

## CHASING THE ELBOW

'Elbow' is referred as the point where a shakehand player changes his strokes from forehand to backhand. All players have some problems to handle a ball going fastly to this point. The better the player, of course, it would be much easier for him to return this kind of balls, and he is more likely to step around and hit it with a powerful stroke, but even at the higher levels, the quality of his returns will be still lower in comparison with a return done with a 'clean' forehand or backhand as he had to move get in position before playing his stroke. My advice is to use this to your profit.

### 1. **WHEN to do it:**

When your opponent is close to table. When he is moving closer to the table. When he is stepping around wrongly (overanticipating). When you see a chance of doing it. Do it as a serve return if they serve short or from a close to table position and he will almost NEVER attack that 3rd ball.

### 2. **WHY to do it:**

To force a weak return. Most of the time the ball will come back, but it will be a weak return, since your opponent had no time to step around and loop, or done with a short or 'poor' arm swing. You can take advantage of weak returns like this. Of course, if you can score from a kill at his elbow, it's even better.

### 3. **WHICH strokes are best to be placed at elbow:**

Punch blocks against fast loops are the best, if your opponent is close to table. Loops or flips are fine. Fast pushes are very good too if you are pushing each other. Anything that gives your opponent little time to react. Play off the bounce on his short balls, and he will look FREEZED. If you are going for a hard shot, you have to know what are the chances if has to come back. It it's 0%, place it far from your opponent, but if it's (let's say) 30%, and you place it at your opponent's elbow, his return will be weak, and you'll be able to hit it hard. No spin fast balls at elbow are even more effective, same as sidespin, or any heavy spin. Learn to serve at his elbow. Do so with sidespin or corkscrew so your opponent is suddenly surprised by a second bounce that makes the ball jump to his body.

### 4. **WHERE is the elbow located:**

If your opponent is on a ready position that is backhand oriented (showing to you his backhand rubber), his elbow is somewhere between his wrist and his elbow (this point is moving to the player's forehand if he's more used to play backhand all the time). It is not at the same spot for all players, so you'll have to find it during play. If he is on a ready position that is forehand oriented, his elbow is at the point where he can only hit the ball with his backhand, as closer as possible to his forehand. Be careful: place the ball a bit more to his forehand, and he could step around and loop. The grip that your opponent has, determines if his style is forehand or backhand oriented, and that determines where the elbow is located. Also, the elbow is moving according to his feet.

### 5. **HOW to set up the rally to play a ball at his elbow:**

You could, if you know that your opponent is weak against elbow ball, chase his elbow in the following manner (that's an example, and that can be done in a lot of ways): Play a long ball, then do one quick drop shot, then one long ball at his elbow. The drop shot is the key here. I don't recommend playing like this as a rule of thumb, but that can work against certain players. I recommend to use elbow balls when you see a chance of it.

### 6. **WHO will hurt elbow balls the most:**

Players with bad footwork. Players that play very close to table (This ones can have its elbow at more extreme spots than usual). Long arm swing players. Players with weak backhand or forehand (his elbow is often a bit closer to his weak side). Players with poor ball control. Players that let the ball drop before they play his stroke. Players with certain shakehand grips that screw his wrist action.

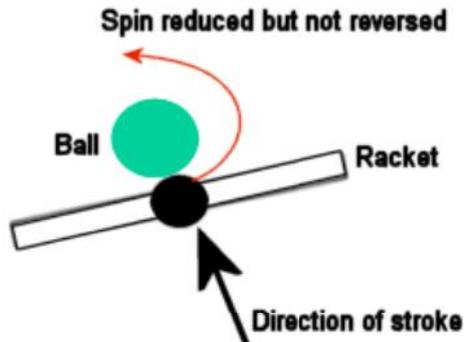
### 7. **WHAT nobody uses but is very effective:**

High balls at elbow: Extremely difficult to do, since a high ball gives time to your opponent to step around. If you can send a fast and high ball to his elbow (almost to his shoulder), he can be in troubles, same as penholders with high balls to his backhand.

## LIFT STROKES

### Introduction

This is a very technical stroke that is very deceptive. It is difficult to execute and also difficult for opponents to recognise and managed. It is only performed against relatively heavy underspin. The primary objective of a player performing this stroke is to "lift" the opponent's underspin back to him with little or no spin at the point of returning it. The whole idea is to play a fast trick on your opponent, making him to believe what is not true. Because table tennis is a fast game that relatively depends on speed and spin, it requires quick decision making and fast reflexes. You must act fast considering your opponent's stroke.



### Executing Lift strokes

In the process of performing lift stroke, a very experience player pretends as if he wants to loop an opponent's underspin but will only place his racket almost if not completely horizontal (see diagram above) and lift the underspin ball across the net. One important principle applicable is the fact that the stroke is by force and not by friction. If there is friction, it should result to partial underspin. The player's racket contacts the ball by tapping it in an upward direction. what this means is that the player must assume the position of looping an underspin (down - up motion). If the opponent is deceived by this motion, he blocks the partial underspin or a close to motionless no-spin and the resultant effect is that the ball hits the net. Remember that you can only block top-spin drive/loop strokes with speed and not underspin or "no-spin no-speed" stroke.

