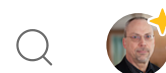


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How to play Table Tennis with low-friction long pimples

Basic technique, tactics, and psychology for the Table Tennis advanced material player

14 min read · Mar 14, 2017



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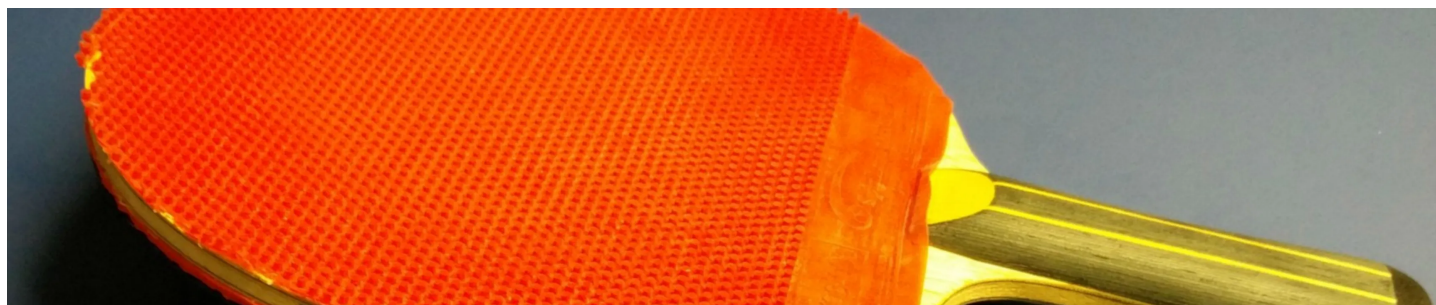
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Introduction

A low-friction long-pimples rubber on one side of the racket (paddle, bat, racquet) can be a good strategic choice. This is when you want to build your style of play by combining the two extremes — the maximum spin capacity of the inverted (backside) rubber and the minimum spin sensitivity of the low-friction long pimples rubber.

You should have a rubber that produces a lot of spin on one side of the racket. Without an inverted “spinny” rubber, it can be difficult to beat opponents who play tactically with no spin and varied speed.

We will start with some basic principles and then move on to playing with low-friction long pimples.

Spin sensitivity

We have a sliding scale of spin sensitivity (and spin capacity) from the inverted rubber (backside) to the short pimples (soft) to the long pimples rubbers. Except for some anti-spin rubbers, long pimples rubbers with low friction have the lowest spin sensitivity. However, unlike the anti-spin rubbers, the pimples of the long pimples rubbers have interesting and useful effects when they are bent.

This difference in spin sensitivity also means that the racket angle needs to be different. This is the biggest single difference between rubbers — if you take away one thing from this text, it is that you need to open up your racket when playing with pimples rubbers.

In principle, you can use the same strokes with pips-out rubbers as pips-in (inverted; backside) rubbers, but the initial angle of the racket must be different (the angle when you start the stroke). See Figure 1 below for a topspin stroke.

