy

There is a huge difference between coaching children and teaching older athletes. In these pages, we are primarily interested in coaching children, and this is the type of coaching which will be emphasized.

Young athletes often look upon sports differently than adults. They participate to have *fun*. Knowing this, what type of coach should you be? There are three basic types: the *command* style, the *submissive* style, and the *cooperative* style.

## Command Style

The *command* style gives out orders, rules, and rigid discipline. This coach carries a verbal whip as he/she attempts to whip his/her charges into shape. He/she knows what is best and no ten-year-old should question that!

The command style, as you can probably guess, is a pretty poor method of coaching - at least for children. It takes the fun out of the game and ends up with kids disliking both the sport and the coach. The command style should be avoided whenever kids are being coached.

## Submissive Style

The *submissive* style lets the students do what they want, with very little leadership. This is basically a babysitter style, where the coach tosses out the ball and lets the kids do what they want. Although it is preferable to the command style, it is not a good method of coaching.

## Cooperative Style

The *cooperative* style is the midpoint between the command and the submissive styles. This type of coach realizes that coaching is a two-way street. The kids do have input, and the coach who realizes this fact is well on his/her way to being an excellent coach.

Obviously, even the cooperative style has variations. You may wish to adopt it, yet tend toward either the command or submissive style. Sometimes it is best to use different methods depending on the situation and the students involved. Your job as a coach is to decide what is best for your athletes.

# History of Table Tennis

The exact origin of table tennis is unknown. It began sometime in the 1890's as a parlor game and swept the country as a craze which soon died down.

It became popular again in the 1920's, and ping pong clubs were formed all over the world. The original name, Ping Pong, was a copyrighted trademark of Parker Brothers. Therefore, the name was changed to table tennis. The International Table Tennis Federation (ITTF) was formed in 1926.

As a parlor game, the sport was often played with cork balls and vellum racquets. (A vellum racquet had a type of rubber stretched on a twisted stick.) In the 1920's, wooden racquets covered with rubber "pips" were first used. These were the first hard rubber racquets, and they were the most popular type of racquet used until the 1950's.

During that time span, two playing styles dominated - hitters and choppers. Hitters basically hit everything, while choppers would back up ten or even twenty feet, returning everything with backspin. A player's attack with hard rubber was severely limited and so more and more choppers dominated. This became a problem whenever two of them met since both would often just push the ball back and forth for hours, waiting for the other to attack and make an error. One match at the World Championships lasted over 12 hours. This was stopped by the advent of the *expedite* rule. See the enclosed *Laws of Table Tennis* for additional information on expedite.

In 1952, a relatively unknown Japanese player showed up at the World Championships with a strange new type of racquet. It was a wooden blade covered by a thick sheet of sponge. Using this racquet, he easily won the tournament, and table tennis has never been the same since.

Over the next ten years, nearly all top players switched to sponge coverings. Two types were developed, *inverted* and *pips out*. The inverted type enabled players to put far more spin on the ball. Both types made attacking and counter-attacking

easier. The U. S., which was a table tennis power up until that time, was slow to make the change.

In the early 1960's, players began to perfect sponge play. First they developed the loop shot and soon looping became the most popular style. Spin serves were developed, as was the lob.

Today, players from Sweden, France, China, and Korea dominate international competition.

# Equipment

Even when dealing with older athletes, it is often the responsibility of the coach to help in choosing the equipment. When dealing with younger children, however, the coach must take over almost sole responsibility of choosing what equipment his/her charges should use. Children may not know the difference between the different racquet surfaces. After reading this chapter, you should be able to help guide kids into using adequate equipment.

Two common types of racquets are *hard rubber* and *sandpaper*. Sandpaper is illegal since it mars the ball. Neither gives the player the opportunity to play the game as it can be played with sponge racquets.

It is strongly recommended that kids be supplied with sponge racquets if at all possible. Sometimes this equipment is not available. If not, the situation is not a disaster, merely a handicap. If the switch can be made to sponge later on, you should do so. Avoid sandpaper at all costs!

Hard rubber was used by the best players in the world from the 1930's until the 1950's, when

sponge was invented. Hard rubber is simply a sheet of rubber with "pimples" on it. The pimples are conical-shaped bits of rubber which enable the racquet to "grab" the ball more than without them. They were successful in their time, but in the 1950's the sponge revolution changed the game.

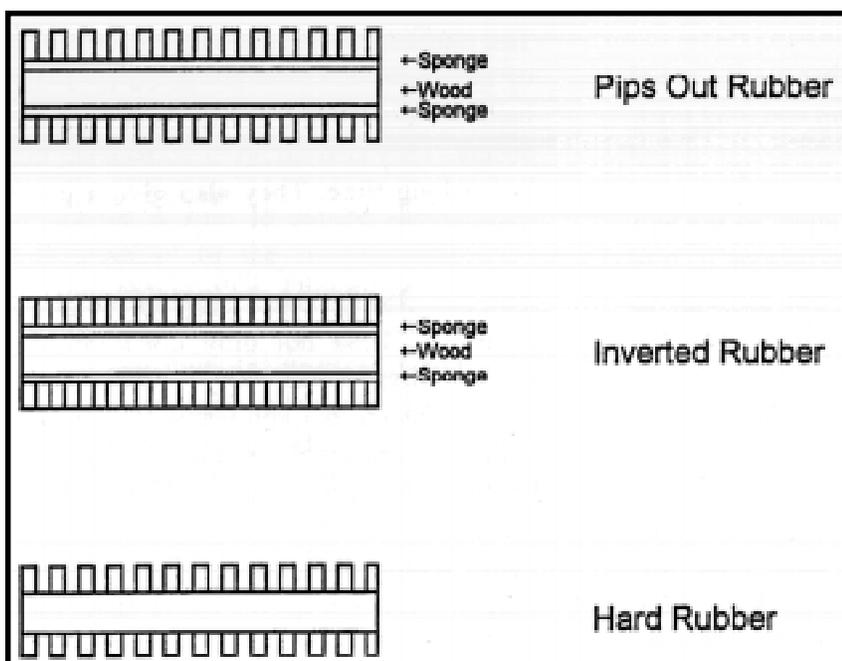
Sponge rubber is hard rubber with a sheet of bouncy sponge underneath. This type of surface enables you to hit the ball harder, put more spin on it, and keep the ball in play at a faster pace. This is something that is difficult with other surfaces.

If the pimples on the rubber sheet are facing outward, as in hard rubber, the sponge rubber is called *pips out sponge*. A variation of this is having the pips reversed, so they point inward, giving a smooth and often sticky surface. This is called *inverted sponge*. It is the most common type of surface used by tournament players. It enables the player to put more spin on the ball and to keep the ball in play at a fast pace.

Although inverted sponge is usually recommended for advanced players, at the beginning level it is important that some type of sponge is used. Hard rubber is acceptable for students; but as the players advance, it is in their best interest to switch to sponge.

Two types of sponge rubber merit special attention. They are *antispin* and *long pips*.

*Antispin* is a type of inverted sponge where the surface is very slick, so the ball slides on it. Spin does not take on it. It is good for defensive play but difficult to attack with. Unless the player you are coaching is a defensive player, he/she should not use antispin (at least not at this stage).



**Long pips** is pips out sponge where the pips are extra long and thin. They are similar to antispin in that they are mostly for defensive play. They produce strange effects on the ball, and for this reason they should not be used at this stage. These effects are caused by the tendency of the pips to bend, producing different types of shots. The pips also return any spin given to them (changing topspin to backspin and vice versa) rather than putting on their own spin. This can be confusing to kids.

The racket is not as important at this level as is the surface. It is best to get the sturdiest ones so they will last.

The table itself is not too important. Top players are very picky about the table, but that will come later on. A bigger problem is getting enough tables. Ideally, you want one for every two players. Since you cannot always have that, ways to deal with too few tables will be dealt with later on.

Any net that is reasonably tight and six inches high will do. Nets do have a tendency to sag after a time, especially if treated roughly. The instructor should check the nets periodically to make sure they are securely in position.

