



Tips, Tricks & Advice from Dr. Pong The Houdini of the Table Tennis World

What is the best way to serve, Doctor?

Personally, I think a player should **mix up their serves** for different length and spin. Some examples of advanced serves include medium-long, deep, short, down-the-line, pure spin, pure speed, etc. Serves to the elbow tend to be very effective, since the receiver must quickly decide (and often does not in time) to use a forehand or backhand.

I'd like to develop an attack strategy, so what do you suggest, Dr. Pong?

Develop a third-ball attack. This is where you serve, the receiver receives, and you nail one in for a winner. An example is a short backspin serve, followed by a long push, then a powerful loop. If you haven't mastered the loop, then be in position to

attempt to win the point on the third time the ball is struck. This is called the third-ball attack. It takes practice, but it is effective.

When is the proper time to attack?

Attack whenever you can, primarily on a long serve. It has been proven that the player to open the offense most often usually wins point, set, and match. In today's game of table tennis, a defensive player cannot effectively defend the high speed and spin attacks of their opponents. This is why you **MUST** learn to attack, attack, attack!

What is the best way to consistently know what your opponent is serving you?

When receiving a serve, keep your eyes mostly on the opponent's racket. If you have ever seen World Champion Jan-Ove Waldner play, you can see that he makes a quick glimpse at how high the ball is tossed, then watches back down to the racket. If you keep your eyes on the ball, the server will baffle you with his deceptions. By watching the racket, you can better determine what sort of spin is being imparted on the ball. **Be sure to watch the exact movement of the racket** as it makes contact with the ball. Watch which way the blade of the racket is moving when contact is made and the angle of the impact. This takes practice, but it will improve your game, especially against players who put a great amount of spin on the ball during serves and volleys.

What is the best way to return a serve, your Highest?

When receiving, **mix up your returns**. Most players too often tend to push, allowing their opponents to start the offense. Mixing up loops, drives, pushes, chops, etc. provides for excellent variation and a bewildered opponent. Don't keep hitting the same return to the same place on the table. If you do, your opponent will be waiting with racket in hand, to take advantage of you. Practice returning serves and volleys in many different directions, speeds, and spins. This is a good strategy and you will learn how important it is as you improve your game.

What racket should I purchase first, beyond that of a practice racket?

If you are ready for professional equipment, begin with a medium-fast blade (rather than fast). A medium-fast blade allows you to rely more on technique than on

equipment to get the ball over the net. It will also provide optimum control. The most important consideration for a blade, however, is that it provides good "feeling." As for rubber try to get the "beginner" kinds for the beginning. The reason for this is because beginner rubbers are designed with less spin and speed, and this translates into easier returns of spinny balls. Trying to return a sidespin serve will be a hair-pulling experience for a beginner if he/she uses an overly spinny rubber. **In short, acquire a "sensible" table tennis racket and rubber.**

The shape of a blade's (or bat's) handle is strictly a personal decision. Flared handles are the most popular, but use whatever feels most comfortable in your hand. Keep in mind, the faster the blade, the less control it is going to have. Offensive and Offensive+ blades are used by those whose game is aggressive, while Allaround+ and Offensive- blades are preferred by players with an all around style. Defensive and Allaround are used by defensive players. The weight of the blade does not necessarily affect the speed of the overall racket. It is also a personal decision, depending on what feels right in your hand. Most rackets weigh between 70 and 100 grams before the rubber is applied. The number of plies vary from one blade to another. Five ply is the most common and most popular, being used by both the offensive and all-round player. Seven plies are preferred by some attacking players because they are faster, but they do tend to be much heavier. And that's just the racket! As far as what's on the racket, the rubber that is applied to the blade will also make a great difference in the speed of the racket.

What should I practice most, my forehand or backhand?

Forehands are the way to go. To hit forehands wherever you are on the table, you will need to develop good side-to-side footwork. But it never hurts to work extra on your backhand so that your opponent won't know what hit him/her when you blast that down the line backhand smash! The best players are always two-winged, or being able to attack almost equally well on both hands.

Practice your forehand and your backhand; you will need both! Most players win with their forehand shots, but a weak backhand can cost a player many games. Get a partner to practice backhand strokes until you feel comfortable. Keep practicing; it is worth the effort.

Sometimes I just feel like giving up in a match. What should I do when I feel like this?