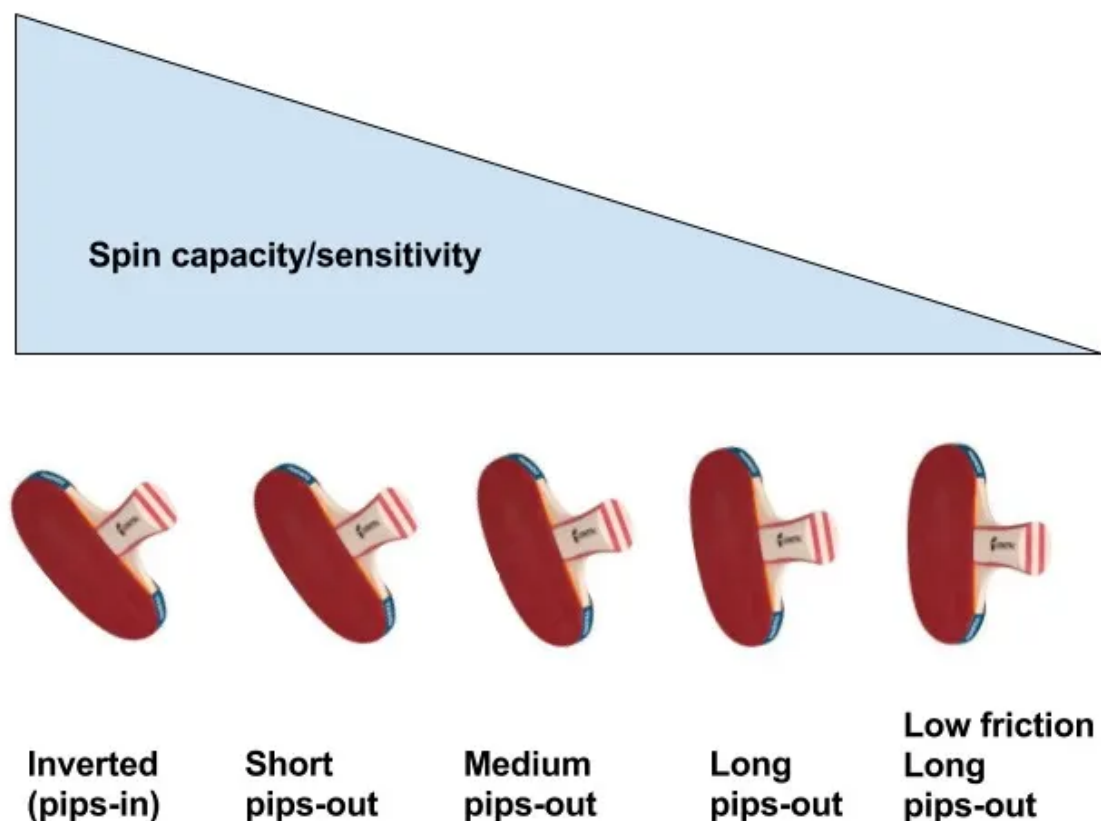


Figure 1. Fundamental racket angle at the start of the topspin stroke, for various kinds of rubber sheets

The same is true for backspin strokes, as you can see below in Figure 2.

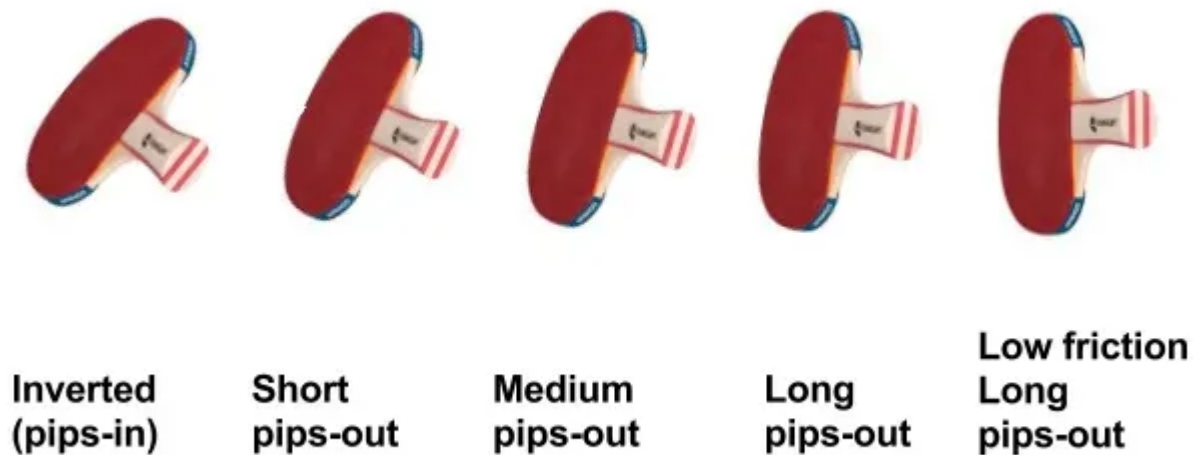


Figure 2. Fundamental racket angle at the start of the backspin stroke, for various rubbers

As you can see, there is no significant difference between backspin and topspin on the low-friction long pimples. However, to play with this type of rubber, the preferred stroke technique is different.

Low-friction long pimple stroke technique

First, some more basic principles for low-friction long pimples in particular. Then we will describe how to make the strokes for different incoming spins with low-friction long pimples.