The ball can be of two basic types: good or inexpensive. Good are listed as 3-star balls, although some 2- and 1-star balls are decent. They cost \$1.00 to \$1.25 each but last a long time. They also give a good bounce.

You can also get 0-star balls for \$0.30 or so each. These not only don't bounce well - they break very easily. It is recommended that you use at least 1-star balls and preferably 3-star balls. In the long run, they are cheaper and last longer.

Table tennis clothing requirements are simple. There are special shoes made just for table tennis, but they are not really necessary at this level. Tennis shoes or something similar is fine. Shorts and a non-white shirt (except when orange or yellow balls are used) finish a player's outfit, although long pants are okay.

Care of equipment becomes very important when dealing with children. Damage to equipment can be avoided if the coach stresses from the start the importance of treating the equipment correctly. This means no banging or throwing racquets, no hitting or shoving of the table, and no sudden yanks to the net. Make it clear from the start that poor treatment of equipment will not be tolerated.

Care of sponge rubber should also be stressed. Inverted surfaces are especially delicate and need to be cleaned regularly. Clean the surface with plain water, wiping it clean with a towel.

Sponge rubber wears out after a few months. Many advanced players change their racquet surface every week! Most players cannot afford that, of course. But the surface does need to be changed periodically (at least every six months to a year). As a player advances, he/she might choose to change more often.

Sponge rubber is sold in square sheets which is attached to the racquet with special table tennis glue. Directions for doing so come with the sponge rubber. There are many manufacturers that sell sponge rubber sheets as well as other table tennis equipment. Contact USATT for a list of approved manufacturers and distributors.

# Teaching the Grip

The most dominating grip in table tennis today, used by over 90% of American players, is the shakehands grip. The shakehands grip is the most popular and will be the one taught here. It is the most versatile and popular grip in the world. It is recommended that all students use this grip unless they already use or have a strong preference for one of the other grips.

The grip is the first thing you will teach your class. Line them up against a wall and show them how it is done. Then have them all try it. (It is assumed that they all have a racquet to use.) Go down the line and check each grip, making corrections when necessary. Praise them for doing it correctly. Even the least coordinated students can do the grip properly, and the coach should give approval for doing so.

## Shakehands Grip

To check the grip, you will of course have to know how to do it yourself. The shakehands grip is easy to learn. It is done as follows.

- Start by “shaking hands” with the racquet handle. Now extend your index finger along the bottom of the blade. This gives extra stability to the blade.

- Now check the thumb. It should be along the bottom of the blade, on the opposite side from your index finger. The thumbnail should be *perpendicular* to the blade. The soft part of the thumb should not be touching the blade.

Now check the crook of the thumb and forefinger. The blade should rest there, perhaps a little to the index finger side but never on the thumb side. The exact placement can be varied somewhat.

- With this grip, there are now two anchors - the thumb and index finger and the last three fingers around the handle. In addition, the middle finger helps support the weight of the blade. With the fingers in proper position, the blade is very stable. When hitting a backhand, the thumb gives a firm backing; when hitting a forehand, the index finger does this.

Once the students have learned to grip the blade properly, you are ready to start!



**Shakehands grip - forehand side.**



**Shakehands grip - backhand side.**

# Getting Started

Children have not developed their hand/eye coordination to the extent that an adult has. What seems simple to an adult can be very difficult for kids. Often when an adult is coaching a child, they are working on different wavelengths. The adult is trying to teach the child to hit the ball on the table. The kid is struggling just to hit the ball. It may be difficult for many adults not experienced with children to perceive this. To a child, just hitting the ball with the racquet can be difficult.

Now that the kids know how to hold the racquet, the first inclination might be to send them out to the table and start teaching them the strokes. But that would be premature. You have to work up to it. The kids will hit the ball everywhere but on the table and will not be able to learn much of anything.

Before sending them to the table, have them practice bouncing the ball on the racquet. For elementary school children, that can be surprisingly tricky.

See how many times they can bounce the ball up and down on the racquet. Make a game out of it - see who can do it the most number of times. Have them do this for five minutes or so both now and at the start of each class for the first few weeks. It is a perfect way to develop hand/eye coordination to the point where they will soon be able to hit a moving ball and keep it on the table. Make sure they use the proper grip while bouncing the ball.

Variations of this game can be done. After they have become proficient at ball bouncing, have them bounce the balls on the floor with the racquet. Or have them try bouncing the ball on the racquet but using alternate sides of the racquet.

Relay races are also great fun. Make up teams and have them race while bouncing the ball up and down or against the floor. The kids will have so much fun, they won't even realize how much practice they are getting.



**Bouncing a ball on a racket helps increase coordination for young beginners.**

# Explaining Spin

If anything differentiates table tennis from other sports, it is spin. Most ball sports use spin in some way, but none to the extent table tennis does. At the higher levels, the spin becomes so extreme as to be unimaginable by those not experienced with it.

At the lower levels, the spin takes on lesser importance. Only two spins are used: *topspin* and *backspin*. Neither are produced to any great extent. However, without knowledge of and ability to use and deal with spin, no one (including children) can develop a full appreciation of the game.

If you hit a ball so that the top of the ball is rotating away from you (and the bottom rotating toward you), you have produced *topspin*. Topspin is used on nearly all attacking shots. A ball hit with topspin will sink faster than one without it. This makes the ball drop on the table even if it is hit hard. Without topspin, most hard hit shots would go off the end.

*Backspin* is the reverse of topspin. If you hit the ball so that the top rotates toward you (and the bottom away from you), you have produced backspin. Backspin is mostly a defensive spin, used to make the ball travel in a line and control it. It makes the ball rise - or it would, except gravity counteracts it. The two balance out, so the ball tends to travel in a straight line.

This would not be good if you hit the ball hard. The ball would go straight off the end with the backspin keeping it from dropping. However, by making the ball travel in a line, the ball can be made to stay at just above net level for a greater period of time. This makes it easier to keep the ball low throughout its flight and keeps the opponent from smashing it.

Kids don't really need to know all the theory about spin. It's enough if you explain to them that topspin forces the ball down and backspin slows it down. Then you only have to explain how spin is produced, which is used on what shots, and how to handle the different spins.

Topspin is produced by hitting the ball with an upward motion. The more you graze the ball, the more spin you get. Demonstrate this for the students by holding a ball in your free (non-racquet) hand and demonstrating a topspin stroke and contact with your other (racquet) hand. The kids should be able to see how the spin is produced. This will be elaborated on in the sections on the forehand and backhand drives.

Backspin is produced the same way but with a downward motion. This too can be demonstrated for kids by holding the ball and showing the stroke and contact. This will be elaborated on in the section on push.

To return a ball with spin, you have to compensate. For example, to return a backspin ball, you have to aim up to compensate for the spin or the ball will go into the net. To return a ball with topspin, you have to aim down or the ball will pop up or go off the end.

Spin is also used on the serve. For kids, it is best to stick to simple topspin and backspin serves, but later they may learn to put sidespin on the serve as well. It is up to you to decide what each child is capable of doing and then teaching him/her what he/she is willing and able to learn.

# Explaining the Rules

There are a number of misunderstandings about the rules of table tennis, and it is likely that your students will all have vague but incorrect ideas as to the actual rules. Explain the rules to them as simply as you can, demonstrating as often as possible rather than just telling.

Shown below are important points that should be explained. It is important that kids get the rules right. It gives them a framework from which to work. Without making the rules clear, they will argue and bicker every time a disagreement about rules comes up. Get the rules ingrained from the start!

## Scoring

- The game is 21 points.
- A game must be won by two points.
- Serves are alternated every five points, except at deuce (when they are alternated every point).
- The game does not end at 7-0 or any other score except 21 or deuce.

## Serving

- The ball must be held in an uncupped hand, with the thumb free.
- The ball must be tossed up at least six inches. The net is six inches high and can be used for comparison.
- The ball must be struck while it is dropping.
- Contact must be above the table level and behind the endline or its imaginary extension.
- Let serves (serves that nick the net but hit the other side of the table) are taken over. You can serve any number of let serves without losing a point.