When you are losing in a match, or have missed several shots in a row, don't get mad, get even. Ask yourself what needs to be done in order to beat the problem that is plaguing your game. Then try the solution. If it doesn't work, do it again. Until the match is over, **you should never give up**. If it is your turn to serve, then you are allotted a reasonable amount of time per serve to wait and think things over before you toss the ball. Take advantage of it.

Besides never giving up, also remember never to let up, too. One of the most common upsets occurs when a player wins the first game very easily and then loses the match. There is such a thing as "second game blues," where you win the first so easily you have difficulty playing all-out in the second game. If you win the first game very easily, and the opponent is at all competitive, beware! It's the recipe for a sudden turn-around and upset, if you aren't careful. The best remedy? Assume the second is really the first, and start over exactly as you did in the first game where you won easily. Above all, never change a winning game.

Who can play in a Club?

Players of all ages and abilities are welcome. Our current players include ages 9 to 90 (literally!), students, teachers, accountants, lawyers, doctors, factory workers, business owners, artists - you name it. As an internationally popular sport you can make new friends from many countries of Europe Asia Africa and Latin America as well as native-born New Englanders too, of course. Youth are welcome to participate at our discretion based on appropriate behavior and sincere interest in learning to play. Young children may not be 'dropped-off' without special permission from the club President (Dr. Pong).

Where does our Club play? How about other clubs?

This is all described on our web site, where you will find a map to our Rutland facility, which is the **Rutland Area Christian School, at 112 Lincoln Street** (aka the old Lincoln Street School). You will also find information about other clubs who play in Vermont as well. If you're really serious about the sport, you may want to consider joining more than one club and playing more than once a week. You will be able to make contact with other clubs by looking through our web site, as we have provided just such information to you.

What can I expect on a normal evening of play if it's my first time at the Club?

We normally set out from **3 to 4 tables** for an evening's play. Players usually introduce themselves to new faces and pair off informally for practice matches or 20-minute practice time with partners of their own choosing. Typically, you can play with up to 5 or more different partners during an evening. Even when we have a large crowd (20 to 25 players, though normally we have around **12-15 players**), you'll play more than you sit and we'll make sure everyone gets their turns. And, between matches you can make friends and learn from watching or talking to some of the best (and friendliest) players in central Vermont!

I don't know anyone there yet, so how do I know who to play with?

Our players range from unrated beginners and "school or neighborhood champs" or "fresh out of the basement" to USATT-rated tournament players from "0700 to 2300." If you don't know your level yet you can watch play on our tables and "ask for the winner" on the table where both players seem to be closest to your level. There are so many different skill levels in our sport and our club that to maximize everyone's enjoyment of the club it is important to respect these differences. For example, don't regularly ask for winners on a table where you aren't competitive. Unrated? Ask Ron (Dr. Pong) or one of our "regulars" which players are unrated or also new to the club. Rated? Ask us who is rated near you. As players get to know you, you'll develop a group of regular partners and rivals. **During an evening of play, you will usually play singles or a doubles match against every player in attendance.**

What does it cost to play?

Current fees or fee structure can be found on our web site. To cut down on the handling of money, we ask that players pay one time during the season, preferably immediately following 2 weeks of a trial period, if you're a new player. Please bring a check or cash, and provide your name, mailing address, phone number and email address upon that "registration" time. Membership rates are, we feel, a bargain, considering our tournament-quality equipment and compared to other recreational activities or sports. Most everyone pays **an annual fee of \$30**, but some players generously pay over and above the fee, as they feel they are getting such a bargain,

and know that the club is still paying off a long-standing debt for the equipment they're playing with.

What do I need to bring as a first-time player, oh Great One?

We have some "loaner" paddles for new players. If you become a regular, we expect you'll purchase and bring your own racket in time. We provide the latest catalog issues of Paddle Palace so that you can begin to familiarize yourself with the best table tennis equipment. Members are usually open to letting new players borrow their extra paddles for short-term use; that way, you can find out what you like best or what works the best for your style of play. Basically, all you really need to bring with you are [a pair of sneakers, and some loose-fitting athletic clothes](#). We have bathrooms available on-site for you to change in.

Do I need to buy a racket before I come for the first time?