Basic principles

1. You have to make strokes that bend the pimples; otherwise, you won't get control. The direction in which you bend the pimples is not always important; what is important is that you bend them. This is the second most important thing to remember from this text.
2. Use a loose grip on the racket handle. As loose as possible with good control and without the risk of dropping the racket.
3. Take it easy; don't be aggressive with the low-friction, long-pimples rubbers.
4. End your stroke in the horizontal direction where you want to place the ball.
5. As described above, you need an open racket angle, almost vertical.
6. You can use the long pips to amplify and reverse spin, but not to completely kill spin. You also cannot override spin because you cannot generate much spin.

Spin is your best friend in a winning game. But with the low-friction, long-pimped rubber, you are manipulating the incoming spin rather than generating it.

7. When chopping, you can either use a normal chopping stroke or a short, light chopping stroke. Both work. Make consistent bh or fh strokes from the starting position, around, and back to the starting position.
8. You should never make power hits. These rubbers are not made for it, they are not good for it, and the pips can break easily. Make all fast hits (like a smash) with the inverted rubber and not with the long pips. Flips or flicks at the net that are not too hard are okay.
9. On slow balls over the table, you will need to push/swish/flick the ball slightly at ball contact to allow the pimples to work properly. This is to make sure you control the speed and placement. This is much more important with long pimples than with a normal inverted rubber.

How to handle no-spin

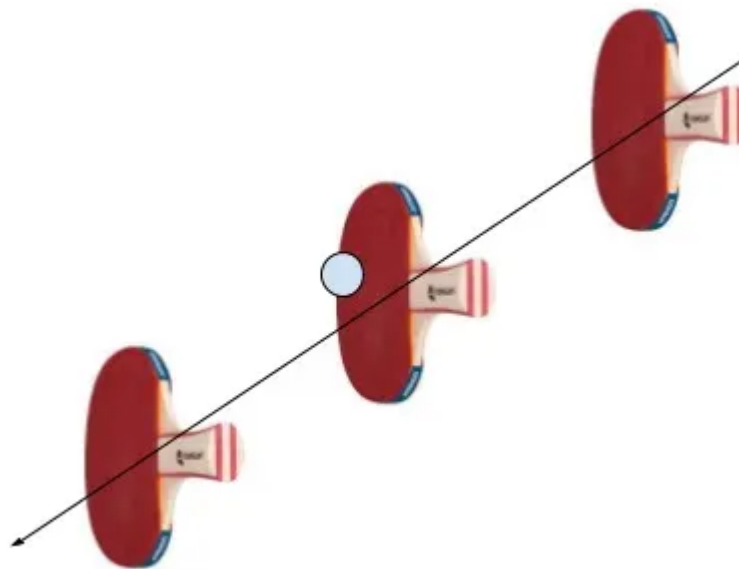


Figure 3. Long Pimples with low friction, to counter no-spin balls

There are at least three ways to handle no-spin balls.

1. Push forward and down as shown in Figure 3. Keep the racket open, neutral, and almost vertical. This stroke is effective and gives you good control. However, if you are used to an inverted rubber, this can be a bit awkward at first, as the

normal backside push has a more horizontal movement and a sharper racket angle, as shown in Figure 4 below.

2. If the ball has momentum (speed), try sweeping it to the side or up instead. You gain control, and your opponent may get confused and make the wrong decision.
3. You can also try a looping motion and give it some momentum. It won't be as fast as an inverted rubber. This can work well as a surprise, but with ox (no sponge), it is a difficult, risky shot with less control. However, there is a good chance the opponent will put the return in the net.

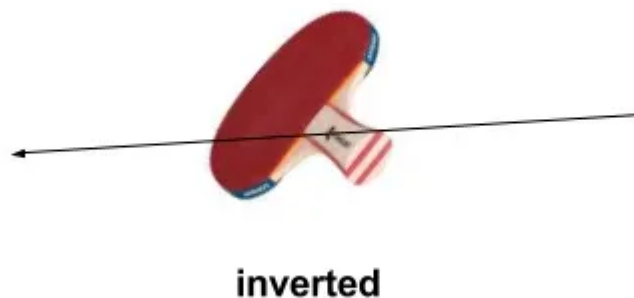


Figure 4. Push with backside rubber.

