



TABLE TENNIS



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About the Tutorial

Table Tennis is an indoor game which is played on a table divided in between by a net. The game has variants like singles, doubles, and mixed doubles. This small tutorial provides some basic information on how to play Table Tennis and its governing rules.

Audience

Table Tennis is a popular game which is loved all over the world. It is a great stress buster; therefore, it is surprising to note that even big MNCs reserve a room for their staff to play Table Tennis. This tutorial is going to help all those readers who want to learn the basics of playing Table Tennis.

Prerequisites

There are no prerequisites whatsoever. All that you need to have is an eagerness to learn this game and enough passion to practice it regularly.

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1. Table Tennis – Overview

Table tennis, also called ping pong, is a sport that originated in the Victorian period in England. High-class people used to play table tennis after dinner. It was initially played by stacking books at the center of a table and hitting a golf ball with thick books. Table tennis needs a lot of attention and speed.

Professional table tennis is played on a hard table which is divided by a net. Players stand opposite to each other, and hit a lightweight ball with a small round bat across the table. Spinning the ball makes the chances of hitting the ball a lot less. So, players tend to spin the ball before serving it to the opponent.

Table tennis is played as singles as well as doubles. It is played in both men's and women's category. Table tennis is played by the rules set by the International Table Tennis Federation (ITTF).

Participating Countries

Table tennis is not confined to England only. It is an Olympic sport and is played by many countries. Unlike any other sport, table tennis is governed by different governing bodies responsible for that particular continent's table tennis.

The top most governing bodies, apart from International Table Tennis Federation (ITTF), are European Table Tennis Union (ETTU) for Europe and USA Table Tennis (USATT) for United States. Below you could find the name of a few countries, out of more than 100 odd countries that take part in table tennis tournaments.

2. Table Tennis – Playing Environment

Table tennis is played by standing across a table. The **umpire** or **scorer** hides the ball in one hand under the table, and lets the players guess which hand the ball is in. The winner gets to decide if he/she wants to serve or on which side of the table they want to stand. Normally in singles, the first service is decided by tossing a coin.

There is another method called **serve to play**, where the player plays the ball back and forth three times and then plays out for point.

Design of the Table

Professional table tennis is played on an ITTF approved wooden table only. The table is uniformly dark-colored and matt finished. This is simply to avoid any glares while playing. The table is divided exactly at the middle using a net.

Amateurs tend to play on solid tables made of steel that are separated with concrete or any solid material.

Dimensions of the Table

The table is 1.525 m (5.0 feet) wide and 2.74 m (9.0 feet) long. It is designed in such a way that it gives a uniform bounce of 23 centimeters (9.1 inch) when a standard ball is tapped on the table from a height of 30 centimeters (11.8 inches). The entire table is made of only one uniform material. The net used to divide the table is of 15.25 cm (6.0 in) in height.

3. Table Tennis – Equipment

The Table may be the main equipment required for playing ping-pong, but that is not the only thing required. Players need a **racquet** or **paddle** and a ping-pong ball as well to go with the game.

Racquet / Paddle

The term keeps changing depending on the country where it is played. As for Britain, it is bat; in the USA, it is called a **paddle**. The term followed by ITTF is **racquet**.

The racquet is laminated and covered with rubber on either side or on both the sides depending on the player. The player based on his/her grip decides whether they need the rubber on either or on both sides.

The handle of the racquet is called **blade**. This blade could be made of many different materials varying from glass fiber, cork, carbon fiber, Kevlar to aluminum fiber. But ITTF recommends that at least 85% of the paddle has to be made of wood. Woods to be used are cypress and Korina. The bat is usually being 6 inches (15 cm) wide and 6.5 inches (17 cm) long.

Ball

The accuracy of the ball is determined by bouncing it on a flat uniform surface from a height of 12 inches. If the ball bounces for about 9.4-10.2 inches, then that particular ball is perfect for play.

