

Backhand Progressions

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Following on from last month's article which focused on the forehand, we will now look at developing the backhand attacking strokes. Remember, although most players find it easier to generate power with the forehand, it is very important in the modern game to also develop strong attacking strokes on both wings, otherwise you will be at a big disadvantage.

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

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

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

Backhand Drive

This shot is one of the key basic skills and forms the basis for the backhand topspin. It is generally less powerful than the Forehand but when played with speed and good placement can be an effective stroke. It can be broken down into the following phases

Ready position – (Preparation) is facing along the line of play and close to the table.

Backswing – This is with a closed bat angle backwards and slightly downwards towards the waist. The wrist should be angled slightly backwards.

Forward Movement – The bat moves forwards and slightly upwards with contact at peak of bounce in front of the body. The forearm accelerates and the wrist straightens to produce speed and power.

Follow Through – The bat continues in the direction of the ball with recovery to the ready position.

Backhand Block

The block is used predominantly against topspin and fast attacking strokes, when you might not have time to play an all-out attacking stroke. It utilises the speed and spin of the opponent by generally contacting the ball soon after the bounce and using a much shorter swing than for a drive or full topspin stroke. At an elite level, the block is used more aggressively by using the wrist in a brushing topspin action to return the ball faster, or by 'cushioning' the ball to greatly slow the speed.

Ready Position – Leg position can be either parallel to the table or with left leg slightly forward to allow for easy movement to forehand attacking strokes

Backswing – The bat is drawn back to the left hip area in a slightly closed position with the wrist bent slightly backwards.

Forward Movement – The forearm moves forward and slightly upward with the wrist straightening. The bat is slightly closed according to the amount of spin. More spin, more closed angle.

Follow Through – The bat and forearm continue to move forwards and upwards.

Backhand Topspin against Block

This shot is really an extension of the Backhand Drive but with a more closed bat angle and greater acceleration of the forearm and wrist with a brushing action on the ball. Contact should be made with the top of the ball at peak of bounce or earlier. It is now being increasingly used at top level play as players have less time to get their forehands in from all positions on the table.

Ready Position (Preparation) – Crouched position square to the line of play. (The stance may be slightly wider than for backhand drive)

Backswing – This is with a closed bat angle backwards and slightly downwards towards the waist with the wrist also angled slightly backwards. There is also a slight rotation of shoulders and waist to the left.

Forward Movement – The bat moves forward and upwards with good acceleration from forearm and wrist. Contact with the ball is in front but slightly to the left of the body with a brushing action.

Follow Through – The bat continues in the direction of the ball with recovery to the ready position.

Backhand Topspin against Backspin

When playing against backspin, players will often try to use the forehand topspin, as most people find it easier to generate power with the forehand. However this is often not possible, so it is very important that players can execute this skill effectively.

The backhand topspin utilises mainly forearm and wrist together with the hips-waist movement as due to the neutral stance, minimal weight transfer occurs. The player should experiment with finding the correct distance in front of the body for contact.

Preparation – Start square to the line of play with a closed bat face. Depending on how much backspin is on the ball, the player may need to slightly open the bat angle to return heavy backspin.

Backswing – Waist & shoulders turn backwards and downwards

Contact – Contact slightly to the left of centre, accelerating forearm and wrist. Weight transfers upwards and forwards. When developing your technique against backspin, initially it is easier to hit the ball just after the peak of the bounce, then once the technique is developed to then starting to take the ball slightly earlier.

Follow Through – The bat continues its forward movement after point contact.

Backhand Counter Topspin

A counterspin stroke is a topspin stroke played against a ball which already has topspin on it. The backhand counterspin is a difficult technique, but is very effective for putting your opponent under time pressure when played close to the table 'off the bounce' or half volley. It can also be performed away from the table to keep your attack going. The focus should be on the flick of the wrist. The upper body needs to be in the forward position and the weight transfer helps to produce speed and spin.

Preparation – as with the backhand topspin, the stand should be square to the line of play with the upper body slightly forward.

Backswing – The backswing is slightly shorter starting the stroke slightly below the ball. It is important for the wrist and forearm to be relaxed.

Contact – Good acceleration of the forearm and wrist in a forward motion, trying to contact the ball slightly before the peak of the bounce.

Follow Through – Bat continues forward toward the line of play after point of contact.

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