### Explanation of "no-spin & no-speed" stroke

Take a look at the diagram above. When an opponent plays an underspin to you by chopping (preferably deep chop), you lift the ball by tapping upward; what you are planning to do is to neutralise the spin, then the ball moves to your opponent's court with a "slight" underspin. This situation retards the speed to a great extent. The table surface drags the ball down and any attempt to block the ball will result to hitting the net.

### How to return lift strokes

What you need to do is to:

- Watch the player and observe if the stroke is by force or by friction. If it is by force do not block.
- Watch the ball and observe the no-spin situation. Quickly counter. If you are close to the table smash.
- Watch the ball and observe the slight under-spin situation. Quickly push. If you are close to the table counter or smash.

The only remedy to successfully return 'Lift' stroke is to perform any other strokes except blocking.

## FLIPPING? HOW TO ATTACK SHORT BALLS

By Larry Hodges

The flip is an aggressive return of a shortball—a ball that would land on your side of the table twice if given the chance. It's most often used against short serves and short pushes. On the backhand side, the flip is basically the same as a backhand drive, but on the forehand it's different.

A flip can be done either crosscourt, down the line, or to the middle. Flip to your opponent's weaker side most of the time (usually down the line to the backhand), but usually go crosscourt whenever you go for a very aggressive flip (so you'll have more margin for error.) An aggressive flip to a player's middle (elbow) is also very effective, because your opponent may have trouble deciding whether to return with a forehand or a backhand.

A flip is done against a ball that has landed short. If it lands short on the forehand side, it can be awkward to reach. For this shot, you'll also need to learn stepping-in footwork.

### WHY IS THE FLIP IMPORTANT?

You could use a normal forehand drive against a short ball to the forehand, but it would be awkward because the table is in the way. A Flip is less awkward and more deceptive. But don't overuse the flip; just the threat of it makes your other returns more effective. Too many flips and your opponent gets used to them.

### EXECUTING THE FLIP

When your opponent serves or pushes short, you'll have to step in to flip. If you reach over the table you'll be off balance and have trouble controlling the shot, especially if you're short. Even tall players have to step in, or they too will not hit their best shot. Most players have little trouble reaching a ball short to their backhand but find it very awkward to deal with the short one the forehand unless they step in.

If you're a step or so away from the table, step forward first with your left leg, getting it close to the endline. If you're already close, don't move the left leg. The longer your legs are, the easier stepping in will be.

Step in with your right leg under the table and toward the ball. Get the leg as far under the table as you can comfortably. Most of your weight should now be on the right foot. Reach over the table with the racket, with your body facing where the contact will be. Against backspin, cock your wrist down and open the racket; otherwise, cock your wrist straight back and keep the racket perpendicular to the floor. Bring the racket to a position just behind the contact point.

Bring the racket forward with your elbow. Then snap your wrist forward (and slightly up against backspin.) Your wrist should rotate at contact, which closes the racket some. Contact should be an upward grazing motion against backspin for control, or straight through and forward against topspin or for extra speed. The stroke against backspin and topspin is essentially the same, but you should open your racket more and stroke slightly up against backspin.

Contact should be on the back bottom of the ball against backspin, on the back or top back of the ball against other spins. Make sure to contact the ball directly opposite where you want it to go. When flipping, make sure to flip to wide angles—either crosscourt at a wide angle or straight down the line (unless you go after your opponent's middle.) Step back quickly, and return to ready position.

If the ball you're flipping is high, "flip kill" it. This is just a flip at full power. Use both wrist and elbow snap for power, and go crosscourt so you'll have more room.

## FAST PUSH TECHNIQUES

By: Richard McAfee, USATT Certified National Coach

The push is not often thought of as an aggressive tool, but rather as a basic keep-the-ball-in-play stroke. The reason for this is simple. Adding speed to a pushed ball is difficult as underspin causes a ball to rise up during flight. Push too fast and the ball will sail off the end of the table. Because of this, most players emphasize producing heavy backspin (as opposed to fast speed) with their pushes if they want to force errors or weak attacks from their opponents.

Rather than only using heavy spin on your pushes to force weak returns, mixing in a fast push can be a great surprise tactic. Often a surprise fast push will force a weak shot from your opponent and enable you to step-around and attack with a strong forehand loop or kill. Here is how to execute a fast push stroke.

First and foremost, contact the ball at the top of the bounce. Your racket should make friction contact with the ball (spin), contacting the middle of the ball and pushing forward and down. This is very different from producing a spin push where the ball is contacted on the way down and more towards the bottom of the ball.

To practice this shot, set your Newgy Robot to produce a push return and have it oscillate over the entire table (Oscillator Lever positions 3 & 4). Now practice mixing spin pushes with a sudden fast push until you can produce both shots with ease. Good luck and good pushing.

Important Notes: Adding sidespin to this stroke can make it even more effective. Also, when you use the fast push in a game situation, look to attack the next return.

**(Editor's Note:** If you have trouble learning this stroke, you may want to start off with having the robot deliver the ball 12 to 18 inches high above your side of the table. This will allow for a greater margin of error. When you gain consistency with your stroke against a high ball, lower the ball delivery angle a little at a time until you can fast push even a ball that is barely over the net.)