But do not just push back with a flat hit or a smash, because without spin, you have no control, and the ball will go long and straight. Not bending the pips means high-risk shots.

How to handle backspin

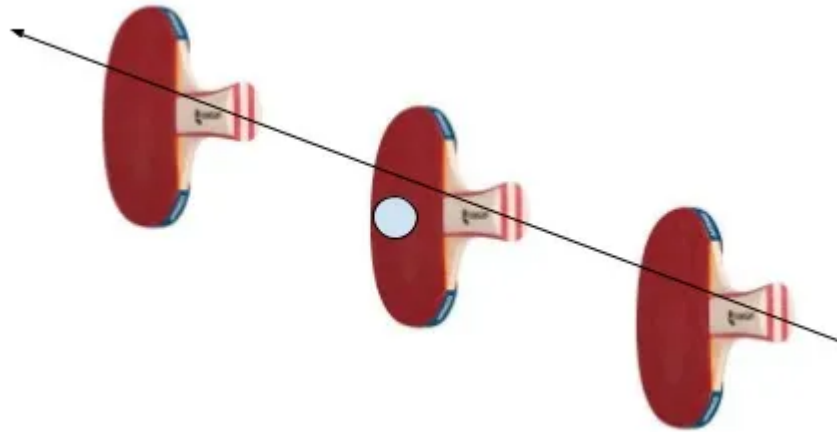


Figure 5. Long Pimples with low friction, to counter backspin balls

You have several options to handle backspin balls.

1. Push forward and up as in Figure 5. Maintain an open, neutral racket angle.
2. Make a looping stroke and give it some momentum, bending the pimples at least a little. This can sometimes work well as a surprise effect. Your opponent reacts instinctively to your movement and returns as if it were a topspin, and the ball goes into the net.
3. When using the long pips on your backhand, try a wrist movement. Unlike with short pips, the wrist should be avoided with long pips, but it could still work.
4. Close to the net, push up with a digging motion.
5. When attacking with the pips, attack the backspin balls. To attack, hit hard up and forward! Especially if you are using an ox or a thin sponge, i.e., your rubber is dampening, you have to start the stroke upwards; otherwise, the ball will go into the net.
6. If the ball is high enough, just hit it flat so that it goes just over the net and then drops down on the other side due to the backspin.

If you get a lot of backspin, i.e., if your opponent makes a chop or a dig (a sharp, long push), remember to do what is described in this section. But do not try to chop!

