

Excercises for short pip play

Contributed by Kees
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As an addition to my two articles on pips out play I'd like to offer here some simple but very effective exercises intended for developing sideways movement behind the table up to the level required in these styles. Attacking penholders and shakehandlers alike must be able to perform forehand strokes from the backhand side of the table; this leaves the forehand side wide open, so excellent footwork is needed to cover an area that otherwise would be extremely vulnerable.

The idea behind the exercises is that in order to execute strokes with precision and force you not only have to get to the ball in time, but also maintain a perfect poise; therefore both speed and balance is what is aimed for.

The best way to move sideways behind the table is with your feet apart (your shoulders should easily fit in between them). If you move to the left, you should step out with the left leg, and then bring your right leg in the same direction, until you stand as before; and your right foot should never lose contact with the floor. Moving to the right you do the same, in mirror image. All the time your weight should be on the front part of your feet, that is, on your toes and your insteps (the balls of your feet), and you should stand lightly, springy, balanced.

If you step out to perform a stroke, your weight should be on that leg before you actually perform the stroke, and you should be balanced.

Refrain from everything which might impair your balance or speed. This means primarily that you should refrain from starting your stroke too early (while you are still moving); it is necessary, therefore, to strike both fast and short. Beginning an upswing while you are still moving destroys your balance and makes your speed less. You can easily convince yourself off this by trying to move quickly sideways while making large “upswinging” gestures.

Exercise 1. Rope-jumping. Keep it up for 1 minute to begin with. Hop very lightly with both feet simultaneously. Rest. Do it for another minute. This strengthens the muscles you need for moving fast sideways. Do the exercise every day for 5 to 10 minutes. I promise, before the second week is out you will be noticeably faster behind the table already.

Exercise 2 a. Stand with your feet apart and bend forward (like you are eager to hit the next incoming ball!), find your balance, and start to swing gently from left to right, v.v., by bending your left knee, then your right, and so on. Make sure your weight is on the leg with the bending knee. Feel your equilibrium shift, like a pendulum. Do this for about a minute.

2 b. Do the same, but add sideways movement: step out left, bring your right leg in the same direction until you stand as before, then step out right, bring your left leg etc. Speed up. Repeat the cycles (one to the left, one to the right) 50 times for a couple of days. Then go for 100. Increase the speed until you are flying. You should actually have the feeling that you are afloat while doing this.

2 c. Now to finetune your balance, place a basket on your left and one on your right. You should be able to just about put your right hand in them when you do exercise 2b. Put 10 balls in the left basket. Do exercise 2 b, but every time you go left, you pick up a ball and take it with you when going to the right, and put it into the basket there. Begin slowly, then increae speed. If you can do it very snappy without missing a single ball, then fill the basket with 20. This exercise is fun for kids (you can even do matches: see who empties his or her basket first), but very good for adults too; for you are now combining speed with balance and dexterity of your hand.

These exercises take up about a quarter of an hour. You can do them every day at home and/or make them a part of your training in the gym. You will make the most of them if you follow them up with the next exercises.

Exercise 3 (prepares for exercise 5). Practice forehand strokes from the forehand corner, first diagonal, then parallel. Practice forehand strokes from the backhand corner, first diagonal, then parallel; finally practice them standing beside the table.

Exercise 4 (prepares for exercise 5). Alternate between forehand and backhand strokes from the backhand corner (stepping around your backhand).

Exercise 5. Now make series, gradually increasing your speed. For single-sided penholders: backhand fast push or fast block from the backhand corner (to gain the initiative), step around, perform a forehand hit (your first attack), move quickly to the forehand corner and again perform a forehand hit (second attack), come back to about the middle of the table turning your torso and perform a killing backhand hit (see 6.2. in my article on single-sided pips-out penholder), and start all over again. Two-winged attackers do the same, but their backhand hit from the middle might be a forehand hit.

As you are getting better at this, you will one day (pretty soon) suddenly feel balance kick in – you do not move anymore, you float. You do not move your feet anymore, for your feet are moving you! Suddenly table tennis is a dance, a fiery form of art! You will notice how much more in control you are and how much better you are able to oversee the table! Exhilaration will grip you! You will know for a fact that you are now on your way to become a great player... Well, something like that, anyway.