[Absolutely not](#), in fact, we don't recommend it at all. We don't want you to buy department store quality equipment, but instead, quality equipment that you will be happy with. We can provide you with advice in purchasing your first custom-made racket. Sporting goods stores rarely sell first-rate rackets, even though they often sell "starter" rackets made by "name brand" companies. We recommend that you take your time in making that first purchase. Try an offensive, fast racket, then a slower, defensive one, keeping in mind that there is usually an inverse relationship between speed and control: the faster a racket, the less control, and vice versa.

What does a decent racket cost?

The range is typically from [\\$60 to \\$120](#) and up for an excellent racket suitable for weekly club play. Cheaper rackets are fine for home or infrequent "social" or club play, but if you decide to play on a weekly basis at a club you will quickly outgrow the typical racket from a discount or sporting goods store. We can loan you the cheaper rackets for occasional play or let you try a "better" racket so you can feel the difference before you buy one. We occasionally put together a club order, so that we can provide players with a discounted price and free shipping, plus you get in essence a "professional" racket to play with.

How do I dress when I practice?

Usually only **non-marking shoes** are required, but we currently play on a tile surface instead of a hardwood surface, so it really doesn't matter. However, it's best that you wear a good, safe athletic shoe. Also, comfortable clothing is recommended. Since the table tennis balls are orange or white, wear a shirt that is neither of those two colors; a dark-colored shirt is desirable. Certainly don't wear a polka-dot shirt! Nearly **any common sport shirt or T-shirt is OK, along with a pair of shorts**. However, don't worry about it too much on your first visit, as we're not in a fashion show! Also, please don't wear T-shirts with offensive language or "adult" themes or images.

How do I get good at table tennis, like yourself, Dr. Pong?

Joining our club will be the best thing you can do for your game. Of course, bring along a little bit of patience as well, but you can't help but learn in the type of atmosphere a club offers. Expect to see a bit of humility in all of us, as we realize that we were all beginners at one time! Learning is gradual, and you may not see a lot of improvement quickly, but believe me, the experienced players will notice. I think beginning players get markedly better night after night. So, watch, listen, ask questions, play as much as you can, and enjoy yourself! Don't forget to make use of our book and video loaning library, or the use of our Newgy Robot ball machine.

Also, are you a mobile table tennis player, or do you just stand there and play ping pong? Table tennis players aren't always fast, but they move their feet to the ball. Ping pong players may be fast, but they just stand there and reach for the ball and usually lose. Which are you? A ping pong player, or a table tennis player? Which do you want to be?

Do you play year-round or only during the winter months?

Actually, **our season spans fall, winter and spring**. We take a break or breather from May through September, which we feel reinvigorates the players for another upcoming season. This gives players a chance to take their vacations without having to miss playing, but some members still get together on occasion at their homes or other locations and play for an evening. Of course, these are much smaller turnouts than what one would expect to find at our club facility. If you play during the summer months, we respect your commitments and determination to "hit some" with

your fellow members! During our season, we play nearly every week, sometimes having to make adjustments according to school activities, overlapping holidays, etc.

What is the correct way to hold a paddle?

Actually, there is more than one way to hold a paddle. However, the most common and we feel, best way to hold a paddle is with what is called the "Shake Hand Grip." Ask any of our players to show you this grip. Common errors include holding the thumb and forefinger on the same side of the racket, holding the thumb rigid in the middle of your racket, or having a bent wrist (the wrist should be held horizontal to the rest of your arm and should not be held in an upward position). If you notice that you are using any of the common errors in holding a paddle, you should change the way you hold your racket immediately. Getting use to the correct (new for you) way may seem strange at first, but be patient, as it will be the best thing for you and your game in the long run.

What is does it mean to be rated versus unrated? How does one become a "rated" player?

New players are generally unrated. Players become rated so that their level of play can be determined so that when they enter tournaments, a player cannot unfairly enter an event that they are too good or experienced to enter, thus winning easily. When a player becomes rated, they can enter nearly any event that includes players as good or better than they are, but no event in which they are too good to play. For instance, a player rated at 702 cannot play in the Under 700 event, but can play in the Under 800, Under 1200, Under 1500 and so forth. First time tournament players, without ratings, provide some difficulty for us as tournament directors to determine what level of play they are eligible for. [To become rated, all a player needs to do is to play in at least one tournament game.](#)

What if I have some medical concerns?

