



Plastic balls: Your questions answered

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We have received a number of requests for clarification on the use of plastic balls in competition from next season – here is a Q&A guide.

Q1: Why the change?

The International Table Tennis Federation (ITTF) announced a move to plastic balls in 2013. They have been used in all ITTF-sanctioned and World Title events since July 1, 2014. The European Table Tennis Union (ETTU) confirmed the mandatory use of the plastic ball in all ETTU competition from September 1, 2014.

Q2: What is Table Tennis England's position?

Table Tennis England conforms with the ITTF decision as a matter of principle. However, we recognised that the 2014-15 season would inevitably be one of transition as stocks of celluloid balls were used up and supplies of plastic balls improved. It was therefore decided to introduce plastic balls at National Championship and Grand Prix events, while leaving local leagues and tournaments free to choose between celluloid and plastic for the 2014-15 season.

Q3: What will happen next season (2015/16)?

Plastic balls will be used at all Table Tennis England events from the start of the 2015/16 season in order to ensure a level playing field for all competitors, on both national and international stages.

We strongly advise that all local leagues use the plastic balls from next season for the following reasons:

- Above all, introducing plastic balls across the board will benefit all players as it ensures consistency throughout all levels of the sport. Not introducing plastic balls in one competition would see players disadvantaged when they play in other competitions.
- It is anticipated that supplies of celluloid balls will dwindle rapidly as plastic balls become the norm. Therefore, making the switch at the earliest opportunity and across the board is advisable for the greater good of the sport as a whole.

Q4: What if my league doesn't want to change?

We strongly advised leagues to introduce plastic balls from 2015/16 as not doing so will only serve to disrupt players. However, we recognise that whilst celluloid balls remain on the ITTF approved list, individual leagues may choose not to introduce plastic balls, despite our strong recommendation that a uniform approach and a common start date would be the most beneficial option for all players.

Q5: What if my club has a big supply of celluloid balls?

The 12 months' notice given to clubs at the start of this season was intended to avoid this situation. However, celluloid balls can continue to be used in practice and club closed tournaments.

Q6: What is the availability?

We have contacted several UK distributors, who believe there may be temporary supply shortages during summer 2015 due to anticipated heavy demand. We therefore encourage all clubs, leagues, and tournament organisers to ensure orders are placed in plenty of time for next season. The ITTF has kept celluloid balls on its list of Approved Balls valid until December 31, 2015. It is not intending to withdraw celluloid balls from the list as long as manufacturers continue to produce them. However, the ITTF anticipates celluloid balls will disappear from the market as production, storage and distribution become unprofitable.

UPDATE: Following ITTF Equipment Committee meetings during the 2015 World Championships in April-May 2015, the ITTF advises that manufacturers expect there to be enough production to meet supply by September, with improved quality.

Q7: Are they robust or easily breakable?

Evidence suggests that while early batches fell below the necessary standards for durability, later batches have improved. For more information, see the ITTF's Q&A by [clicking here](#)

Q8: When can we get Orange balls?

The ITTF anticipates that orange balls will be introduced by manufacturers in the near future as the production process for the white balls becomes normalised.

UPDATE: Following ITTF Equipment Committee meetings during the 2015 World Championships in April-May 2015, the ITTF advises that it has received one application for approval of orange balls, so it is probable that orange balls will be produced in the foreseeable future.

UPDATE 2: Orange training balls are now available from some suppliers, including [tabletennis.deals](#)

UPDATE 3: One manufacturer has submitted balls for lab testing. They are now refining the balls. The ITTF advises that orange balls are on the way and will be made of the "second generation" improved material now being used for white balls.

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Notes:

- The ITTF decided that the new plastic ball would be introduced in ITTF competitions from July 1, 2014, meaning National Associations were obliged to do likewise. Plastic balls have been used in ETTU competitions since September 1, 2014. They have also been used in Table Tennis England Grand Prix, National Championships and Masters events since September.
- Competitive Table Tennis is table tennis in which a player competes in a tournament, other than a closed tournament of his/her own club, or represents a club, a League, a County Association or Table Tennis England. The full regulations relating to Competitive Table Tennis can be viewed here: <https://tabletennisengland.co.uk/our-sport/our-sport-information/rules-regulations-2/>

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