ITTF has set certain rules for the ball's dimension and weight. A ball of 40 millimeters in diameter and as light as 2.7 grams should only be used to play table tennis.

Usually the balls are manufactured in either white or yellow color. The color might vary depending on the color of table as well as surroundings. The ball is made of plastic only and it should be ITTF approved. Ball quality is displayed by manufacturers with star mark ranging from one to three, three being the highest.

4. Table Tennis – Terms

Many terms are used in a table tennis game to describe points, fouls, etc. A list of some of the frequently used terms is given below.

- **Heavy** – Used to describe a strong spin.
- **Blade** – Wooden part of the racquet.
- **Anti-spin** – A defense spin used to confuse the opponent or even as a reaction to one strong spin. Top-level players rarely use this technique, but it is very famous among amateurs. Player uses the pimples side of rubber of racquet.
- **Inverted rubber** – Smooth side of rubber which is used to play and the pimples side is glued to bat. The smooth side gives more spin as there is a larger contact area.
- **Pimples (Pips)** – Rubber side of the racquet that gives different spin effects unlike inverted rubber. There is no much contact surface on this side of the racquet.
- **Crossover** – Change of stroke from forehand to backhand. A player needs to change his/her stroke as this is often an easy target for attack. It is not easy to return a service in this area.
- **Tight** – A strong return which is difficult for the opponent to handle. It is usually a combination of spin and strong stroke.
- **Loose** – A weak return that has insufficient spin or stroke or both, and is easy for the opponent to play.
- **Early** – This is to refer raising of ball.
- **Late** – The fall of ball's bounce.
- **Loop** – A strong stroke that usually overpowers the spin of the incoming ball.
- **Multi-ball** – A ball robot or another player continuously feeds another player in training. This method is used to reduce time waste.
- **Penhold** – This is a style used to hold the paddle. This resembles t-holding a pen.
- **Shakehand** – Holding the paddle with index finger perpendicular to handle. This is the most common way of holding the racquet and it resembles holding of racquet in tennis.
- **Sandwich rubber** – This is to describe inverted rubber with sponge.
- **Speed glue** – As the name, it is a glue with high volatile solvents, used to glue sponge of rubber to the blade (the wooden part of racquet). It increases the speed of stroke.
- **Third ball** – This is a stroke that's hit by server in response to the opponent's stroke after serve. This is the first attacking stroke in table tennis rally.

5. Table Tennis – How to Play?

The game usually starts by deciding who is going to serve first and who is going to receive. The game begins after deciding which player will serve first.

Service and Return

The game is commenced by the player who serves. The ball is raised at least 16 centimeters in air without any spin and is hit by the racquet in such a way that it hits the server's side of court once before going on to the receiver's court without touching the net.

Let

A rally of unscored results is referred to as **Let**. This could occur because of many reasons, but a few are:

- When the receiver is not ready and the ball is served.
- The ball is concealed and either the umpire or the opponent player is in doubt of the serve.

Scoring

There are many scenarios where one player gets points. A few are:

- If the ball touches anything, not the net, before reaching the opponent.
- If the opponent fails to return or service.
- If the player hits the ball with wooden part of racquet, not the rubber part, then the opponent gets a point.
- When the receiver completes 13 returns in a rally, under expedite system.
- Player gets a point when the opponent obstructs the ball.

Alternation of Service

Service can change depending on game point of the match. Regardless of the winner of rally, service keeps changing between opponents. A **Deuce** is played, when both the players have ten points each and each player serves for one more point. The service and receiving doesn't change in Deuce.

Players change sides of the table at the end of each game. When one of the players scores five points first, players change the ends regardless of serving turn. If players miss changing sides or if are serving out of turn, the points are still calculated and game is resumed from there.

Types of Strokes

Usually strokes in table tennis are divided into two categories — **offensive** and **defensive** strokes.