## Rallying

- You may not volley the ball (hit it before it bounces on your side of the table).
- The rally continues until someone fails to return the ball.
- You may not move the table or touch it with your non-playing hand.
- To start a game, one player hides the ball in one hand under the table and the other tries to guess what hand it is in. Winner gets the choice of serving or receiving first (or choice of sides).

**You can find the complete rules of table tennis at the USA Table Tennis home page at [www.usatt.org](http://www.usatt.org) (click on “Rules of the Game”).**

# Multiball

One of the problems of teaching young beginners table tennis is that they just don't have the ball control to keep it going. Since neither can keep the ball going, neither gets great practice. It would be far better if they could hit with a stronger player who could keep the ball going to one spot so the player can concentrate on one shot. But this is usually impossible. There are more young players than there are good players. However, there is one way to improve - multiball.



**During multiball, the coach grabs ball out of a box and hits them at the player.**

To use multiball, you must have a bucket of balls available. One person (the instructor at first although later the kids themselves can learn to do it) feeds the balls to the person practicing. He/she does so by hitting the balls with his/her racquet in whatever fashion is desired to the spot where the player is waiting. The bucket is placed on the table near the net, and the feeder stands to the lefthand side of the table (the righthand side if the instructor is left-handed).

The feeder can control the shots far better than if he had to hit the player's often errant shots. He can go at whatever speed and pace is desirable for the given player.

The only disadvantage of multiball is that one person does have to feed. However, a beginning player gets well over twice as many good shots off in a given time than would be possible if hitting with a partner. This may make it worth the effort. This is an especially good method to get players started off on each stroke before sending them off to the table to hit among themselves.

What seems to work best is the following schedule.

- Whenever a new stroke is introduced, start with a demonstration so the students know what they are supposed to do.
- Have them line up and do multiball with the coach one at a time. Here it would be advantageous to have more than one coach so the players can spend more time hitting and less time waiting in line.
- After each child has practiced the stroke to be learned, they can be sent out to the table.

They will probably still hit the ball all over the place, but they will do better than they would have before. With practice, they will be able to do the strokes acceptably and with time, they may surprise you with their skill.

# Teaching Simple Serves

To start with, you should teach your students to serve topspin and backspin, with both the backhand and forehand. These four serves will not only be useful in games but will also allow them to serve in such a way as to start good rallies during practice.

Make sure you have explained the difference between topspin and backspin before teaching these serves. Also make sure they understand the service rules.

Once demonstrated, the kids should be sent out on the table to practice their serves. They should not rally at this time. Have one serve the ball and the other catch it and serve it back. Give them goals to work towards, either a certain number of good serves in a row or a specific target on the table to hit a certain number of times.

Some children will have trouble doing a six-inch toss and making a good serve. For these players, you can help by guiding their playing arms through the stroke. You should still let them do the toss alone, however.

To teach a topspin serve, have them hold the racquet so it is perpendicular to the floor. Have them contact the ball on the back towards the top with an upward and forward motion. Show them how to graze the ball for maximum topspin. This serve can be done either forehand or backhand, whichever is easier for the child. However, they should eventually learn to do it both forehand and backhand.

A topspin serve, once learned, can be served very fast. Players should see how fast they can serve the ball and still keep it on the table. For maximum speed, do not graze the ball too much. Have the ball sink mostly into the wood and swing mostly straight forward. Try to have the ball hit the table as close to the endline on the far side as possible. If it lands too short, the serve can be served faster. If it lands too deep, it's been served off the end.

To teach a backspin serve, have him/her hold the racquet so the hitting surface is pointing mostly upward at about a 45 degree angle to the floor. The specific angle depends both on the type of racquet surface, the speed of the racquet at contact, and how finely the ball is grazed. This is true on all serves, but especially with backspin and sidespin.

Contact the ball on the back towards the bottom with a downward stroke. Again, stress that the more you graze the ball, the more spin. This serve can also be done both forehand and backhand, and both ways should be learned.

On all serves, the points that should be stressed are:

- Keep the ball low.
- All serves should be served with as much spin or as much speed as possible.
- All serves should be aimed at a particular part of the table, not just served in the general direction of the far side.
- Serve with a general plan in mind. If you want a topspin return, serve topspin. If you want a backspin return, serve backspin. Of course, this is just a generality. You can't force your opponent to return the ball the way you want. But you can try.
- Make sure the serve is legal!

On the following pages, you will find sequences of the forehand and backhand topspin, backspin and sidespin serves.