How to handle topspin

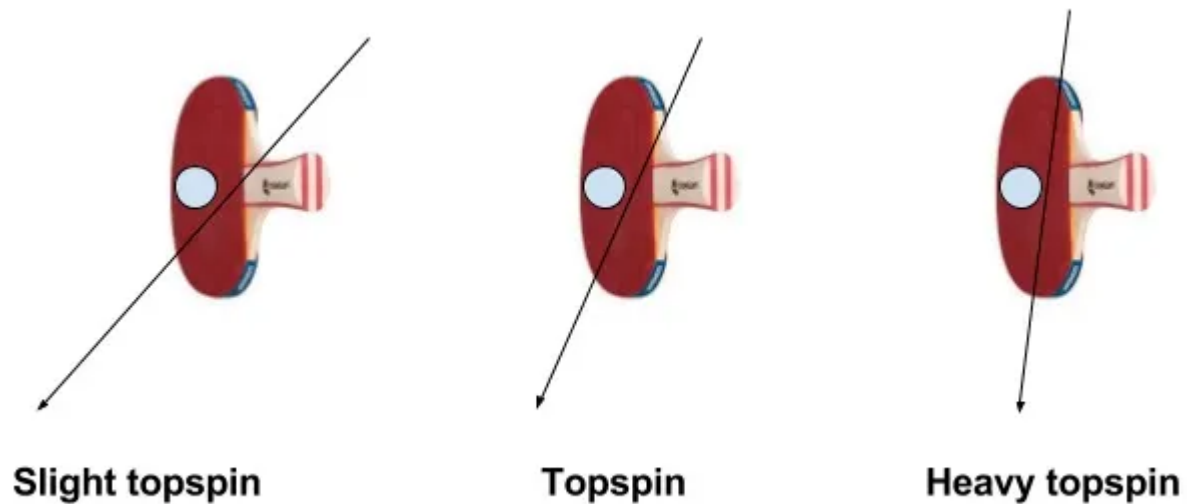


Figure 6. Long Pimples with low friction, to counter various topspin balls

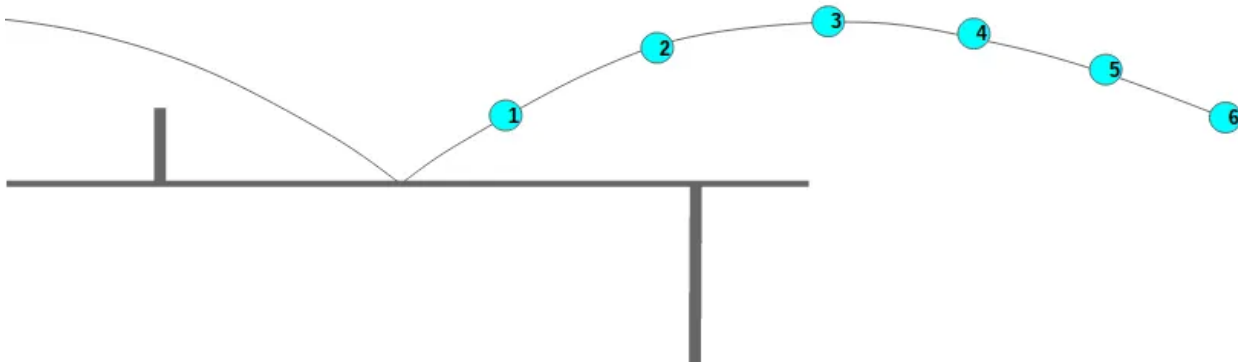


Figure 7. Trajectory, ball contact points

You have many ways to handle topspin, but you have to practice.

1. Pull down as shown in Figure 6 above. The stronger the incoming loop, the more down and less forward (3–4 on the trajectory in Figure 7).
2. Pull up and forward a bit for loose, medium-high topspin lobs or low balls over the table (2–3 on the trajectory in Figure 7). You need to close the racket a bit for this stroke (as for the medium pips-out, in Figure 1).
3. Block fast loops by swishing down. Swishing or flicking down a bit at the ball's impact, resulting in a straight fastball with a light backspin. Over the table or behind the table (2–3). An upward motion also works.
4. Chop to reinforce or amplify the incoming topspin so the opponent receives a strong backspin. Behind the table, at waist level (6).

5. Block over the table, just after the bounce (0–1), with the racket a few centimeters (max. one inch) from the table surface. The ball will stop suddenly and just go over the net, like a drop shot. This type of dead-ball block is better with ox. It can be very effective.
6. Block gently (with a loose grip and good ball sense and feeling) on a not-too-hard ball (1–3). Difficult.

Things to think about

By using the above options in a varied manner, you will not only reverse or change the spin but also the rhythm as you hit the ball at different points along the trajectory.

- Take the balls low. If the incoming ball is high, take the ball at 1 or 6. Balls you hit high are more likely to be returned high by you, for your opponent to attack.
- Don't try to kill the spin. Instead, use the spin to gain control and create problems for your opponent.
- Also, don't block too hard; it will go long and straight.
- And don't attempt a looping stroke against topspin. It may be effective, but it is a risky shot, especially with the ox rubber.
- Create the spin with your backside (the spinny rubber). Then you get a spinny ball back to work with, with your pimples. Don't play a rally with no spin! Alternate the sides.

Problem-solving: Long, fast serve to your pimple side

Getting a fast, long serve, usually without spin, to the pimpled side (usually your backhand) is a weak point. There is no standard solution; you have to find the one that works best for you. Here are five suggestions:

1. Swipe sideways, bending the pimples.
2. Swipe upward, bending the pimples.
3. Block dead ball (as topspin № 5 above).
4. Move back and chop it.

5. Position yourself ready with the backside (the inverted rubber) facing up. Then you won't get the long fast serve (!), and you avoid the problem.