Offensive Strokes

Hit - This is a very powerful stroke with more speed and less or no spin at all. It is hard to return this kind of stroke, but is usually played to keep the ball in the game. The paddle is perpendicular to the direction of stroke.

Smash - As the name itself, it is a stroke which is very powerful. Usually played to return a serve that's either too high or too close to the net. A lot of acceleration and accuracy is needed to deliver this stroke. It is a combination of backswing and high-speed. The ball's trajectory is changed with sidespin. The main objective of smash is high speed and bounce, so that the opponent is unable to hit the ball.

Loop - This attack gives the ball more spin than speed. The racquet is parallel to direction of stroke. This kind of stroke results in topspin and jumps a bit forward after hitting the opponent's side of the table.

Counter-hit - This hit, if delivered with correct accuracy, could be as good as a smash. When the ball is hit immediately after it bounces on the table, it results in counter-hit. To achieve this stroke, bat should be very close to the ball.

Flick - When the backswing is compressed to a short wrist swing, it gives a flick. Usually, played by participants, when the ball has not bounced beyond table's edge. This stroke is usually played to return a serve and when there is no much room for backswing. This could resemble loop in the way it is played.

Defensive Strokes

Push - This stroke causes a backspin and makes the ball float slowly in air to the opponent's side. This attack is popular by name slice in Asia. This stroke can be difficult to return because of the back spin action. This serve might land very close to the net and is difficult for amateurs to play. However, experienced players could return this serve with a loop and could put the opponent in a tough spot.

Block - This stroke might look easy, but could destroy the opponent. One doesn't hit the ball, but simply puts the racquet so close to the ball, that it hits the racquet right after its bounce. Block could change the side of ball landing on the table, which can be highly advantageous as the opponent wouldn't be able to judge the ball. Usually in block, the ball is returned with the same energy and angle with which it was served. This stroke can have a topspin and can make the opponent defenseless. Experienced players tend to return this serve with a loop or a smash

Chop - This is the backspin counterpart of loop. This strike is made when the ball lands almost at the end of the table. Hence, the strike is very heavy, and requires more energy. This backspin is usually a return to the opponent's topspin. If played well, the ball is horizontal to the table while in air with a little rise. Chop is extremely difficult to return. Only certain players can demonstrate variations in chop like no-spin impact or side spin.

Lob - This strike propels the ball to a height of about 5 meters, to land on opponent's table with highest spin. A good defense lob is so effective that it can be used as a return to smash. To make a return to this strike, players usually back off from the table for about a few meter and run towards the table to hit the ball with maximum speed and strength. This strike is very powerful because of its unpredictability of spin.

A Game - When either one of the players scores 11 points then, he / she is declared as winner of that particular game. In case both the players reach 10 points, then the player who achieves two points before the other one is declared as winner of the game.

A Match - According to ITTF, a match is the best of odd number of games. Usually a match consists of 3, 5 or 7 games.

6. Table Tennis – Types of Spins

Spin plays a very important part in table tennis. The effect of spin can change the entire game. We will discuss the different types of spins that we get to see in Table Tennis.

Backspin - This spin is used usually to keep the ball low and in the game. This spin is hard to return and hence, is used a lot while serving. The ball rotates away from the player and so it is hard to hit the ball. To return backspin, smash can be used but it should be very close to the net and with full energy.

Topspin - The trajectory of the ball is perpendicular to the axis of the spin. The ball dips downwards before bouncing and approaching the opposing side. To return this spin, the player needs to adjust the angle of their racquet. This is not as fast as the backspin but is used predominantly to give the opponent less chance to respond.

Sidespin - It is used much while service, as the trajectory of the ball is vertical. Sidespin doesn't have much effect on the bounce of the ball. This stroke is referred to as a **hook**.

Corkspin - This spin is referred to as drill-spin. The trajectory of the ball is more or less parallel to axis of spin. This spin is not as effective as the ones mentioned above and can be returned with backspin or smash. To make corkspin more effective, it is usually combined with one or more varieties of spins.