**Forehand Topspin Serve**



**Forehand Backspin Serve**

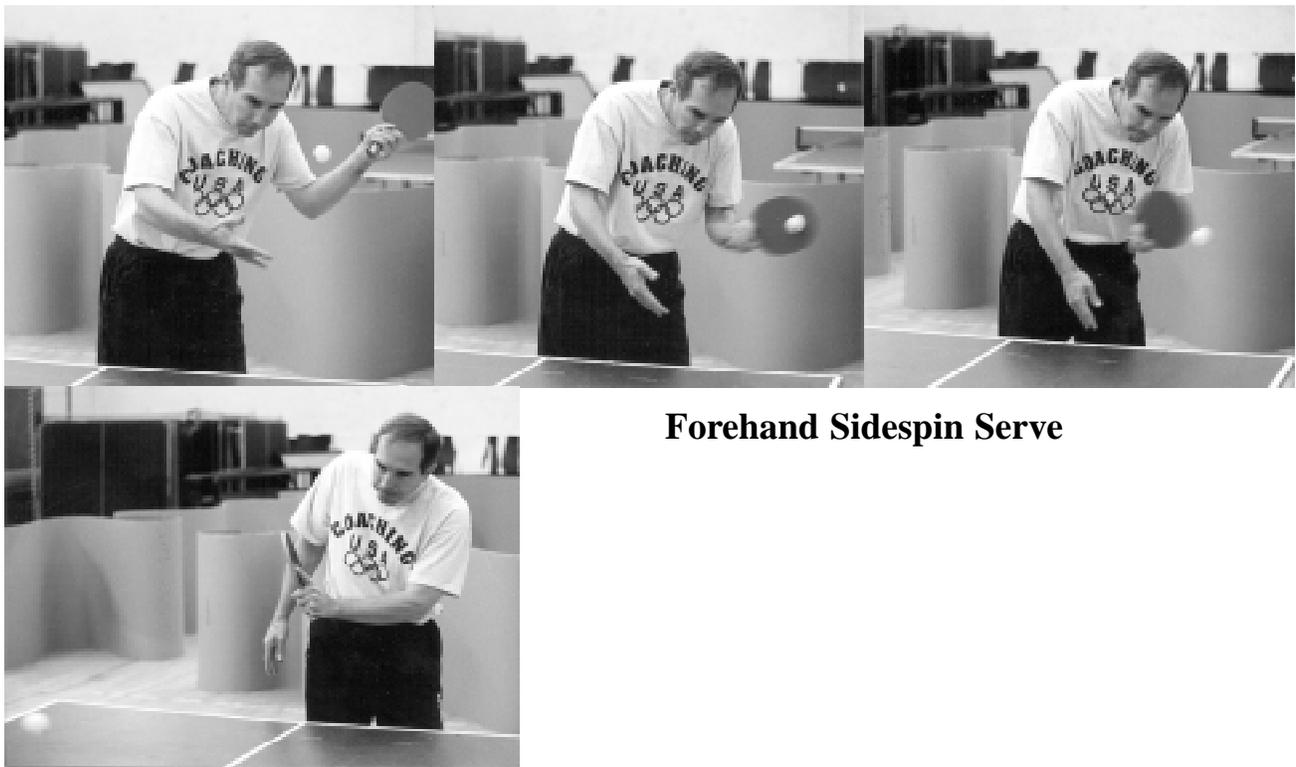




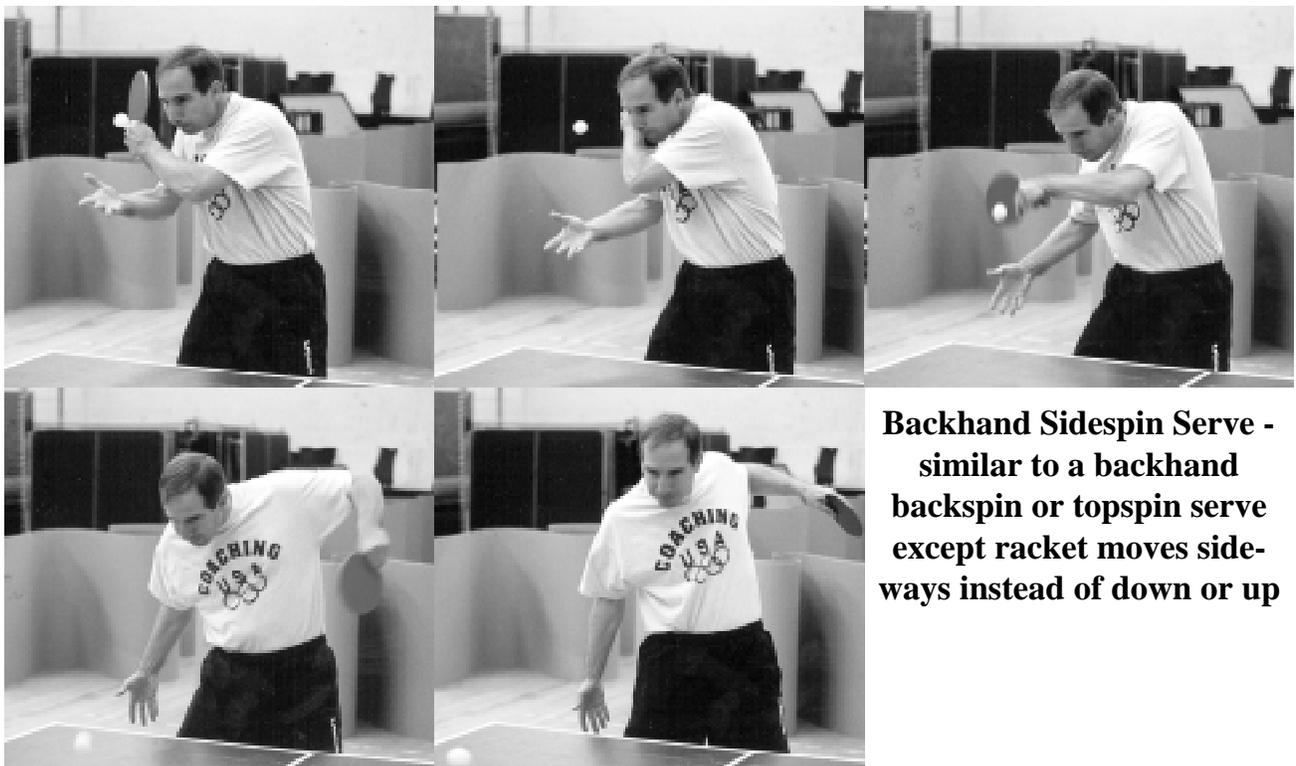
**Backhand Topspin Serve**



**Backhand Backspin Serve**



**Forehand Sidespin Serve**



**Backhand Sidespin Serve - similar to a backhand backspin or topspin serve except racket moves sideways instead of down or up**

# Teaching the Strokes

The best way to teach a stroke is to know it well yourself and have experience teaching it. In these next few sections, we will first go over how the stroke is done and then common mistakes which students make.

One thing to note is that although kids don't have the hand/eye coordination of adults, they are natural imitators and will mimic a perfect stroke much more easily than an adult. Rather than tell them all the finer points of each stroke, learn to demonstrate and then fix individual problems.

The best way to teach a stroke is to guide the player through it. Methods for doing so will be explained in each section as they come up. There are several problems you will encounter, however. First and foremost will be the player's own resistance. Not intentional resistance, but most kids tense up when learning a new stroke. You'll be surprised at their strength! Tell them to relax the arm. You should guide the stroke until they have the feel of it, first without the ball and then with it. Then have them practice the stroke a few times on their own without the ball.

It will be shown how to guide a player through a stroke, both for lefthanders and righthanders. It is assumed that the instructor is righthanded. If you are lefthanded, reverse the instructions, teaching lefthanders the way it is explained for righthanders and vice versa.

## Ready Position for Strokes

Before teaching any strokes, you should teach your kids how to stand at the table. Have your players stand in a slight crouch with the knees slightly bent. Weight should be on the balls of the feet, which should be slightly farther than shoulder width apart.

Note that in table tennis, a player's middle is his playing elbow. This is because all shots rotate on it, and the forehand and the backhand shots are equal distance from it on either side. This means that a player who favors neither side should stand with his playing elbow lined up with the middle line of the table. Since most players favor the forehand at least slightly, they should stand with the elbow a little to the left of the middle line.

# Teaching the Forehand

The forehand drive is the strongest shot in the game because, unlike the backhand, the body is not in the way during the shot. Also, the muscles used in the shot are generally better developed than those used in the backhand. It will likely become the best shot for most of your players. It is done pretty much the same way with all three grips. (Description is for a right-hander, although sequence is of left-hander.)

## Backswing

Rotate the body to the right at the waist and rotate the arm back at the elbow. The elbow should stay near the waist. Weight should be rotated to the right foot.

During the backswing, the racquet should open slightly. The racquet tip and arm should point slightly down, with the elbow at about 120 degrees or so.

## Forward Swing

Start by rotating the weight forward onto the left foot. This initiates the forward swing. Now rotate the arm on the elbow forward, keeping the elbow almost stationary. The elbow angle should decrease to about 90 degrees. The waist should be rotated forward. Backswing and forward swing should be one continuous motion.

## Contact

Contact should be made at the top of the bounce, in front and slightly to the right of the body. This will close your racquet as it contacts the ball. The racquet should rotate around the ball, creating topspin.

Sink the ball into the sponge using the upward and forward motion of the racquet. Stroke through the ball - do not stop the swing at contact.

## Follow-Through

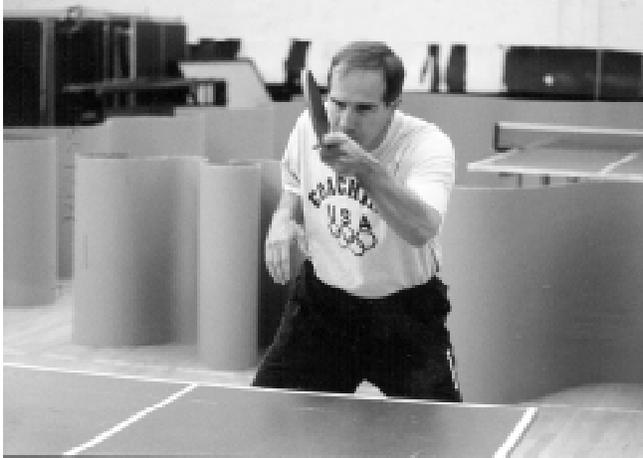
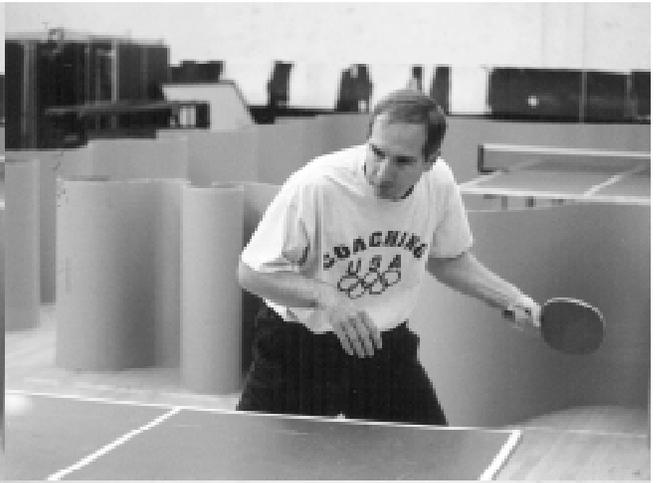
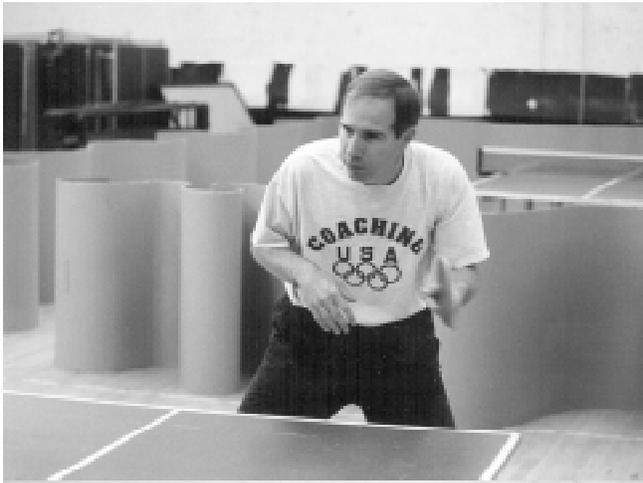
The racquet goes roughly to the forehead or around the right eye, similar to a salute. Taller players follow through lower. Shorter players (and most kids) follow through a little higher. Weight should be transferred to the left leg, with the shoulders and waist rotated to the left.