Problem-solving: Fast/hard no-spin shot to your pimple side

This is very similar to the long fast-serve problem above. This can be extremely difficult if you can't use your inverted rubber.

With the pips, you need to swish at ball contact (in any direction) to get some control. Try upward. The other options are to use a super-loose grip and muffle-block the ball, or dead-block the ball immediately after the table bounce (if you are close to the table or already bending over it).

Problem-solving: You get a high no-spin ball to your pimples' side

It is difficult to smash with low-friction long pimples. So don't.

1. Try to go around and use the backside rubber
2. If you take the ball low with the pimples rubber, swipe upwards (hit it upward)
3. If you take the ball high with the pimples rubber, swipe or strike it to the side. Start the stroke from a high position.

Problem-solving: Your opponent plays a low-speed, no-spin game

This is tricky, especially if you have ox. If you don't have time to go around and use your backside (inverted rubber), try flicking sideways or up. Do not hit hard with the pips — it will probably go straight out because of “no spin -> no control”.

Problem-solving: You are forced to hit a slower, relatively high, no-spin ball to your opponent

Good players can easily identify a high no-spin ball and hit it with a winner. You should always ensure that your high or rising balls have a lot of backspin or complex spin so that your opponent doesn't dare to smash them.

Balancing control and deception by choosing a sponge

One question is whether to use a sponge with your low-friction, long-pimples rubber. I've tried to make some diagrams below to illustrate the effects with a sponge of various thicknesses, but I want to put in a disclaimer that I may be wrong at some points—I haven't tested all combinations. Also, different products have different properties.

My conclusion is that if you're looking for maximum disruption and deception, and rarely use the long pips for an attack, then you shouldn't have a sponge (ox). Then

you can both chop and block with the spin reversal.

If you want to attack backspin balls with less risk, add a 0.5–1.0 sponge. But you'll lose some of the disruptive and deceptive effect.

Think of it like this: the ox is like a go-cart (no suspension and direct steering), while with the sponge it is more like a Citroën. Which do you prefer to drive?

I should also mention that your inverted rubber will be slower with ox (no sponge) on your pips-out rubber. So you might want to compensate with a thicker backside sponge.

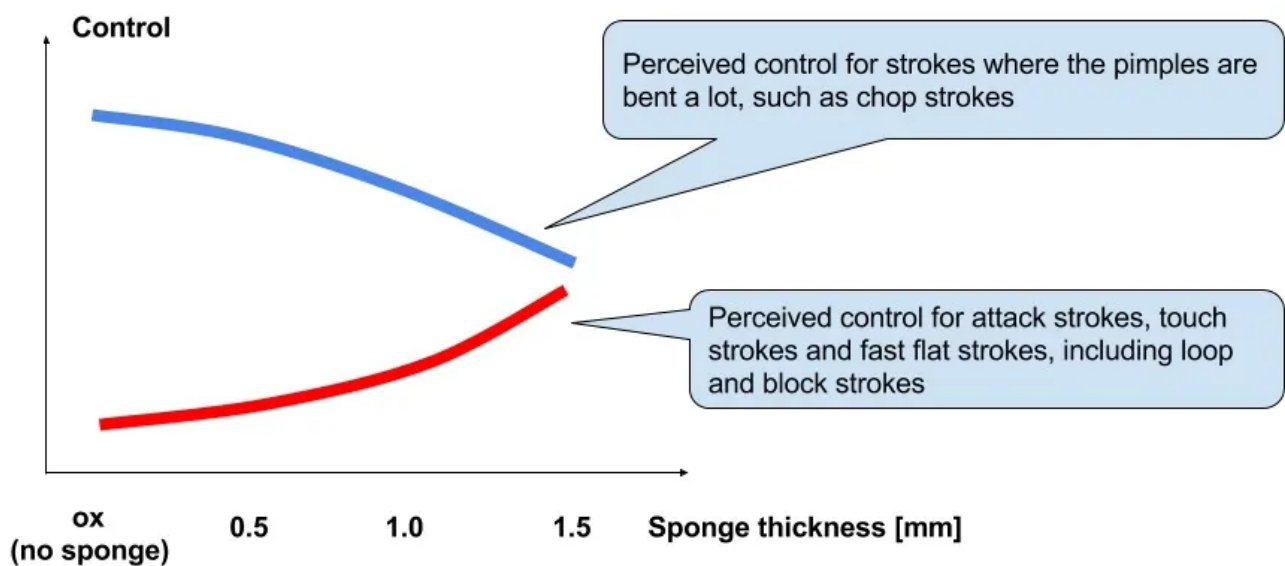


Figure 8. Long Pimples with low friction, perceived control for various sponge thickness

