

# Developing Forehand Strokes

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Although it is very important in the modern game to develop strong attacking strokes on both wings, most players find it easier to generate more power with the forehand, so this month we are concentrating on developing this important offensive weapon.

We start off with a basic drive, then look at:

- How to generate more topspin.
- Using a block to contain your opponent's strong attack.
- How to topspin against a backspin ball
- Using the counterspin stroke both close to and away from the table.

All of the descriptions in this article are for a right-handed player. For left-handers, transpose left and right!

## Forehand Drive

The Forehand Drive is one of the key basic skills to master as it is the basis for all forehand offensive strokes. Little or no spin is imparted to the ball in the early learning stages. Like all strokes it can be broken down into four distinct phases:-

**Ready position (Preparation)** – The player should be in a crouched position with left foot slightly forwards. The stroke should be played close to the table.

**Backswing** – The upper body rotates to the right with the bat arm taken backwards and slightly downwards with a closed bat angle. There should be a 90° bend at the elbow and a small gap between the arm and the upper body. There should be a slight weight transference to the back foot.

**Forward Movement** – The upper body rotates to the left as weight is transferred to the front foot. Contact is made in front of the body at the top of the bounce. As players progress acceleration of the elbow can be used to impart greater speed and power on the ball.

**Follow Through** – The bat arm continues to move upwards and forwards in a saluting action with a 90° between upper arm and body and 90° at the elbow. Recovery should always be to the ready position.

To produce more topspin from the drive stroke, the bat angle needs to be more closed so that a brushing action is used on the top of the ball, and more acceleration in the elbow and wrist joints is required.

Important areas to think about when playing a forehand topspin against a block:

**Ready Position** – Side to square stance

**Backswing** – Good rotation of legs, hips, waist and shoulders with weight transference to back leg. The bat should not drop below the height of the ball.

**Forward Movement** – The legs, hips, waist and shoulders all rotate forwards with good acceleration (Brushing) at the top of the ball at peak of bounce or just before. As players progress acceleration of the elbow can be used to impart greater speed and power on the ball.

**Follow Through** – The bat arm continues to move forwards and upwards using both the elbow and wrist to impart the spin. Recovery should always be to the ready position.

Exercises to improve this skill:

- Forehand Topspin to two positions down the line and diagonal – to the opponents Forehand Block and Backhand Block.

- Forehand Topspin against Backhand Block anytime blocker wants switch to backhand play the point free.

### Forehand Block

The block is used predominantly as a containing technique against strong offensive strokes and utilises the spin and speed already on the ball. The reading of the approaching ball is key as the bat angle on the block needs to be adjusted accordingly depending on the amount of topspin on the ball. The ball is generally taken before peak of bounce and is therefore played close to the table with a short action and relatively high bat. At elite level many variations of the block exist such as chop and sidespin which require excellent hand skills.

**Ready Position** – Similar to F/H Drive but a little closer to the table and some players prefer a more square on stance.

**Backswing** – The backswing is short with the racket closed and the elbow forming a 90° angle. The elbow acts as a pivot point and the racket moves slightly backwards and downwards as the ball approaches.

**Forward Movement** – With the elbow as the pivot point the forearm moves slightly upwards striking the ball before peak of bounce with a closed bat angle. (The more topspin on the ball, the more closed the angle needs to be).

**Follow Through** – The bat and forearm continue to move slightly upwards and forwards, finishing just below the chin with the shoulders parallel to the table.

### Forehand Topspin Against Backspin

Show video clip Naomi Owen playing against Joanna Parker (Any timings as it is all the same) footage to be taken from Advanced Techniques

Generally speaking, when topspinning against backspin as opposed to against the block, a less closed bat angle should be used and contact will be on the back of the ball with a brushing action moving in a more upward direction. However this will be dependent on the amount of backspin on the ball – attackers always need to look out for the defenders use of the float (no spin) – if they do not read this shot, they will topspin the ball off the end of the table!

This is an advanced technique so it is important that you develop a sound technique for the basic top spin stroke before attempting it.

Important areas to think about when playing a forehand topspin against backspin:

**Ready Position** – Side to square stance

**Backswing** – Good rotation of legs, hips, waist and shoulders with weight transference to back leg. The bat should drop slightly below the height of the ball depending on the amount of backspin.

**Forward Movement** – The legs, hips, waist and shoulders all rotate forwards with good acceleration (Brushing) on the back of the ball at peak of bounce or just after.

**Follow Through** – Weight is transferred to front foot with follow through to 90 degrees between upper arm and body and at the elbow.

Exercises to improve this skill:

- Forehand topspin to forehand/backhand defence diagonally and down the line.
- Forehand/backhand defence to two positions Forehand wide and Forehand middle so attacker has to move throughout the exercise.

### Counter Topspin

The counter topspin is an offensive stroke, commonly used in the modern attacking game and predominately used with a forehand. Counter topspin involves topspinning the opponent's topspin ball and can be played away from the table or close to the table. In the latter case it is a very useful tactic in reducing the time available

for your opponent to react.

This is an advanced technique so it is important that you develop a sound technique for the basic top spin stroke before attempting it.

### **Counter Top Spin – Close to the table**

**Ready Position** – From a position with the left foot forward for right-handers, the hips, waist and shoulders all rotate to the right bringing the weight onto the right leg.

**Back Swing** – The arm is brought back and lowered below ball height though higher and more closed than for topspin against backspin defence. Keep forearm relaxed.

**Swing / Contact** – The arm moves forward and upwards, though in a more horizontal arc than for topspin against backspin defence. Contact is beside the body at hip height with the bat closed. Contact is made with the ball at its highest point with a closed bat.

**Follow Through** – The weight transfers to the left leg is completed as the body rotates to the left.

Exercises to improve skill:

- Forehand Topspin Diagonally to Forehand Block
- When the player who is blocking wants to, play a forehand counter topspin.
- Short service with backspin to the Forehand
- Forehand push to wide Forehand
- Server to Forehand Topspin diagonally.
- Receiver to counter topspin

### **Counter Topspin away from the table**

**Ready Position** – From a position with the left foot forward for right-handers, the hips, waist and shoulders all rotate to the right bringing the weight onto the right leg.

**Backswing** – The arm is brought back and lowered below ball height though higher and more closed than for topspin against backspin defence. Keep forearm relaxed.

**Swing / Contact** – The arm moves forward and upwards, though in a more horizontal arc than for topspin against backspin defence. Contact is beside the body at hip height with the bat closed.

**Follow Through** – The weight transfer to the left leg is completed as the body rotates to the left. The bat finishes high with the arm in a 90°-90° position (90° at the elbow, 90° between upper arm and body).

Initially, this skill can be learnt and developed through both players standing further away from the table and topspinning to each other.

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