## Notes

The forehand smash is the same as the forehand drive except harder. Use as much forehand snap as possible and put all of your weight behind the shot. Sink the ball deep into the sponge and wood.

When guiding the player through the forehand drive, make sure that he/she keeps his/her elbow about 4 inches from the body. For a righthanded player, you should keep your left arm on the player's playing elbow to keep it in place. Guide his/her arm with your right hand, using your own forehand stroke. Make sure the player stands at least slightly sideways and strokes from the elbow.

For lefthanders, guide the stroke with your right hand doing what for you would be a backhand. Your right hand should be to the left of the child's head. Hold his/her elbow in with your left hand.



**Forehand Drive**

# Teaching the Backhand

The backhand is the second shot to be taught. It too can be done against backspin, but is best used against topspin. Beginners should probably push with their backhands against backspin, at least at the start. It is not as powerful as the forehand. Therefore, consistency and quickness are more important. It is done differently with all three grips, but we will only explain the shakehands grip backhand in detail. The others will be covered briefly.

## Backswing

Rotate the lower arm and racquet towards the stomach, bringing the racquet down to about table level. The racquet and arm should point slightly downwards, with the elbow at about a 90 degree angle. The racquet should open during the backswing. The elbow itself stays stationary. Do not use the shoulder, legs, waist, etc., at any part of the stroke!

## Forward Swing

Rotate the lower arm and racquet forward and slightly up on elbow. The elbow moves forward just enough to keep the racquet going in a straight line.

## Contact

At contact, snap the wrist up and over the ball, closing the racquet. The racquet rotates around the ball, creating topspin. For extra power, stroke straight through the ball with less spin, sinking the ball straight into the sponge and wood.

## Follow Through

The arm continues to extend forward and slightly up, with the elbow extending forward to keep the racquet going in a straight line until the very end of the follow-through. At the end of the stroke, the racquet should point a little to the right of the direction the ball was hit. The elbow is now almost fully extended.

## Notes

A backhand smash is simply a very hard backhand. Use a longer backswing and snap the wrist hard at contact. This is a very difficult shot, and most beginners won't be able to do this shot for a while.

When teaching the backhand, make sure the player strokes the ball in front of the body, not from the side. The backhand can be more difficult to teach a child since the player has less reach on that side, combined with short arms, the range is rather small (even for multiball).

When coaching a righthander, guide the stroke with your own backhand stroke. Your right hand should be around the right side of his/her body, guiding his/her right arm. For a lefthanded player, you can either guide with your left hand or stand to the player's left, facing him. Guide with your right hand and do what for you would be a forehand stroke.



**Backhand Drive**

# Teaching the Block

A block is a simple way of returning a hard drive. It is simpler than a drive, and many coaches teach it first for that reason. However, one of the worst habits a player can get into is blocking too much.

A block can be done either forehand or backhand. The stroke is similar to a drive except that there is no backswing and very little follow through. There is also no weight shift. A block is best described as just that - a block. Just stick the racquet in the way of a hard hit ball. If the racquet angle is correct, the ball will go back low and with a good pace.

Another difference in the block is that you should contact the ball earlier. Take it right off the bounce. The block is most effective as a way to return an opponent's drive as quickly as possible so as not to give him a chance to keep attacking.

Later on, when you show your players how to do table tennis drills, you will often have one player attack with forehand and backhand drives, while the other blocks.

## The Block - Forehand and Backhand

### Backswing

Very little backswing. Just get the racquet into position so that the incoming ball will contact it.

### Forward Swing

Very little, except on an aggressive block.

### Contact

The key to blocking is to use the opponent's speed and spin to return the ball. Contact should be made right after the bounce. Quickness is the key - you don't want to give your opponent time to make another strong shot.

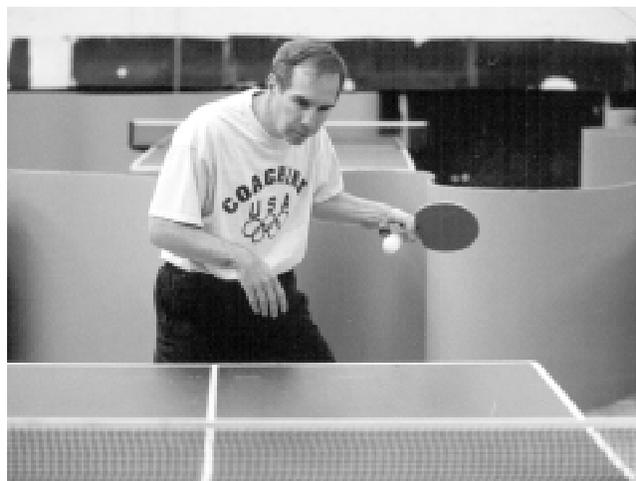
Hold the racquet firmly and let the ball sink into the sponge and trampoline back. At contact, move the racquet forward some, more so against a slow ball than against a fast one.

### Follow Through

Although you have no backswing and hardly any forward motion before contact, you do have to follow through. Just move the racquet forward, rotating at the elbow.



**Backhand Block**



**Forehand Block**

# Teaching the Push

The push is a passive backspin shot done against backspin. It is generally done against a serve or push which you don't want to attack. It is mostly done with the backhand, as the forehand push is slightly awkward and it is usually better to attack on that side. The key is to push so the opponent cannot attack effectively. Keep the ball low, place it well, and give it a good backspin.

The push is done roughly the same with all three grips. The following description is done for the shakehands grip. Make the obvious adjustments for other grips.

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## Backhand Push

### Backswing

Point the elbow forward, open the racquet, and bring the racquet backward, rotating at the elbow. The elbow should not move much during the stroke.

### Forward Swing

Rotate the racquet forward and slightly down.

### Contact

Beginners should contact the ball as it drops. Let the ball fall onto the racquet, grazing the bottom back of the ball to create backspin. More advanced players can push quicker off the bounce, but for kids that may be too difficult to control. Top players do it both ways.

### Follow Through

Do not stop at contact. Follow through by extending the arm at the elbow until it is almost fully extended.



**Backhand Push**

## Forehand Push

(Description is for a right-hander, although sequence is of left-hander.)

### Backswing

The elbow should be slightly in front of the body. Open the racquet and bring the racquet backwards and up, almost to the right shoulder. The elbow does not move throughout the rest of the stroke.

### Forward Swing

Rotate the racquet forward and down at the elbow.

### Contact

Contact is the same as on the backhand push. Let the ball drop onto the racquet, grazing the bottom back of the ball to create backspin.

### Follow Through

Do not stop at contact. Follow through by extending the arm at the elbow until it is almost fully extended.

The push is very easy to teach, but it is difficult to teach good backspin. This is not important at this stage. Guiding a child's stroke should be easy since the push is such a simple shot. Emphasize keeping the ball low since many of your players will want to send the ball high into the air. Also emphasize that the push is a slow shot. Many of your players will want to push the ball much too fast to keep it on the table with any consistency.



