
Single-sided Pips-out Penholder Play - 1. Introduction

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1. Introduction.

The single-sided style of penholder play is its oldest form; in the East (China, Korea, Japan) it is regarded as traditional. In Eastern cultures tradition is held in high esteem; tradition is looked upon as the well-ordered compilation of everything that has proven its practical worth. Single-sided penholder play most certainly proved itself; great Chinese champions played in this style: Chen Long-Can, Jiang Jia-Liang, Liu Guo-Liang. When Liu won his world title in 1999 (having already won the Olympic gold in 1996), the little taciturn genius, currently coach of the Chinese National Men's Team, gave a rare interview, in which he complained about the declining interest for single-sided pips-out play in his country. Young players and coaches alike were too impatient, they wanted fast results and were disinclined to invest the time needed to master the traditional style, he said. True enough, playing with inverted rubbers is more quickly acquired. Chinese top coaches reckon they can teach their pupils to play well with inverted rubbers in about five years; to play well with pips as a penholder, however, takes seven years, because a player has to master not only the attack but also the defence. But practicing hard for seven years does pay off. Gao Jun, a great example of traditional controlled counter-attack with single-sided pips-out, in her mid-thirties still can compete with the best. He Zhi-Wen, in his mid-forties recently proved he can still aggressively hold his own against Timo Boll. And of late young players have appeared who again have adopted this style with great success; Lee Eun Hee of South Korea, a nimble all-out female attacker, is one them. As for myself I simply am in love with this style – to my mind it combines elegance and intelligence in a fast purposeful dance. Below I have tried to write down more or less comprehensively what I have come to know of its basics. I think that an understanding of the physics involved, the actual chain of cause and effect, really helps in learning the required techniques and tactics. It is of use to understand how topspin brings the ball down or backspin will make it float, how the ball reacts to the pips, how it is actually directed, and how the height of the bounce plays a decisive role in the kind of stroke to use. Therefore the basic physics involved will be covered before the basic techniques and tactics will be described.