

Return of Serve

Author: Russell Moore

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With the server having the advantage at the beginning of a point, having a good receive of serve becomes a vital part of your game. There are many different aspects to take into consideration when receiving including the length of the serve, spin on the ball, table position of serve, recovery position of your opponent and tactical. Against a long serve, or a serve that has drifted long, attacking players should be encouraged to attack the ball with a topspin. Against a short serve, there are 3 main types of return that can be used:

Short Return – A short return limits the opponent's attacking options. It is about gaining time and restricting the opponent's time. The ball is taken early after the bounce to shorten the reaction time of the server, to help keep the ball low over the net and keep the ball short so that it would bounce at least twice on the opponents side.. The wrist is used to create backspin making it difficult for the opponent to flick.

Flick – The wrist is used to produce a short topspin or no spin shot over the table. Variations to this are to use an open bat starting position and then on contact the bat is in the neutral position. Another variation is using the 'feint flick' in which the upper body moves in one direction and the wrist sends the ball in the opposite direction at the last moment.

Attacking Push – This stroke is performed with backspin or no spin. It is taken early after the bounce and is a quick, deep return to the opponent. The server will then have very little time to start an aggressive attack and the receiver will have the possibility to counter attack.

In all of the above returns, good footwork is vital with the head as close to the contact point as possible (i.e. do not stretch). To enable the player to achieve this, 'In and Out' footwork needs to be practiced as this is necessary for returning a short service or a short return. When first developing the movement for the return of serve in the early stages, multiball is a useful tool to use. Key coaching points for the movement are:

- The foot nearest the ball moves under the table with the body angled forward and the arm slightly bent (If the player does not move in close enough to the ball the arm becomes too straight and control is lost).
- The wrist is used to control the length of the ball and to impart spin.
- After contact, the player recovers by moving the feet back to the 'ready position'.

Looking at the Backhand Short Push and the Forehand Flick, here are the key coaching points to consider:

Backhand Short Push (note: photos and description for a left-handed player)



Preparation

- The player steps in with the left foot so that the head is low and near to the bat. (If the ball goes wide off the backhand side of the table, step around the table with the right foot).
- The bat angle is open and there is a very short backswing.

Forward Movement

- Contact with the ball is early after the bounce.
- Use the wrist to brush the ball to create some backspin.

Follow Through

- The follow through is very short with the bat finishing low.

Forehand Flick (note: photos and description for right-handed player)



Preparation

- The right leg moves under the table for right-handers with the body angled forward and the arm slightly bent.

Backswing

- The bat moves forward horizontally with the bat neutral or slightly closed depending on the spin. With the elbow as the pivot point, the stroke is performed with the forearm and wrist.

Forward Movement

- Contact is made at the top of the bounce in front of the body.

Follow Through

- The bat continues to move forward and upward. The player then recovers by moving the right leg back.

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