7. Table Tennis – Types of Grips

Grip in table tennis is the way one player holds the racquet. There are three different styles of holding a bat and different player has either one or both styles of holding the racquet.

Penhold

This hold got its name, as it resembles holding a pen. Here the player's middle, ring, little fingers are curled around the racquet. This style of holding the racquet is called **Chinese penholding**. Even though many players have this way of holding the racquet, their style of play is entirely different.

Another style of penholding is the Japanese/ Korean style. In this style, the three fingers are across the back of the racquet. Players who have Chinese penholding style prefer round racquet head, whereas the one who have the Korean style, prefer square-shaped racquet head.

Usually, players who have a penholding style don't use the other side of the racquet. But, in 1990s the Chinese developed a reverse penhold technique in which, the player uses the other side of the racquet as well.

Shakehand

As the name suggests, this type of grip resembles one shaking a hand. This hold is also called the **Western grip** as many players of Europe and America use this style of holding a racquet.

Shakehand grip looks easy and it is a very versatile style. So, it was started even in China and now, many top-level Chinese players also use this technique. Apparently, players feel this technique easier than penhold, as it gives a wide scope of play.

Seemiller

This grip is named after **Danny Seemiller**, as he was the one who used this technique. To have this kind of grip, one should place the thumb and index finger on either side of the racquet and the rest of the fingers should be placed at the bottom part.

This method is used to distract the opponent, as contrasting rubbers can be placed on both the sides of the blade. This technique gives great loops on the forehand side.

8. Table Tennis – Variants

Table Tennis is a game played in singles as well as teams of two people. We will discuss the different variants of Table Tennis in this chapter.

Singles Table Tennis

Singles Table Tennis is played between two individuals, one on each side. Both have to earn points to win the game.

Doubles Table Tennis

Doubles table tennis was introduced to the Commonwealth Games in 2002 and Olympic Games in 1988. A line is created to bisect the court and create two different courts for both the individuals. Service should be made in a way that the ball bounces at least once in the right-hand box before bouncing on the opponent's right side box. If this is not how the service is done, the opponents gain a point.

If X and Y are paired opposite to U and V. Then, X is the server to U or V. If X serves, then U or V could be receiver and when Y serves U or V could be the receiver. This is applicable vice-versa.

After achieving five points in the game, players must switch ends of the table.

Mixed Doubles Table Tennis

In the mixed doubles, the teams on both side have one male and one female player. The rules are same as men's or women's doubles.

9. Table Tennis – Tournaments

Table tennis tournaments are famous in Asia and Europe. Nowadays, they are gaining more popularity in the United States as well. The most important tournaments are:

World Table Tennis Championships

This competition was initially held in the year 1926 but then was held biennially since 1957. Five individual events together make this tournament – Men's singles, women's singles, men's doubles, women's doubles, mixed doubles.

Table Tennis World Cup

This is an annually held competition since 1980. Women's singles were introduced in the year 1996 and team competitions in 1990.

Men's and Women's World Cups - All the matches so far were best of 7 in which they have 3 stages.

The Preliminary Stage- Intercontinental Cup - The four representatives from Latin America, Africa, Oceania and North America compete with all the members of the group on a group basis. The winner of this group joins the remaining 15 players in the 1st stage.

The 1st Stage or Group Stage - The 16 players are divided into 4 groups, in a way that all the members of a group is playing with each other. Division into groups is based on ranks of that particular player. The players holding rank 1, 2, 3, 4 are placed in group A, B, C, D respectively. The rest of the players are placed in different groups based on their ranking.

The 2nd Stage (Knockout) – The quarterfinals and semi-finals are knock-out rounds. The winner of quarterfinals goes in the semi-finals and the winner of semi-finals enters the final.

Quarter Finals – Four quarter final matches (Q1, Q2, Q3 and Q4) are arranged in accordance to both the final groups and the rankings in the 1st Stage. Q1 to Q4 are as follows: A1 vs. B2, B1 vs. A2, C1 vs. D2 and D1 vs. C2.

