

Tactics

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Posted On: January 25, 2012



Getting tactics right in a match really can be the difference between winning or losing. In simple form, tactics are about exposing your opponent's weaknesses, whilst being able to apply your own strengths. If a player practices as many different areas of the game as possible and improves them, then this will limit weaknesses in their own game. In turn this means that the player's opponents will have less tactical information to work with or it will at least be less obvious to spot the weaknesses.

The coach in the corner...

Should the coach in the corner be spotting the right tactics and informing the player what to do? Or would it be better for the player to work out the correct tactics?

Many coaches have different views on this; some coaches argue that players perform better when they are coaching them. Some coaches argue that the player working out the correct tactics would be better in their long term development. Is it right that when their coach isn't there that the player will under achieve, or should we be giving the skills to our players so they can play independently? If so, how do we do this? How do we give our players these skills?

If they always rely on what the corner coach is telling them, then problems tend to creep in. For example, when a coach takes more than one player to a competition and they are competing at the same time, the coach can't be in both places at the same time. If a player competes for England there is a good chance they will have a different coach. If the coach can't make the competition etc, in all of these scenarios the player needs the ability to think for themselves.

I would suggest a balance. When a player is young and relatively new to the competition side of table tennis, you may have to inform the player of where your opponent is weak but don't just tell, try to get them to understand why they should play in this way etc. This is the start of the learning process. As they compete more and more, your role as a corner coach changes from "play to the backhand and then to the middle" to "where do you think he's weak?" and "where are you winning your points?" etc. This gets your player to think about their game and in turn will encourage them to think while they are playing. This is crucial, as tactics may constantly need to be adapted.

In the training hall you can also encourage this kind of play, by getting different players to adopt certain tactics and each player trying to figure out what each other are doing. All of this adds to their learning and development in the game.

By Craig Bryant

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