



PLAYING CHOPPERS

By Larry Hodges, USATT Certified National Coach

There is nothing more infuriating than losing to a patient chopper who lets you beat yourself with your own errors. Losing to a chopper is like four-putting in golf; you may have made some good drives to get to the green, but all you remember are the misses at the end. Rather than four-putting forever, let's learn how to beat the chopper.

A chopper is weakest in the middle, but you have more table (and so more margin for error) by going diagonally to a corner. Going for a winner down the line often catches the chopper by surprise. A chopper who is not particularly fast is vulnerable at the corners; a chopper with inverted on both sides is more vulnerable in the middle. Keep these "basics" in mind when playing any of the following styles. There are three general ways of playing a chopper. Informally they are called European style, Asian style, and Chiseling.

European Style

The goal here is to bring the chopper in close to the table, and then attack hard, especially at the chopper's middle. The chopper is too close to the table to make the return, and so misses. When using this technique, you should mostly serve short to bring the chopper in, and try to follow with a strong attack. Sometimes, however, fake the attack, and push short instead - the chopper, in his haste to back up for the expected attack, will have trouble with this ball, and will often have to make a last-second lunge to return it. Even if he makes the return (often a weak one), he will be left jammed over the table and vulnerable to the next ball, which you can promptly loop for a winner. If the chopper stays closer to the table to guard against this drop shot, then you attack. The chopper has absolutely no way of answering this ... in theory.

During a rally, if the chopper makes a good return from away from the table, push short again, and start over. The object in a rally is to catch the chopper too far away from the table or moving backward so that you can drop the ball short, force him to rush in, and attack when he is jammed up against the table. Alternatively, you can push a few balls, keeping the chopper close to the table, and then attack when you think he's not expecting it.

Asian Style

The goal here is to control the spin and pace of the rally. This method is especially good against a long-pipped chopper, but takes regular practice against a chopper to learn to do effectively. Pips-out players are especially good at this style, but many good inverted players also play this way. This style doesn't work well against an all-inverted chopper who chops very heavy. Let's assume you are playing a long-pipped chopper.

Here the aim is to get the chopper off the table, and then attack relatively softly over and over, into the long pips side, but not with full spin. The chopper can only return whatever spin you give him because of the long pips, and so their returns are not particularly heavy, making your continuous soft attack easy. After topspinning a few balls, you find one you like and loop or smash a winner.

Depending on what you are more comfortable with, you can topspin many balls in a row before going for a winner, or only a few - be unpredictable. Some players just topspin over and over, not going for a winner unless they get a very easy one. You should try to vary your spin, sometimes looping very dead, sometimes spinny. However, beware of varying spin returns when you vary your own spin. For example, when you give heavy topspin, expect heavy chop, and so either lift the ball more on next shot, or push and start over. Don't fall into the trap of spinning heavily over and over - a chopper loves it, and all you'll get are heavy chop returns, which can be very difficult to loop consistently.

You can mix in pushing, but too much pushing will throw your own timing off. By topspinning over and over to the long pips side (but not with full spin), you can build up a rhythm that a chopper will have difficulty breaking.

Try to get down to almost eye level with the ball by bending your knees. This will help your consistency by making the lifting easier and will get your eyes closer to the ball so you see it better.

Chiseling

I am not fond of this style. This basically means pushing with the chopper until the chopper either misses, pops up an easy one, or gets impatient and attacks too much. At the higher levels, chiseling is rare, but at the lower and medium levels, it is more common. Since I'm a strong believer that the game has to be FUN (it is a game!), I don't like this way of winning. Unless you're a chopper yourself (in which case SOMEONE's got to push, and it might as well be you), I'd rather see a player lose by attacking in some way. You may lose now, but you'll learn how to play a chopper better in future matches.



TIPS FOR BEATING A CHOPPER

1. Place your attacks at the center of the table. Attack at his elbow / pocket / body. Stay away from both his wings.
2. Move him close / far to table. Use drop shots when he is very far from table.
3. Do not put much spin on your shots if you can't handle they when come with reversed spin. If you send heavy topspin you'll receive heavy backspin.
4. Loop with a high arc with an upward motion. Your primary goal should be keep the ball in play, while looking for a chance to score.
5. If he's serving with long pips, his serves can't be spiny. Learn to kill them.
6. He probably can't attack against topspin well, but can attack backspin.
7. No spin can be hard to handle for some long pips. See if you can make him miss.
8. Try to cover the entire table with you forehand if you are fast enough. Get into ready position as soon as you know where the ball is going.