

# **How to prepare for table tennis matches and how to play at your best!**

**There is not much money in table tennis but your attitude at the table should always be professional.**

The attitude towards table tennis as a sport is not the best in Australia but do not let this prevent you from being serious; because if you are not serious about your sport how can you expect anybody else to be?

In our country it would be hard to earn enough money to support a family but table tennis is a huge sport in many countries and the best players are professional; some with an income of more than 2 million dollars a year!

So be proud of your sport. Set goals, do season planning. Take your practising seriously, be prepared for tournaments and always show a positive attitude during your matches!

## **Practise a lot**

It is said that to master a skill, also table tennis, takes around ten thousand hours, so if you want to become a top player you will have to practise a lot. But since it is hard to make a living from table tennis the young players will also have to have a back-up plan; study hard to make sure they can get a job they can be as happy with as their sport.

Before the start of the season it is important that you set your goals - and that they are measurable and achievable: Do you really want to put in the effort to become a champion? Can you manage to both practise and study enough?

## **10.000 hours**

Well, let us say that you are a junior and practise table tennis for one to two hours three days a week. This is far from enough to make you a world champion; it will take you too many years to reach 10.000 hours. To move to Korea, Japan or China where the juniors often practise eight hours every day might be tempting if you are really keen but not so easy to do if you were not born there!

It may be that you will have to set goals that are more realistic; become a club champion, get selected to state teams. Even then you will normally have to practise a bit more than a few days a week. Of course you can aim even higher if you are really, really keen: To get selected to national teams and be playing for Australia in international events like Commonwealth Games, World Championships and the Olympics! But then you really should be practising about every day, play competitive almost every weekend and go overseas for more training and tough competition.

So forget about computer games and TV-programs - get down to the table tennis hall instead! Too expensive with a private coach? Find a practicing partner, ask your club to organize squad training! Do service practising on your own! Not possible to practise every day? Squeeze in a table at home or see if there is a table at your school, visit another club for practising and Fixtures. Take part in holiday training camps and might be go overseas in your holidays. And remember that it is possible to practise your game away from the table - do mental table tennis practising in bed or on your way to school!

## **Physical training**

Remember that table tennis is a sport that requires a high level of fitness. In most countries every table tennis session is followed by physical training but it is no big problem for you to improve your fitness on your own. Many strength training circuit exercises for table tennis do not require any equipment and you can go running and do skipping rope jumping!

## **Season planning**

So let us say that you have set achievable goals and found a way to combine your education with enough hours at the table tennis table. Well, then it is wise to do season planning; on your own or in co-operation with your coach (if you have one). First you will have to put down on paper when you shall reach your goal for the season; if it is to be achieved at a major tournament or just on club level. Is it at the middle or the end of the season? With a set date then you will have to plan your practicing leading up to the goal when your form shall peak.

It will be normal to do plenty of regular and simple exercises with a lot of physical training at the start of the season and more and more match-like with less physical exercises when you get closer to the major goal.

## **Major weapons**



In the first period it is common to work hard to improve the major weapons and also try to iron out the weaker sides. Usually with a lot of footwork exercises. In the middle period it is common to do plenty work on serves and return of serves follow by your own winning strokes, with many irregular exercises. When you get close to your major goal for the season then it is normal to work even harder on irregular exercises, and as much game-play as possible.

### All levels

It is always important that you try to practise and play matches against players of all levels and playing styles. Be serious and professional at the table at all times; set your own goal for each practising session and each match! It is also important to play in as many tournaments as possible; remember that you need many, many hours at the table!

### Perform at your best

So you are getting prepared for your major goal but how shall you be sure you will perform at your best? Well, you will, as mentioned, need to have a professional attitude to table tennis. Respect your sport and always do your best in practising and matches (don't forget to respect your opponents).

Believe in yourself but do not be over-confident. Some players and coaches think that that you need to be really "pumped up" at the table, but too much adrenalin might in fact be a hindrance to your performance. It is ok to put on a game-face and show happiness at your good points; to be a kind of actor and play the part of a confident athlete - but do not over-do it! To stay calm, relaxed and focused with a proper game plan might be much better than screaming and showing your fist!

### What shall you do?

So how shall you play at your best? What shall yo do before your important matches and what shall you do at the table. Here is my to-do list:

- The night before: Go to bed early to get plenty of sleep.
- Wake up at least 2 hours before the match/matches.
- Have a healthy breakfast (but not too heavy).
- Bring some food plus banana and energy bars.
- Use a clean and proper table tennis shorts and shirt. Put on your track suit.
- Check that you bring your racket, spare racket, table tennis shoes, towel and water bottle.
- Be at the venue at least 1 hour before the match/matches.
- Warm up (besides the tables) as soon as possible with jogging, sidestepping and dynamic stretching.
- Warm up at a table as early as possible, preferably with your practising partner or coach; warm up all your strokes (included serves and serve returns) - play a practising match if possible.
- Put on tracksuit after the warm up.
- Take a look at your opponents; check their weaknesses and strong points.
- Prepare mentally for the match - make game plan in your head (if possible get assistance from you coach).
- Short warm up (like shadow table tennis) just prior to the match.
- Check if the floor is slippery and prepare a wet paper towel to step on if so.
- Remember your towel and water bottle when you go to the table for your match.
- Go to the table in a positive mental attitude (and keep it throughout the match!).
- Shake hands with the opponent before the toss of serve/side; tell him/her your name if you do not know him/her.
- Take a look at your opponent's racket to see if there are pimples or other unusual rubbers/blade.
- be ready; bend knees and keep your body weight forwards.
- Be loose and relaxed but at the same time alert, focused and concentrated.
- Small jumps before the start of each point to make sure you are moving at all times.
- Positive "yes!" or simular self encouragement after good points you win.
- Forget "bad" lost points; the next point is more important than the ones played!
- Take slow, deep breaths if you need to calm nerves, shake racket-hand.
- Remember to towel off after each six points.
- Got to your coach to get advice between the sets; he/she is there to help you!
- Have a sip of water or sports drink between the sets but not too much.
- Show a proper attitude when the match finished, thank your opponent and the umpire, plus your own and the opponent's coach.
- Put on you tracksuit to keep warm for next matches (even if it is warm in the hall).
- Have some food or banana/energy bar between the matches.
- If your are playing team-matches remember to stay at the table to cheer on your team-mates, and remember a short warm-up before your own match.

Good luck!

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