We realize players come in all ages, sizes, shapes and physical conditions. Depending on your particular skill level and physical condition, table tennis can be a casual "low-impact" game, or a fast-paced, physically demanding sport. If you have some medical issues and have questions regarding your fitnesses to play, [we would recommend that you consult with your doctor.](#) Even so, perhaps you should consider taking it easy if you haven't been active for awhile. Perhaps you should wear a medical bracelet

and/or advise the club director or others with the club if you have any serious medical condition you think we should know about in case of emergency such as diabetes, epilepsy, heart disease, etc. We reserve the right to limit your participation if we have concerns about your safety, but if we don't do so, we are not assuming the personal responsibility you should exercise to decide if you shouldn't be playing for medical reasons.

What about professional training?

Would you like to learn how to play table tennis the "right way?" Professional coaching has been a part of our club's itinerary just once, when we invited one of the top players in the world to provide a weekend clinic for club members and other interested players residing in Vermont. We have been giving serious thought to doing this again, as many of our players have "hit a wall" in their development. We expect to make the necessary contacts with professional coaches this season, and perhaps have [another clinic during the summer of 2007](#).

What then about personal training? What can I do on a regular basis that would constitute practice?

- 1) Practice against a [ball machine](#).
- 2) [Shadow practice with a weighted racket](#). Many players find they play better if they shadow practice with a weighted paddle before play. (Shadow practicing means practicing the stroke away from the table, without a ball.) This makes their regular racket feel lighter, and their strokes faster. You can make your own weighted paddle by gluing something to a regular paddle, or by swinging two rackets together. However, don't try rallying with the weighted paddle; that'll throw your time off.

Would my opponent care if I examined his/her racket?

You are entitled to examine your opponent's racket before a match starts. Some of your opponents will use surfaces that you might not be used to playing, such as long or short pips, or antispin. Many players immediately begin grumbling about it, either out loud or in their minds. Either way, you've just brought your game down a notch. [Examine and think about the opponent's racket](#) only tactically, and stay positive. If you aren't used to a surface, the worst thing you want to do is lower your confidence even more by going negative! Just think about what you have to do against that

surface. Play into the surface early on and try to get used to it. Remember, if the surface truly were an advantage, the majority of players would be using it and if they are not, that means there is a built-in disadvantage to the surface. Find it and exploit it.

What type of shoe is best?

Every sport it seems has an athletic shoe that best fits its sport; table tennis is no different. [Shoes with gum-rubber bottoms](#) are great for table tennis, but somewhat difficult to locate. In summary, if your shoes aren't grippy enough, you slide when you play, and so can't move properly. If your shoes are too grippy, you can't slide them across the floor when you move meaning you have to physically lift them up each time you want to move. What you want are shoes that grip, but also slide. Unfortunately, floors are different, and what "el slippery" on one floor may be "el glue" on another. Some players adjust to this by having two pairs of shoes, one very grippy (for slippery floors), and one not as grippy (for more normal floors).

When I am ready to buy a new racket, what kind of information should I keep in mind for a blade and rubber?

BLADE

The wood part of the racket is usually referred to as the blade. Its construction has a strong influence on its performance. [Generally speaking: the stiffer the blade, the faster it is](#). Some blades have one or more thin carbon layers which increase their rigidity without adding too much weight. The distinction between blade types is made on the basis of the number of plies. The construction most frequently used by top players is the classic 5-ply, pioneered by Swedish blade makers. It results in a springy blade with good feeling and medium to medium/high speed. It is ideally suited for the European-style topspin game. The typical 7-ply blade is a little thicker and heavier than the 5-ply. Due to the additional plies and higher weight, the blades are stiffer and faster. They are very effective for hitters. Carbon blades are usually closer to 7-ply blades in feel than 5-ply blades. They have very low vibration and are fairly rigid. Some hybrid construction blades use a woven fiber layer to produce good initial vibration with quick damping. They are quite fast, but their feel is less hard. A construction used mostly for Japanese-style penhold blades is the one-ply. These blades are extremely fast and well suited for the style played by Japanese or Korean penhold players. These descriptions are general in nature. There

are variations in all directions, and occasionally players of one style may do very well with blades designed for a different one.

