

## Single-sided Pips-out Penholder Play - 5. Over the table play

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### 5. Over the table play.

#### 5.1. Pushing.

Against backspin balls you can instead of block also push. Against heavy backspin balls that bounce low and close to the net you should.

You can push slow by simply putting your bat (face up at an angle of about 45 degrees) under the ball, very shortly after the bounce in order to make good use of the upward motion of the ball; hold your bat still, that is, avoid imparting forward motion and do not lift it yourself; just have the ball bounce off your bat over the net. Make contact fairly high on your bat, that is, between the middle and the grip; this makes it a lot easier to produce flat returns. The ball should go almost straight forward. Because it just bounces off without much friction, the ball may keep most of its original rotation, which to your opponent now will be topspin (this is called spin reversal). However, this depends on the kind of pips you use. Softer and longer short pips will bend and tend to make the ball dead or even return it with mild backspin. Try this out when practicing, so you know what to expect. Also vary the angle of your bat (very flat to just slightly open) and see what happens. If you are unable to predict the outcome, this is a risky shot.

Pushing fast is more reliable, because the result is predictable. Do the same as with the slow push, but now really push against the ball. The motion should be forward, and slightly downward, not upward. This way your pips will brush the underside of the ball, imparting heavy backspin. Again, try this out in practice, varying the angle of the bat; also vary the speed you are pushing with. Find out how to push the ball deep or short, and keep it low. Generally if your returns pop up, you have to hold out your bat less open or take the ball higher on your bat.

#### 5.2. Flipping.

A short ball can also be attacked by flipping it. The flip is a short, almost completely upward stroke. With pips you cannot drag the ball upward and over the net, so you have to use its own upward motion again. Keep your blade vertical. Lift your arm to shoulder-height, then bring the blade down just before the ball when it bounces; then go straight up with it again, closing your bat a fraction to help the ball over the net. If you want to produce a fast, deep ball, you go up and slightly forward, making a brushing contact with the centre of the ball; if you want to produce a slow ball, do not go forward at all, just aim and go up. Coming in at the ball from shoulder-height must be done in order to avoid imparting too much forward motion on the ball (you would hit into the net if you came at it horizontally).

Chances are that your pips will reverse the incoming spin to some extent when you flip. Again, you have to find out to what extent exactly. If your pips do reverse backspin to topspin, you are able to attack backspin balls with a pretty fast flip, because they will land fast on the table.

#### 5.3. Sidespin block.

Even with pips incoming spin is best avoided when it cannot be turned against the opponent. The best way to minimize the influence of backspin or topspin is making contact with the ball at its side, as the side centre of the ball is one end of the axis the ball is rotating around. A point close to the axis will move far less than a point far from the axis as you will see when watching a spinning wheel. As you play penholder style you can only make contact with the right-hand side of the ball (a shakehander can also make contact with the left-hand side, viz. with his backhand). You can do this in flipping, but also in blocking. A sidespin block is executed as follows. Keep your bat vertical and point it towards the ball; come right at it, then make contact shortly after the bounce as far at its right-hand side as you can; so &ldquo;cut the ball&rdquo;. Have the ball bounce up and off your bat, at the same time stabbing at it (in order to produce sidespin) and (guiding the ball a bit) bringing your bat up and slightly into the direction you want it to go. This is a touch-shot, so perform it delicately; yet the upward/forward (brushing) motion should be sharp and with venom. You can also bring your bat downward/forward to impart backspin; you should come in to the ball a bit more from the side for this and also open your bat slightly. The sidespin block is a suitable technique for cutting the forehand sideline returning a short serve from the backhand side.

#### 5.4. Open sidespin block against backspin.

Incoming heavy backspin on your left-hand side (e.g. from a half long serve) can be countered with an open block. This technique is a combination of a fast push and a backspin block. Block the ball, cutting it, with a fairly open bat, moving the bat forward (to impart backspin) and to the left (to impart sidespin). Take the ball very early after the bounce.