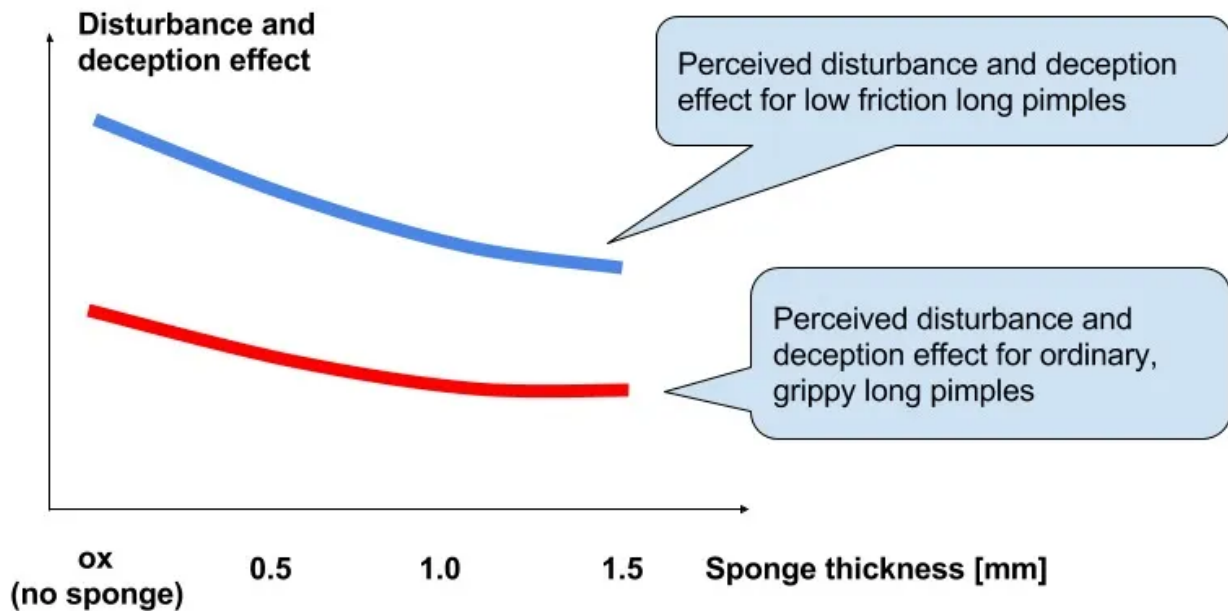


Figure 9. Long Pimples, perceived disturbance, and deception effect, for various sponge thicknesses (schematic)

