

## Some tips for returning serves

- When you are in doubt about the amount of spin on the ball, spin it yourself a little more, not less. The natural reaction when you are unsure of the spin is to gently touch the ball, attempting to caress it back. Unfortunately this does not work well with modern rubbers and their intense reaction to spin. So when in doubt, use a heavy spin – it will increase your chances of overpowering whatever spin your opponent has placed on the ball. Don't hit it faster, just spin it more.
- When you are having trouble attacking the serve, and being forced to push when receiving, a double bounce push is the best return, provided you can keep it low. It is also the most difficult return to make. I would recommend to keep practicing this stroke but only start using it in games when you can do it successfully at least 70% of the time. Until then stick to using a fast deep or fast angled push, which is a little less effective but much easier for you to do successfully.
- When your opponent is attacking your returns too easily. When you are learning to return serve, the middle of the table is the safest place to aim at to allow for errors. As your control improves, you must begin to keep away from the middle of the table when returning serve. You want to either make your opponent move sideways to reach the ball, or aim at his playing elbow so that he has to decide whether to hit it with his forehand or backhand, and then has to move to play the stroke as well.
- If you are having trouble reading the spin, make sure you are watching closely at the time of contact. Also try to watch your opponent serve against other players, and try to guess what spin he is putting on the ball. With a little close observation you'll soon start to recognize his different serves.
- When you are having trouble with a particular serve, master the serve yourself – not only will this give you another serve to add to your own arsenal, but it will help you understand and return that type of serve more easily. Watch better players return that serve - see what they do, think about why they are playing that stroke, note how effective it is, and decide whether that type of return would suit your style of play. If so, then try it out!
- If you are making too many mistakes when attacking the serve, you should try to be as aggressive as you can be while maintaining some margin for error. If you are attacking but hitting too many serves into the net or off the end of the table, reduce your power a little, and increase your spin. This will give you more height over the net, and a ball that drops a little shorter on the table with good spin. When your opponent blocks the ball back, you can hit his return with more power.
- If you find that you are still making too many mistakes when attacking the serve, you can try using a push or chop instead. Get the ball back into play a few times, and make your opponent work for the point. Don't just keep hitting and missing if you can't get the ball on - your opponent may just have too good a serve for you to attack, and you can't afford to keep giving him freebies. Then make sure you do some more practice against that type of serve in training later on.

Until the next time, play well.

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