**Forehand Push**

# Teaching the Loop

The loop is a shot with excessive topspin. The spin is produced by grazing the ball in an upward direction. A good loop is difficult for a beginner to return without going off the end or at least popping up. It is easier to loop against backspin than against topspin. It is primarily a set-up shot, but it can also be used as a putaway shot. It is best done on the forehand side, but many players have developed good backhand loops as well. The description below is for the forehand loop against backspin; in the notes afterward the differences for looping against topspin are noted. (Description is for a right-hander, although sequence is of left-hander.)

## Backswing

With your right foot slightly back, bend your knees, rotate your hips, waist and shoulders backward, and bring your racket and arm down and back by dropping your right shoulder. Straighten your arm so elbow is nearly straight, with your wrist cocked down slightly.

## Forehand Loop vs. Backspin



## Forward Swing

Start the forward swing by pushing off your back leg and rotating your hips and waist forward. Rotate your shoulders, pulling with your left.

## Contact

Just before contact, snap your forearm and wrist into the ball smoothly but vigorously. (Beginners shouldn't use wrist at first.) Contact the ball as it drops for maximum spin and control, at the top of the bounce for faster, more aggressive loops. Contact is made in front and to the right of your body, immediately after the shoulder and hip rotation. Contact is a lifting, grazing motion against the back of the ball.

## Follow-Through

Arm should continue up and forward, finishing with the racket somewhere around the forehead or higher. Transfer your weight to your left foot.

## Notes

Against topspin or a ball without backspin, the stroke is the same except you don't lift the ball. Backswing is more backwards, not down. Forward swing is mostly forward, and contact is more on top of the ball instead of the back of the ball.

# Games Kids Can Play

There are a number of games you can play besides table tennis singles. Many of them involve having more than two players to a table, which can be a great help when you have too few tables. They should be mixed in at various times as a break from regular practice sessions. They are, above all else, great fun for the kids, which is the basic reason they are being taught table tennis.

## Doubles

Table tennis doubles is similar to tennis doubles in that you have two players on a side, thus four players to a table. There are a few differences between doubles and singles, however.

First of all, the players must alternate shots. If one player on one team hits the ball twice in a row, that team loses the point. This enables all participants to get an equal number of shots and have equal fun.

In the situation where the teams are Players A and C versus Players B and D, the rotation is as follows:

1. Player A serves to Player B
2. Player B returns to Player C
3. Player C returns to Player D
4. Player D returns to Player A
5. Player A returns to Player B (i.e. start over)

This rotation continues until a point is won.

After Player A serves five times, Player B (on the other team) serves to Player C. Player C then serves to Player D, and the rotation continues in this way. The second difference is that all serves are served diagonally from the server's righthand court to the receiver's righthand court. If the serve hits the table outside these courts, it is a lost point.

## Brazilian Teams

For Brazilian teams, break the class into teams of three to five players each. Two teams play against each other on each table - a great way to make up for a lack of tables!

The players on each team get into a line and the first one from each team goes to the table. They play out one point, and the loser of the point goes to the end of the line for his team. The next in line takes over for him/her.

This is done over and over, with the winner of each point staying on the table and the loser going to the end of his team's line. The new person on the table always serves. Score is kept for each team, with the first team to reach 51 (or 31 if you want a shorter game) wins, although you have to win by two.

## Canadian Singles

Canadian singles is a variation of Brazilian teams. This time, players play for themselves, with three or more players on a table. The players get into a single line.

The first two players play out a point, with the loser going to the end of the line. The next player goes to the table. As in Brazilian teams, the new person always serves.

Each player keeps score for himself/herself or you can have someone score for everyone. The game continues until someone has scored 21 points and wins the game.

## Ladder Singles

Arrange the tables into a specific numerical order. Put your two weakest players on the first table, the two strongest players on the last table, and everybody else in between going from weakest to strongest. Have them hide the ball to see who serves first; and when everybody is ready, shout "GO!" Everybody begins playing out points, alternating serves. The first person to score seven points yells "STOP!" Everybody stops, and whoever is in the

lead at that time advances one table toward the first table. The loser goes down a table. Have them hide the ball again for service and continue as before.

If there is a tie when “stop” is yelled, play a sudden death playoff. One point wins. Have the entire class watch - they’ll love it!

The object of the game, of course, is to reach the first table and stay there. This is why you start with the strongest players on the last table and the weakest on the first table. Note that whoever wins on the first table and whoever loses on the last table stay where they are.

If you have a few players too many to have two to a table, have your strongest players sit out the first round(s) by the last table. They should get in line to get onto the last table. In this version, the loser on the last table goes to the end of the line of those sitting out and the first in line gets on the table. Of course, if the player loses right away, he/she is put back off the table again. This is another reason to put your strongest players on the first table.

### **Ash Tray Table Tennis**

Ash tray table tennis is the same as regular table tennis with one exception: ash trays or similar objects are placed on the table at various points. There are two ways of scoring: either play it straight with the ash trays as obstacles or score only if a point is won by hitting an ash tray.

### **Stroking Contests**

Two games that can be played that also help a player practice his/her strokes are backhand to backhand games and pushing games.

In the first, have them play out a game hitting just backhands from their backhand corners. (No backspin shots!) If the ball hits to the right of the middle line (for righties), it is a lost point. Lefties should play together or you can have a lefty and righty play the game hitting their shots down the line (parallel to the sidelines).

You can also set up a pushing game. Only backspin serves are allowed, and the players push all over the table until one of them misses.

### **Relay Races**

As mentioned earlier, relay races are great fun and great for fitness. They can be done bouncing the ball on the racquet, on the floor, or any other version you can think of.

### **Table Tennis Olympics**

Events include:

- Table tennis ball shotput
- Table tennis ball throw (if there is room)
- Table tennis sprint done while bouncing the ball on racquet
- Table tennis target shooting - See who can hit a target on the table with the serve the most times
- Table tennis obstacle course - Running around and under pre-arranged tables

Add any events you can think of!

# Scheduling Practices

It is assumed here that the students you are teaching are all beginners, meaning that they have not been involved in organized table tennis. For this level, the drills and practice sessions should be kept simple. Yet variation is the spice of life, especially for young kids. They should be given different drills to try whenever possible. This doesn't mean that they can't ever do the same drill twice. Far from it! But the same drills shouldn't be scheduled every day. New ones should be thrown in whenever possible.

Another way to make a practice session more interesting is to mix in various games, such as those learned in the chapter *Games Kids Can Play*. Don't spend all of every session playing these games. Otherwise, the kids will not improve and they will come to expect nothing but games. Getting them to practice later on will be difficult.

Following is a list of drills the kids can do. Note that most of them require footwork, and the kids should be shown how to move their feet! Most drills should be done in five to ten minutes, although you can have them go on much longer if you can make a game out of it. Pick out the ones you think will be most helpful and start your session!

Immediately after the Drill Library is an outline of a three-week table tennis class targeted for fifth and sixth graders. For other ages and classes of other lengths, you should vary the schedule somewhat.

# Drills Library

All drills are written for the righthander. Make appropriate changes for lefthanders.

## **Forehand to Forehand**

The players hit forehand to forehand, cross-court. They should concentrate on consistency. Contests can be set up to see which pair can hit the most in a row. This can also be done with most of the drills mentioned below.

## **Backhand to Backhand**

Same as forehand to forehand, except done with the backhand.

## **Forehand to Backhand, Down the Line**

One player hits his/her forehand down the line to the other player's backhand.

## **Forehand-Backhand**

One player hits or blocks his/her backhand side to side. The other player alternates between hitting a backhand and a forehand.

## **One-One Footwork**

One player hits or blocks his/her backhand side to side - one to a corner and the other to the middle of the table. The other player returns all shots with his/her forehand.

## **Forehand-Backhand Footwork**

One player hits or blocks his/her backhand cross-court to the other player's backhand. The other player alternates between hitting his/her backhand and his/her forehand out of the backhand corner.