RUBBER

The choice of rubber is made on the basis of spin and speed. Several factors affect each of these qualities. Without going into too much depth, some of these factors are construction type, flexibility and tackiness of the contact surface and the springiness of the underlying sponge. There is pips-out and pips-in (or "inverted") rubber. Currently, inverted rubber is used by the overwhelming majority of top players. It is - with some exceptions - high friction rubber with good resilience, designed to produce high spin combined with great speed. The name "inverted" comes from the fact that the top sheet is attached to the sponge by its pips, leaving the other - the smooth - side for contacting the ball. There are two distinctly different feeling kinds of inverted rubber:

- * Japanese rubber has a flexible, grippy, but usually not very tacky surface. The sponge is generally soft and very resilient. That combination is fast and affords relatively good control.

- * Chinese made top sheets are usually tackier. They produce very high spin under most circumstances. Depending on the underlying rubber, their speed varies. Most modern styles require a soft sponge, so many Chinese products are available with either soft Chinese or soft Japanese sponge. The hard sponge preferred by players in the 70's and early 80's is still available from some manufacturers. There are many different types of pips out rubber, each designed for a specific style, and they are distinguished by the length of the pips.

- * Short pips are used for fast attack styles. They can produce some spin, but are mostly used for flat hitting.

- * Medium pips generate a very "down" ball that is hard to counter. They are not as easily controlled as short pips.

- * Long pips generate a "knuckle-ball" effect, because they leave most of the existing spin on the ball. They are mostly used by defensive players to neutralize an attacker's spin.

Keep in mind that there is often [a synergy effect between blade and rubber](#) that makes certain combinations work particularly well with each other.

There is also a technique called re-gluing. Players peel the rubber off the blade before they play and apply a fresh coat of glue. That increases feel, spin and speed by a substantial amount, so much so that only few top players play without the benefit of that technique. Coaches usually do not recommend a player start using speed glue before their strokes are well grooved, which usually doesn't occur until a few years into their training. For players who choose to use speed glue, a springy, vibrant blade and a soft sponge will produce the best effect. To my knowledge, no one in Vermont currently uses this technique.

I've heard about playing in the middle, and I have seen others play the middle. I think I play the middle, but I wonder, do I really?

Except at the advanced levels, **few players really play the middle effectively**. Many think they do, but what they think is playing the middle often isn't. For example, their crosscourt backhand "to the middle" might cross the table in the middle, but by the time it reaches the opponent, it's moved diagonally into their backhand court. (So they need to aim the shot so it reaches the middle as it reaches the opponent.) Or a shot that seems to go the middle just feeds a moving opponent's forehand attack off that middle shot. (So they need to judge better when to go to the middle, and perhaps do so more aggressively.) Or a player might start a rally by going to the corner, planning on going to the middle on the next shot but faced with a strong return, are unable to make a strong shot to the middle. (So they need to play the first shot at the middle.) So are you really playing the middle?

If I have a big lead, should I experiment?

With games to 11 now, **few leads are really safe**. It only takes a short series of careless shots, and what seemed like a big lead becomes a big loss. However, if you do have a big lead, and the match won't be over if you win that game, consider experimenting tactics for the next game. Don't do anything that's probably low percentage - but perhaps try out a new serve or new serve & follow, or a different receive, and see what happens. Often you'll find something that'll be useful later on. But caution - the first priority is to win the current game, so use some judgment here! If you do find a new tactic, you might then consider to hold back on it in the next game, and do whatever you did to get your big lead in the previous game. After facing your "new" tactic, your opponent might not be ready for the tactics you had been using, and you now have an "ace in the hole."

What serve can I develop easily as a “disguised” serve to my spinny ones?

Many players learn to put decent spin on their serves. However, when faced with disguising this spin, they have great difficulty. Why not [develop a no-spin serve](#), with a fast, violent serve motion? Change directions as the racket contacts the ball (contacting the ball as the racket is changing directions at the split second where it is nearly motionless), or contact the ball near the handle of the blade (where the racket is moving slowest) so there will be little spin but your opponent will be left making a snap decision on what's on the ball. A no-spin serve is just as effective as a spin serve if the opponent thinks there is spin on the serve!

We have some real “choppers” in our club, and they are difficult to play against. What is the best way to play against someone who constantly “pushes” the ball back?

There is nothing more infuriating than losing to a patient chopper who lets you beat yourself with your own errors. Losing to a chopper is like four-putting in golf; you may have made some good drives to get to the green, but all you remember are the misses at the end. Rather than four-putting forever, let's learn how to beat the chopper.