Semi-finals – These matches are among the winner of Q1 and winner of Q2, and winner of Q3 vs. winner of Q4.

The finals are played by winners of semi-finals, and the ones who didn't win the semis compete for the next position.

Olympics

Table tennis was introduced in Olympics in the year 1988. It was initially played in the form of singles and double by both men and women.

In table tennis, Olympics has always been dominated by Chinese. They've won 24 gold medals and in just 28 events.

ITTF World Tour

This tournament was introduced in the year 1996, known as ITTF pro tour, but was changed in the year 2011.

This tournament is played under six categories: Men's and Women's doubles, Men's and Women's Singles and Men's and Women's under 21 matches.

This tournament has its own point system. The players gaining most number of points might be invited to the ITTF world tour grand finals.

Famous Trophies

Trophies are awarded to winners of each individual game, which should be returned for next championship.

- **Swaythling Cup** for Men's Team: ITTF first President donated this in 1926.
- **Iran Cup** for Men's Doubles: At the 1947 World Championships, this award was presented for the first time.
- **St. Bride Vase** for Men's Singles: C.Corti Woodcockin 1929 donated this award, in London.
- **Corbillon Cup** for Women's Team: In 1933 Marcel Corbillonin donated Corbillon Cup.
- **W.J. Pope Trophy** for Women's Doubles: General Secretary of The ITTF W.J. Pope in 1948 donated Pope Trophy.
- **Heydusek Cup** for Mixed Doubles: Donated by Zdenek Heydusekin 1948.

10. Table Tennis – Champion of Champions

Table tennis hall of fame was established in the year 1993 for the recognition of extraordinary players. The list is approved by ITTF and for every two years the eligibility is renewed. In 1991, when this concept was introduced, the eligibility was that the player should have won at least five gold medals in the Olympics or in the World Championship. Here are a few champions who registered their names forever in the table tennis world -

Deng Yaping

She is one of the greatest players in table tennis who won six World Championship medals during 1989-1997. Deng of China started playing table tennis at the age of 5. She won her first national championship, when she was just 13 years old.

She won her first doubles World Championship along with Qiao Hong in 1989 and first singles World Championship in 1991 even after being denied a position in the national team because of her height of 4feet 11 inches.

Even after retiring at a very young age of 24, she left as world no.1 in female table tennis. She won four Olympic gold medals and world championship titles in singles as well as doubles during the year 1995, 1997. She earned herself the title of World Champion 18 times.

Victor Barna

He was born in Budapest, Hungary in the year 1911. He was the World Champion record holder for 5 times, with 40 medals. He won World Doubles 8 times and English open as well. Barna was inducted into the International Table Tennis Foundation Hall of Fame in 1993. He has authored a few books as well on Table Tennis among which "Your Book of Table Tennis" and "How to win at Table Tennis" are quite popular.

Richard Bergman

One of the remarkable players in the world of Table Tennis, Richard Bergman was the winner of 7 World Championships including four Singles, one Men's Doubles, two Team's titles. He had won 22 medals in total. Not just an amazing player, he was one of those 12 members who founded the ITTF Hall of Fame.

Ma Long

Ma Long is a Table Tennis Champion from China. Who was ranked number 1 in January 2016. At the starting of his career, he won ITTF championships but could not succeed in world championships.

In 2013, he won China Open and Asian championships. In 2014 also he won Asian championship. In the same year in WTTTC championship he won all the sets and received Victor Barna award. In 2015 also he won many championships and is now number 1 player.

Ding Ning

Ding Ning is a Table Tennis player from China who won world championships in 2011 and 2015. Both these winnings were in women's singles.

In women's singles, she won Asian championships in 2009, and was second in Olympics 2012. In Women's doubles, she was world cup runner-up in 2009 and winner in Asian championships in 2009.