

Table Tennis

Rule Book and Playing Hints

Courtesy of Harvard Sports



History

The sport was founded in England during the late 19th century. In 1933 the United States Table Tennis Association was formed, now known as U.S.A. Table Tennis. Some people refer to the sport as “Ping Pong”. However, “Ping Pong” is a registered trade mark of Indian Industries.

19 million Americans participate in table tennis each year, of which 2.5 million are serious players. Table Tennis is the most popular racket sport in the world and became an Olympic sport in 1988.

The Equipment

The Table is made of wood and painted in matte green, Dark Green, or blue, and it has white boundary lines. Although green is the most common color, blue is the new tournament color used in World Championships and the U.S. Open. The table is nine feet long by five feet wide and stands thirty inches tall.

The Net is stretched across the middle of the table. At times it may seem tall but it is only 6 inches high, about the width of your racket. 72 inches is the official length. The better quality models will have height and tension adjustments.

The Ball is light, 2.5 grams. It only measures 1-1/2” in diameter and is made of celluloid. It comes in white, yellow, or orange for maximum visibility. In competition play, the ball may travel over 100 miles per hour.

The Racket may be of any size, shape, and weight. It must have a rubber surface. It comes either in “pips-out” or “pips-in” (smooth surface) preferably over a sponge sub-surface for faster playing characteristics. A “pips-in” surface produces a greater spin than a “pips-out surface.” The performance of your racket makes a difference for quick improvement. The more spin and speed characteristics the less control the racket has. This is a trade off where the beginner needs the control while the serious player wants as much spin and speed as possible.

One side of the racket surface must be red, the other side black. This is a tournament rule. Should the player decide to have different kinds of rubber surfaces, the color rule enables the opponent to see what rubber surface the player is using. One side may produce heavy spin while the other may produce good defense without any spin.

Playing Rules

Scoring. The player, or doubles team, who first scores 21 points wins the game. However, you must win by two points so a game could go on 30 to 50 points before being decided. A match is usually the best two out of three games and in international championships it is best three out of five games. In other words, if you lose the first game it’s not the end of the world; winning the next games can make you the winner.

Let’s Start the Game!

Choice of Ends and Service. Who starts serving and which player gets to stand at which end? You can flip a coin...if you win the flip you can choose to SERVE or RECEIVE from the end you like. After each game you will alter the ends. Should there be a tie, for instance one game to one game, the players will change ends after the first player reaches 10 points in the final game.

The Serve. Stand behind your end of the table. Hold the ball on the palm of your free hand and throw the ball straight up in the air. As the ball falls hit it so it lands on your half of the table, makes one bounce and lands on the other side of the table. If the serve touches the net, it is a let, and you must serve again. If it touches the net and lands on the floor, you lose a point. If the serve goes into the net you lose the point.

You serve until five points have been scored, and then the other player gets to serve for the next five points. At 20 to 20 (you must win by two points,) you alter the serve after each point.

The Server is the player who starts the game by being the first to put the ball into play.

The Receiver is the player who receives the ball from the server, and returns it over the net.

If you are the receiver: remember, the ball must not bounce twice on your side of the table, and you can hit the ball only once to return it. Try to hit the ball on its highest peak and you will have a better angle hitting it back onto the opponent's side.

If your return touches the net and goes over, it is okay. If it goes into the net it is bad news! You just lost a point. If your return goes over the net but misses the table, bad news again! You lost another point. Should your returning ball touch the edge of the table on your opponent's side, that's great! It is very hard to return an edge ball. As long as the ball hits the edge while dropping it counts. Should the ball hit the side of the table top it is not considered an edge ball and will not count.

Win a Point

- If the opponent fails to return your shot, your shot can hit the boundary lines (white lines) on your opponent's side or even the edge of the table and it is legal. Your serve can also hit the edge and it is legal.

Lose a Point

- If when attempting to serve or make a return.....you miss the ball.
- If you hit the ball into the net, including the top of the net, and it comes back to your side of the table.
- If you hit the ball wide or too far so the first bounce hits the floor or the wall.
- If you hit the ball before it bounces on your side of the table. No volley is allowed.
- If the ball bounces twice on your side of the table before hitting it.
- If you move the table or touch the net during play.