[A chopper is weakest in the middle](#), but you have more table (and so more margin for error) by going diagonally to a corner. Going for a winner down the line often catches the chopper by surprise. A chopper who is not particularly fast is vulnerable at the corners; a chopper with inverted on both sides is more vulnerable in the middle. Keep these "basics" in mind when playing any of the following styles. There are three general ways of playing a chopper. Informally they are called European style, Asian style, and Chiseling.

European Style

The goal here is to bring the chopper in close to the table, and then attack hard, especially at the chopper's middle. The chopper is too close to the table to make the return, and so misses. When using this technique, you should mostly serve short to bring the chopper in, and try to follow with a strong attack. Sometimes, however, fake the attack, and push short instead - the chopper, in his haste to back up for the expected attack, will have trouble with this ball, and will often have to make a last-second lunge to return it. Even if he makes the return (often a weak one), he will be

left jammed over the table and vulnerable to the next ball, which you can promptly loop for a winner. If the chopper stays closer to the table to guard against this drop shot, then you attack. The chopper has absolutely no way of answering this ... in theory.

During a rally, if the chopper makes a good return from away from the table, push short again, and start over. The object in a rally is to catch the chopper too far away from the table or moving backward so that you can drop the ball short, force him to rush in, and attack when he is jammed up against the table. Alternatively, you can push a few balls, keeping the chopper close to the table, and then attack when you think he's not expecting it.

Asian Style

The goal here is to control the spin and pace of the rally. This method is especially good against a long-pipped chopper, but takes regular practice against a chopper to learn to do effectively. Pips-out players are especially good at this style, but many good inverted players also play this way. This style doesn't work well against an all-inverted chopper who chops very heavy. Let's assume you are playing a long-pipped chopper. Here the aim is to get the chopper off the table, and then attack relatively softly over and over, into the long pips side, but not with full spin. The chopper can only return whatever spin you give him because of the long pips, and so their returns are not particularly heavy, making your continuous soft attack easy. After topspinning a few balls, you find one you like and loop or smash a winner. Depending on what you are more comfortable with, you can topspin many balls in a row before going for a winner, or only a few - be unpredictable. Some players just topspin over and over, not going for a winner unless they get a very easy one. You should try to vary your spin, sometimes looping very dead, sometimes spinny. However, beware of varying spin returns when you vary your own spin. For example, when you give heavy topspin, expect heavy chop, and so either lift the ball more on next shot, or push and start over. Don't fall into the trap of spinning heavily over and over - a chopper loves it, and all you'll get are heavy chop returns, which can be very difficult to loop consistently. You can mix in pushing, but too much pushing will throw your own timing off. By topspinning over and over to the long pips side (but not with full spin), you can build up a rhythm that a chopper will have difficulty breaking. Try to get down to almost eye level with the ball by bending your knees. This will help your consistency by making the lifting easier and will get your eyes closer to the ball so you see it better.

Chiseling

I am not fond of this style. This basically means pushing with the chopper until the chopper either misses, pops up an easy one, or gets impatient and attacks too much. At the higher levels, chiseling is rare, but at the lower and medium levels, it is more common. Since I'm a strong believer that the game has to be FUN (it is a game!), I don't like this way of winning. Unless you're a chopper yourself (in which case r SOMEONE's got to push, and it might as well be you), I'd rather see a player lose by attacking in some way. You may lose now, but you'll learn how to play a choppebetter in future matches.

How much lower body is involved in stroking the ball?

Many players stroke with too much arm, with little body rotation. This greatly limits the power they can generate. It also creates inconsistency in a fast rally as the stroke comes under stress to keep up the pace with just arm movement. Watch how the top players (and even the intermediate ones) **generate force by rotating their body into their shots**, especially on the forehand side. Then spend as much time as needed shadow practicing these shots until you too can do it. (Shadow practicing means practicing the stroke away from the table, without a ball.)

Is playing in tournaments helpful?

Yes and no. Many players practice for many months, not playing in any tournaments until they feel they are completely ready. They then enter a tournament ... and flop. They don't understand it, so they go right back to practicing for many months, avoiding tournaments again. When they again feel ready, they enter a tournament again ... and flop again. And the cycle continues. Others both practice and play lots of tournaments, get lots of feedback on what works and what doesn't in tournament competition, practices it, gets more feedback at tournaments, and their playing level spirals upward. Which are you?