## **Two-One Footwork**

One player hits or blocks his/her backhand twice cross-court to the other player's backhand corner, then once down the line to the forehand, and then does two more to the backhand, one to the forehand, etc. The other player hits a backhand from the backhand corner, a forehand from the backhand corner, and then a forehand from the forehand corner. He/she then starts over with a backhand from the backhand corner, etc.

## **Figure Eight**

One player hits everything cross-court. The other hits everything down the line. Each player alternates hitting forehands and backhands. The ball will travel in a figure eight.

## **Pushing**

Both players push backhand to backhand, keeping the ball as low as possible. They push forehand to forehand and then push all over.

## **Attack Against Backspin**

One player serves backspin. The other pushes it back to a prearranged spot. The first player attacks it, usually with the forehand. They play out the point. They can also combine this with one of the earlier drills, continuing the rally as explained in the earlier drill.

## **Serve and Attack**

One player serves any serve. The other returns the serve without attacking. The first player attacks, and the two players play out the point like in a game.

## **Service Practice**

This can be done in two ways. One way is to give each player a number of balls (a whole bucket if possible) and have them serve one at a time. Afterwards they pick up the balls and serve again.

Another way is to have one player serve and have the other player catch the serve and serve it back, etc. Or you can have one player serve, the other player return the serve, and the server catch the ball and serve again. They should not play out the point or they won't be able to concentrate on their serves.

# Sample Lesson Plan

Shown below is a sample one-week, seven-day lesson plan for students in grades five and six. Be flexible with the drills. If a student is not capable of doing a specific drill, change to a simpler drill. If you run into time problems, change the schedule. You may want to start each session with stretching and calisthenics.

## Day 1

1. Introduction to table tennis
  - a. General introduction
  - b. Equipment
2. Grip
  - a. Demonstrate shakehands and penhold grips
  - b. Have kids line up and demonstrate grips
3. Ball bouncing
  - a. Demonstrate
  - b. Have kids practice
  - c. See how many they can do in a row
4. Free play or relay races

## Day 2

1. Have kids line up and demonstrate grip again
2. Ball bouncing practice
3. Table tennis etiquette
  - a. Proper conduct
  - b. Care of equipment
4. Forehand demonstration (with partner or with video)
5. Class shadow-strokes forehand together

## Day 3

1. Demonstrate grip
2. Ball bouncing
3. Serve demonstration
  - a. Forehand topspin
  - b. Forehand backspin
4. Serve practice - players catch each other's serve
5. Games - Brazilian teams suggested

## Day 4

1. Ball bouncing
2. Class show-strokes forehand together
3. Forehand practice
  - a. Preferably one-by-one with two instructors doing multiball - one feeding and the other guiding the stroke
  - b. If not the above, then pair kids on tables according to ability if possible. Instructor should move from table to table and try to work with each player individually.
4. Forehand to forehand practice - Players are also practicing forehand topspin serve

## Day 5

1. Class shadow-strokes forehand together
2. Forehand to forehand practice
3. Games - Brazilian teams or ash tray table tennis

## Day 6

1. Backhand serve demonstration
  - a. Backhand topspin
  - b. Backhand backspin
2. Backhand serve practice
3. Forehand to forehand practice
4. Games - Relay races or Brazilian teams

## Day 7

1. Ball bouncing
  - a. Forehand side of racquet
  - b. Backhand side of the racquet.
2. Backhand demonstration
3. Backhand practice
  - a. Preferable one by one with two instructors doing multiball - one feeding and the other guiding the stroke
  - b. If not the above, then pair kids on tables. Instructor should move from table to table and try to work with each player.
4. Backhand to backhand practice

# Physical Conditioning for the Young Athlete

At the higher levels, table tennis requires superb physical fitness; and besides hours of table time, they spend many additional hours doing physical training of all types. For beginning students, however, it is not as important. In fact, table tennis can be used as part of their fitness program.

One aspect that is important for all levels is stretching, both to prevent injury and to help the player play his best. A good stretching routine should be done at the start of every session.

It is best to have the kids do some easy jogging before stretching to loosen the muscles. Nothing hard, just enough so that they won't be stretching tight, cold muscles.

All main muscle groups should be worked. These include the neck, shoulder, arms, back, waist, and legs. Don't do jerky exercises or you might injure the player during the stretching routine.

After the routine is done, a few sprints are good to get the blood moving. Then, it's table time!

# Running Tournaments

Once you have your class going, you and the students will probably want to have class tournaments. These are both fun and easy to run. There are a number of types of tournaments you can run.

## Single Elimination

The simplest is a single elimination tournament. You will need to make up a draw sheet for this. An example of a single elimination tournament draw sheet for eight players (results included) is shown on the next page. For more players, simply extend the draw sheet further to the left with more branches. Note that if you have “N” players, it will take “N”-1 matches to complete the tournament.

You should seed your best players. Put the best one at the top of the draw, the next best at the bottom. Otherwise, the best two players might play the first round. Of course, at this level that might not be as important and you might just place everyone in the draw at random.

## Round Robin

In a round robin, everyone plays everyone else. This means that if a lot of players are in the class, it's going to take a long time if they are all in one group! It is usually better to put them into groups of four or more, with all those in a group playing each other. The winners of each group (as well as the second place finishers, the third place finishers, etc.) can then be put into a final round robin or into a single elimination draw. This format allows all players to play in more matches than would otherwise be possible and keeps the weaker players from being knocked out of the tournament after one match.

An example of a round robin group for five players is shown on the following page. Note that if there are “N” players in a round robin, it will take  $[N(N-1)]/2$  matches to complete.

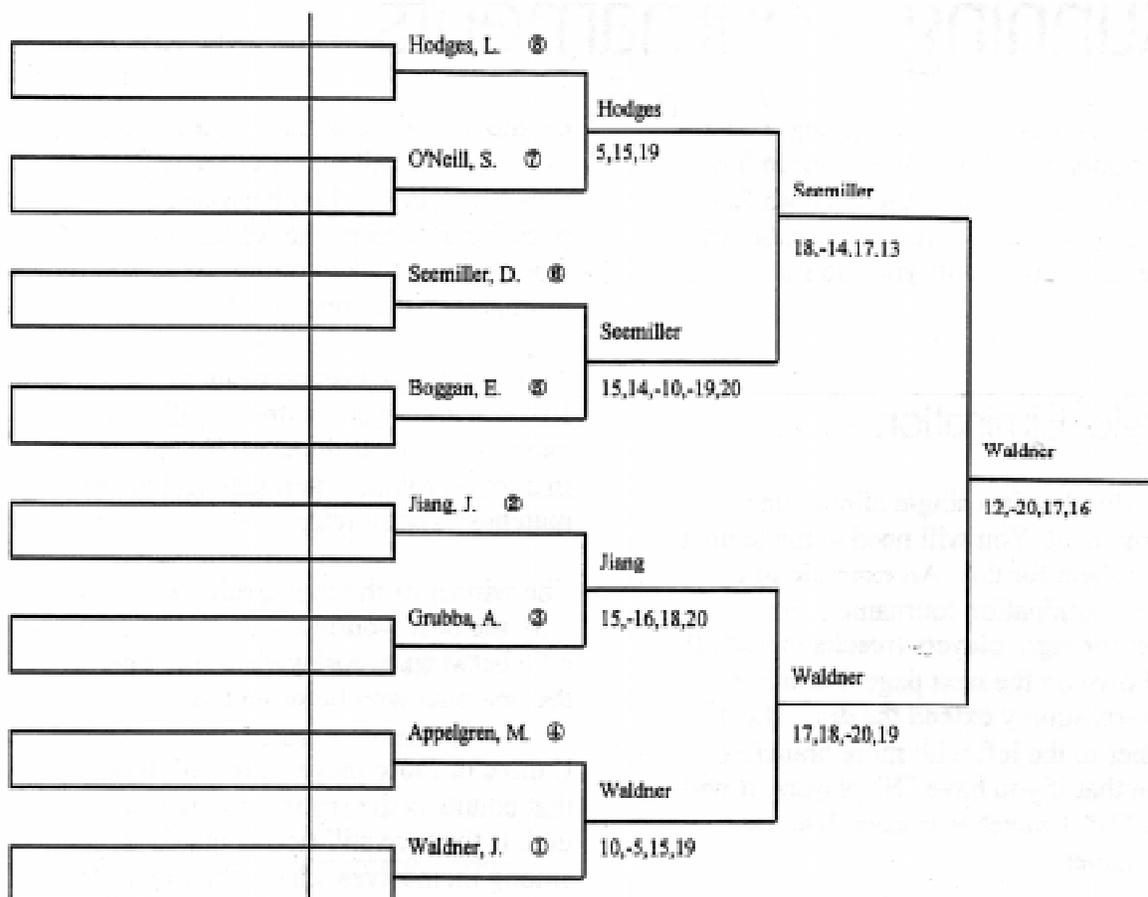
The winner of the round robin is the one with the best won/lost record. If there is a tie between two players, the winner is the one who won between those tied.