Legal Point

- It is legal to hit the ball around the side of the net to land the ball on your opponent's side.
- It is legal for the ball to hit the top of the net and "climb" over.

Doubles Play

Each team consists of two players. The players on each team must alternate hitting the ball every other time. The server stands to the right of his partner. The center line determines a good serve. The serve must first bounce within the right side of the center line, bounce over the net and land diagonally on the left side of the center line on the opponent's side. Should the serve fail to bounce within the correct box, the server loses the point. After serving 5 points, the server and his partner trade places. The serve then passes to the opponent's, and the previous receiver serves 5 points diagonally over the net. After receiving five serves, it's your turn to serve 5 points. You are not serving to the player you previously served to but to his partner...in other words, they switch sides.

Playing Conditions

In tournaments, the playing court per table is 40 feet long, 20 feet wide, and 11 and a half feet to the ceiling. For home use or recreational play we recommend the playing area to be at least 20 feet by 12 feet. If you do not have enough room in your basement, try using your garage or play outside if you have an outside table.

Clothing

If you play with a white ball you are not allowed to wear a white shirt. In tournament play, clothing consists of a short sleeve shirt, shorts or skirt, socks and shoes.

Playing Techniques

The Grip.

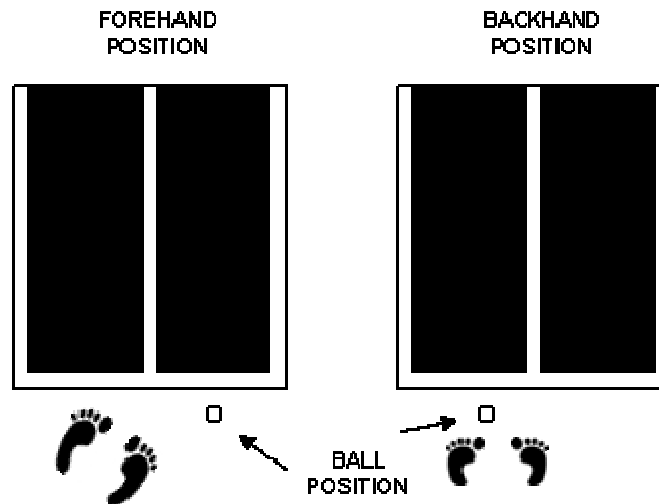
Hold the racket handle as you would shake a friend's hand, or hold it like a pencil.

Ready Position.

Stand about one foot away from the table. Stretch out your racket arm and your racket should touch the table. Keep your feet next to each other spaced about 16 to 24 inches apart and your knees slightly bent.

Forehand.

- Turn sideways 45-degrees. If right handed your left foot is positioned in front of your right foot, if left handed this step is reversed. (see illustration)
- Hit the ball on the side of your body (like in tennis)
- Start with your arm behind your body. Move your forearm and shoulder toward the ball. On contact snap your wrist for more power and follow through.
- Hit the ball on its highest peak.



Backhand.

- Position yourself in the ready position.
- Try and hit the ball in front of your stomach. (see above illustration)
- Move forearm toward the ball and snap your wrist upon contact with the ball. Do not use your shoulders.
- Hit the ball at its highest peak.

Push-Backspin.

- Position yourself in the ready position.
- In one motion, move your forearm forward when hitting the lower part of the ball. Remember to open the racket so you can see the entire playing surface and “chop” slice the ball with a defensive stroke. You are hitting the bottom part of the ball and creating a backspin.

Top Spin.

- Use the position for backhand or forehand play.
- Move your forearm down and backward, moving it forward and up while hitting the ball.
- Hit the top part of the ball with a closed racket (angle your racket so that you can not see the hitting surface) creating a top spin shot.

Side Spin.

- Bend/drop your wrist downwards holding the racket.
- Try to hit the side of the ball with a delicate touch making the ball rotate as much as possible.
- In a backhand side spin your racket should be held close to your stomach and snap your wrist and forearm straight forward hitting the side of the ball.
- In a forehand side spin your racket arm is held out and snap the wrist and arm toward the stomach.