I am trying to develop a radical spin serve like yours, Dr. Pong.

What can you suggest?

In a couple of words . . . **serve violently!** Many players, when serving, either serve with a weak motion and get very little spin, or use a somewhat fast motion, and get only a decent amount of spin. However, if you want to get real spin on the ball, you have to think of the serve as a "violent" motion. Think of it this way. If you want

the ball to spin at 100mph, you need to get your racket moving at 100mph. You can't do that by pitter-pattering around - you have to really stroke it - and that means getting "violent." After a good session practicing your serve, you should be sweating from the effort.

Once in awhile, I encounter a hardbat player; what is the best way to play against such a racket?

Let's start out by realizing that if your opponent is using hardbat, and you are using sponge, you have an advantage. If it weren't so, most players would be using hardbat! Few players use hardbat against sponge players to improve their game; they do so because they like playing with hardbat, and are willing to play at a somewhat lower level to do so.

But a hardbat player has one advantage - you probably aren't used to playing against it. To a non-thinking, robotic-type player, this can be fatal. If you use a more tactical and flexible approach, however, you hold all the cards. Unless the hardbat player's level is simply much stronger than yours, he should be at your mercy.

You have to adjust your tactics to the specific player. While in theory, you can do more things with sponge than hardbat (because of the extreme spins you can generate, and the ability to counter against even heavy topspin), in reality a hardbat player usually uses more shots, since he can more easily do defensive shots such as chopping, chop blocks and short pushes shots that sponge players can do, but often can't control.

A simple approach is to divide hardbat players into three types (but noting that some players play combinations of these):

Choppers and chopper/hitters

Blockers

Hitters

If the opponent is a blocker or hitter, you have two tremendous advantages: you can loop (which is difficult for a hardbat player to adjust to, since his surface doesn't "grab" the ball), and your sponge gives you more "bounce," so you can counter-hit

more easily. If you get out-counteracted by a hardbat player, he's either much better than you, or you simply didn't adjust to his surface when counter-hitting. (How do you adjust to his surface when counter-hitting? By forcing counter-hitting rallies until you feel comfortable against the surface. Just serve fast and deep, and prepare to counterdrive.)

Ultimately, you will beat most hardbat players simply by looping every chance you get. You don't need to overpower the loop just loop steadily, and you'll have plenty of time to tee off on the next shot, since a hardbat player cannot block a loop back with any pace.

Make sure to serve mostly deep against a hardbat hitter or blocker. Against a short ball, they can beat you with quickness and angles, so keep the ball deep!

Why isn't table tennis a major sport here in the United States?

New to TT??? What you should know.....

Even though most Americans think of table tennis as merely a basement recreational activity, it is an impressive # 2, behind soccer, in terms of ALL organized sports in the world. What is even more impressive is that [table tennis is the youngest of the world's major sports](#). At the competitive level, players hit the ball in excess of 150 km per hr. across the table.

Since 1926, when the International Table Tennis Federation was formed, the sport itself has made tremendous progress in virtually all parts of the world. Among the "developed" nations, America is the last to discover the sport on a major scale. The ITTF now includes 127 National Associations today. Unlike baseball or football, which is only played in some parts of the world, ITTF affiliated nations are found on every continent on earth.

Thanks to the "Ping Pong Diplomacy" of 1971, it is well known that the Chinese rate table tennis as their national pastime. Other Asian countries have adopted table tennis as their national sport. Japan has more than 1,500,000 players and in Korea, table tennis is sponsored by national banks and airlines. In Europe, table tennis has seen a rapid growth in just the last 25 years. In the 1950's, this sport was literally

unknown in Sweden, but today it is their 3rd largest participant sport. In fact, many Swedes have held the World's Table Tennis Championship title. Germany, France, Yugoslavia, Hungary and Rumania have all produced world champions, despite their small populations.

As a spectator sport, table tennis strongly occupies Europe and Asia. The United States has it's own American team which travels the world each year. Table Tennis is now recognized and played in the "OLYMPICS," with its debut appearance in the 1988 Seoul Olympic games. You can find the sport televised throughout the world at any given time. From the "Hong Kong Invitational" to the "World's Table Tennis Championships" to the "Olympics," table tennis is completely sold out for all sessions.