If three or more players are tied, then all that counts is the record among those tied. If they are still tied in matches among themselves, check their records among themselves first in games and then in points.

## Other Types of Tournaments

There are many other types of tournaments you can set up. You can have doubles tournaments, Brazilian or Canadian team tournaments, or even table tennis Olympics (see chapter on *Games Kids Can Play*). It's up to you and the kids. Offer prizes if you can, but either way the kids will have a great time.

## Example of Single Elimination Draw Sheet



## Example of Round Robin Draw Sheet

Last Name/First Name	A	B	C	D	E	Won/Lost Matches Games	Place
A Hodges, L.		W 10,11	W 19,-19,22	W 15,14	W 15,16	4-0 8-1	1
B Preiss, S.	L 0-2		L 0-2	W 15,17	W 20,19	2-2 4-4	3
C Mathews, S.	L 1-2	W 8,7		L 1-2	W 15,17	2-2 6-4	2
D Moystner, S.	L 0-2	L 0-2	W 18,-22,19		L 1-2	1-3 3-7	5
E Gleeson, L.	L 0-2	L 0-2	L 0-2	W 18,-18,17		1-3 2-7	4

**NOTE:** There were two 2-way ties in the matches. In each case, the winner was the winner of the match between the two players.

# Final Word

Table tennis is among the United States' fastest growing sports. With its inclusion in the Olympics, its popularity is soaring.

You and the students you coach can also join the USATT. Membership not only allows you to play in USATT-sanctioned tournaments, but it also entitles you to a subscription to *USA Table Tennis Magazine*, the official magazine. Membership also allows you to join a large network of players, coaches, and supporters.

If you want to go further in coaching table tennis, there are four levels of coaching certification, as discussed briefly in the first chapter. These can greatly improve your table tennis expertise as well as your enjoyment of the game. A phone call or letter to USATT Headquarters, (719) 578-4583, will send you all of the information you need on advancing as a coach.

As for your players, there are dozens of table tennis camps held throughout the year, especially during the summer. Information on these camps is in *USA Table Tennis Magazine*. During these camps, children learn the game at a higher level while having great fun.

You would not have read this far if you did not have an interest in children and table tennis. Coaching is one of the most fulfilling occupations one can take part in. Whether you do it for a living or do it as a volunteer, the look on a happy child's face when he hits in that first forehand smash and pumps his/her fist in the air is a look that should never be forgotten.

*Good luck!*

# Glossary

**Backhand** - A shot done with the racquet to the left of the elbow for a righthander, the reverse for a lefthander.

**Backspin** - A type of spin used mostly on defensive shots. When you chop the ball, you produce backspin. The bottom of the ball will move away from you.

**Blade** - The racquet, usually without covering.

**Block** - A quick, off the bounce return of an aggressive drive done by just holding the racquet in the ball's path.

**Blocker** - A style of play where blocking is the primary shot.

**Chop** - A defensive return of a drive with backspin, usually done from well away from the table. Also known as backspin (see *backspin*).

**Chopper** - A style of play where chopping is the primary shot.

**Closed** - If the racquet's hitting surface is aimed downward, with the top edge leaning away from you, it is closed.

**Counter-Drive** - A drive made against a drive. Some players specialize in counter-driving.

**Cross-Court** - A ball that is hit diagonally from corner to corner.

**Dead** - A ball with no spin.

**Deep** - A ball that lands deep on the table. A serve that will not bounce twice on the opponent's side of the table if given the chance is also considered deep.

**Default** - Being disqualified from a match.

**Double Bounce** - A ball that hits the same side of the table twice. The person on that side loses the point.

**Down the Line** - A ball that is hit along the side of the table, parallel to the sidelines, is hit down the line.

**Drop Shot** - Putting the ball so short that the opponent has trouble reaching the ball. Done when the opponent is away from the table.

**Flat** - A ball that has no spin, usually traveling with good pace.

**Footwork** - How a person moves to make a shot.

**Forehand** - Any shot done with the racquet to the right of the elbow for a righthander, to the left for a lefthander.

**Handicap Events** - An event in a tournament where points are spotted to make the match even. Can be singles or doubles.

**Hard Rubber** - A type of racquet covering with pips out rubber but no sponge underneath. It was the most common covering for many years until the development of sponge rubber.

**Hitter** - A style of play where hitting is the primary shot.

**Inverted Sponge** - The most common racquet covering. It consists of a sheet of pips out rubber on top of a layer of sponge. The pips point inward, so the surface is smooth. This is the opposite of pips out sponge, where the pips point outward.

**ITTF** - International Table Tennis Federation. The governing body for table tennis in the world.

**Kill Shot** - See *smash*.

**Let** - If play is interrupted for any reason during a rally, a let is called and the point does not count. See rules for more details.

**Loop** - A heavy topspin shot usually considered the most important shot in the game. Most players either specialize in looping or in handling the loop.

**Looper** - A style of play where the primary shot is the loop.

**Match** - A two out of three or three out of five games contest.

**Open** - If the hitting surface of the racquet is aimed upwards, with the top edge leaning towards you, it is open.

**Penholder** - A type of grip giving the best possible forehand but the most awkward backhand of the conventional grips.

**Pips** - The small conical bits of rubber that cover a sheet of table tennis rubber.

**Pips Out** - A type of racquet covering. It consists of a sheet of pips out rubber on top of a layer of sponge. The pips point outward, the opposite of inverted.

**Playing Surface** - The top of the table, include the edges.

**Push** - A backspin return of backspin. Usually defensive.

**Racquet** - What you hit the ball with. The blade plus covering.

**Rally** - The hitting of the ball back and forth, commencing with the serve and ending when a point is won.

**Rating** - A number that is assigned to all tournament players after their first tournament. The better the player the higher the rating should be. The range is from about 200 to about 2800.

**Rating Events** - An event in a tournament where to be eligible you must be rated under a specified amount.

**Receive** - The return of a serve.

**Rubber** - The racquet covering. Sometimes refers only to the rubber on top of a sponge base.

**Rubber Cleaner** - used to keep the surface of inverted rubber clean.

**Serve** - The first shot, done by the server. It begins with the ball being thrown up from palm of hand and struck by the racquet.

**Shakehands Grip** - The most popular grip. It gives the best balance of forehand and backhand.

**Short** - A ball that lands close to the net. A serve that would bounce twice on the opponent's side of the table if given the chance is also considered short.

**Smash** - A putaway shot. Ball is hit with enough speed so opponent cannot make a return.

**Spin** - The rotation of the ball.

**Sponge** - The bouncy rubber material used in sandwich covering. It is used under a sheet of rubber with pips. It revolutionized the game and ended the hard rubber age in the 1950's.

**Stroke** - Any shot used in the game, including the serve.

**Topspin** - A type of spin used on most aggressive shots, with an extreme amount being used in the loop shot. When you topspin the ball, the top of the ball moves away from you.

**Umpire** - The official who keeps score and enforces rules during a match.

**Underspin** - See *backspin*.

**USATT** - USA Table Tennis, the governing body for table tennis in the United States.