The US "Open" Table Tennis Championships are held in America each summer. You will find the top players in the United States competing here. Teams from various countries and individuals from around the world are invited to attend and participate. This major tournament is held in different major U.S. cities year to year. The US "Closed" Table Tennis Championships are held each December in Las Vegas, Nevada. This tournament is only open to those who live in the United States.

I've heard that there are many benefits to playing the game of table tennis. What have you heard, oh Great One?

Actually, there are many advantages to playing table tennis, as you eluded to. Scientific studies have placed table tennis [among the very best aerobic activities](#) for one's body, which doesn't surprise those of use who play the game seriously. Here are a couple of other comments that I find interesting to note:

<<by Hikosuke Tamasu - Songs of International Friendship:

We have an answer for the increased longevity in Japan: "Table tennis is best [for prevention of senility](#)" wrote Dr. Win Weger, an American physician, in his book, entitled "How to Increase your Intelligence". "You should play table tennis, because you use your eyes in the play and that does a good job of stimulating the core of your brain." Other medical books conclude that stimulating the brain and keeping young are closely related.>>

<<by Dr. Win Weger - How to Increase your Intelligence":

If time permits, and if you have a good player to practice against, during your marathon or at other times, [table tennis is an excellent way to extend this hand eye coordination](#). That game has many benefits: it demands very fast, complex reactions, you get instant feedback on your responses . . . the game has many subtleties, finesses, interlinked skills, rhythms, and stratagems which make demands on your entire brain and physical system, and at levels of high desire and stress, the games forces on you extraordinary self-integration and self-discipline. Becoming sharp in table tennis is one excellent way to "turn on" more of your midbrain.>>

The game of table tennis has some interesting statistics. Do you have any, Oh Great Mystic Seer?

Yes. Here are just a few examples of some of those:

- * Table tennis is an Olympic event.
- * In 1999, 13 million American played table tennis, according to the American Sports Data, Inc.
- * Table tennis is the most popular racquet sport in the world and is the second largest participation sport. Annually, over 10 million players worldwide compete in tournaments, nationally and internationally.
- * Most table tennis tournaments in the US have free admission.
- * The record for number of hits in 60 seconds is 173, by Jackie Bellinger and Lisa Lomas in Great Britain on February 7, 1993.
- * The table tennis ball weights only 2.7 grams. For comparison sake, a hummingbird egg weighs 0.3 grams, so it would take 9 eggs to equal one ball.
- * With the help of a powerful player, the ball can reach speeds exceeding 100 mph.
- * World class players can put up to 9000 rpm of spin on Table Tennis balls.
- * Table Tennis balls aren't really hollow. They are pressurized slightly with a gas.
- * Parker Brothers originally patented the name "Ping Pong" and the patent is now owned by Escalade Sports.
- * A serious Table Tennis player does not like Table Tennis to be called as Ping Pong.
- * World powers in Table Tennis are: China, Sweden and Korea.
- * The racket, bat, or blade may be of any size, shape or weight as long as it is flat, rigid and 85% natural wood.

- * Longest table tennis rally: 8 hours, 15 minutes, 1 second, by Brian Seibel and Steve Seibel.
- * Longest uninterrupted table tennis tossings, alternatively on both sides of the bat (without changing the position of the feet): 9,900 of these tossings in 1 hour, 5 minutes, 40 seconds, by Professor Annajah Ramesh, February 12, 1994.
- * In 1997, Professor Ramesh turned one half of a table tennis table vertical and patted a ball against it 18,737 times in 1 hour, 33 minutes and 53 seconds. The record observes that "position of the feet [was] unchanged till completing 17,568 strokes." (Yeah, but what about the subsequent 1,169 strokes? Were those feet dancing about or what?) Those feet, or that feat, or both, gave him an Inaugural World Record for the "Longest Uninterrupted Solo Table Tennis Rally."

Awe-inspiring stuff!

**Time to make your own "Awe-inspiring" moments.
We welcome you to come play "The Game" with us,
become a member of The Green Mountain Table
Tennis Club - And produce your own "Guinness" (Book
of Records) moments and memories!**

PS: Say, are you a real doctor, Dr. Pong?

Answer: I can't believe you are asking me that question. I am so upset that I am coughing up shards of my own laughter!