Strategy and Tactics

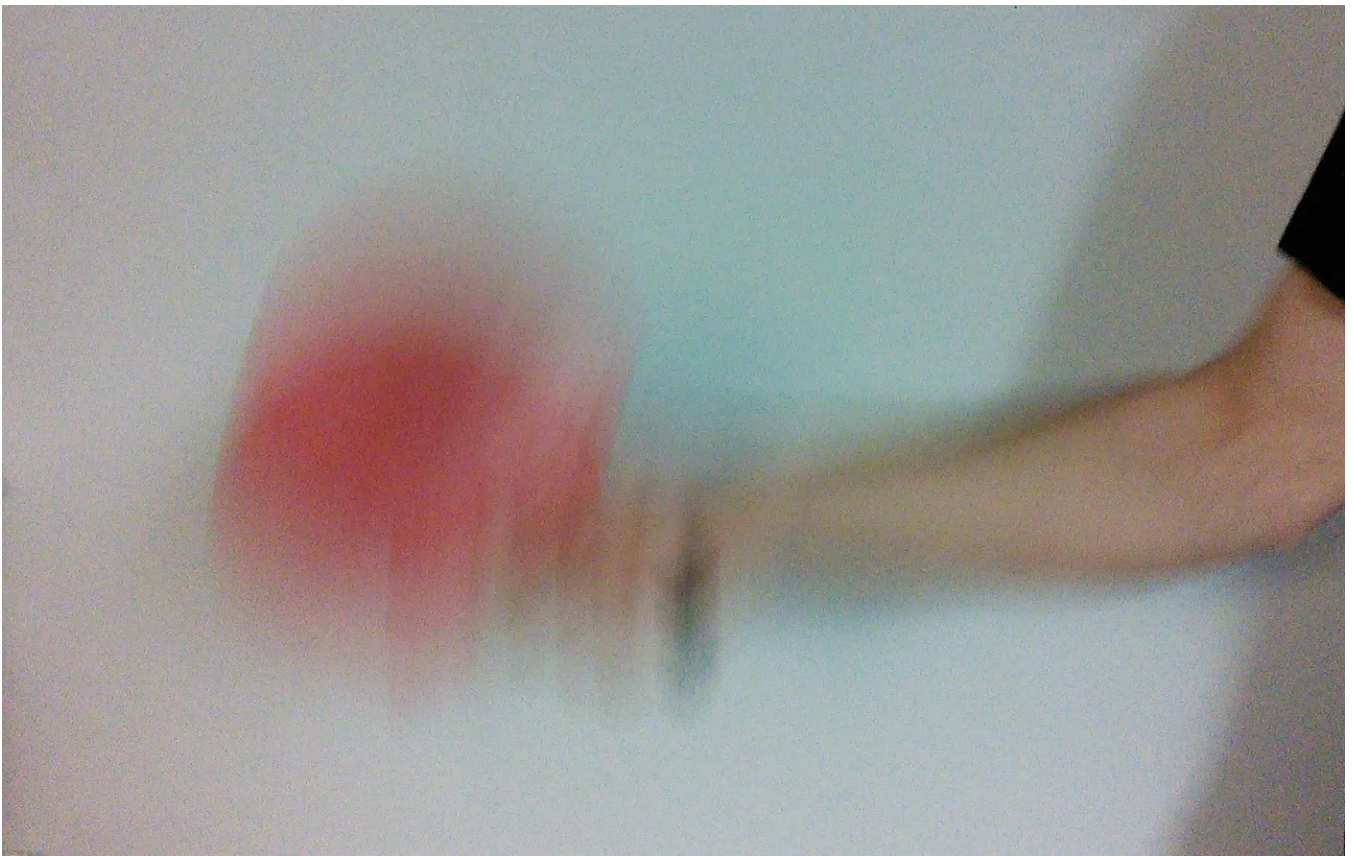
A few words about strategic decisions and tactics.

Playing styles

With the low-friction long pimples, you win with spin, not speed. You win by varying spin and placement, changing pace, and breaking rhythm. Your big advantage is the combination of spin generation with the inverted rubber, spin reinforcement/reversal, and the pimples' low spin sensitivity.

With low-friction long pimples, there are two typical defensive playing styles: either chopping a little further away from the table or disruptive blocking and attacking near or over the table.

It might be a good idea to master both styles and tactically choose the one that best suits the game.



Chopping

The defensive style of play with the chop is to defend patiently and wait for the opponent to miss his loops — you have great opportunities in the chop both to create a strong backspin (by increasing the rotation) and to vary trajectory, length, etc. in a relatively safe way.

You have two options: either 1. a short, varied game, or 2. a longer, consistent game.

1. Get the chop balls low over the net and vary the length — either very short or very long. Your opponent is likely to dig back (a long, deep push), a stroke with some risk of failure. Attack the dig by going up and forward.
2. If you are sure you are getting strong backspin on your shots, you can add height to your chop shots. This will reduce the risk of missing the table. The chops will become longer and higher (even rising after passing the net), which can make it difficult for your opponent to loop back. Your opponent won't smash a winner. He will either smash into the net or choose not to smash. Continue high-chopping the loops.

Deception

The deceptive game requires more tactical skills.

With long pimples, you have a great opportunity to change the incoming spin with the different strokes described above and to create uncertainty and indecision in your opponent. However, as already mentioned, you cannot generate a lot of spin, so you should only have long pimples on one side and play alternately with the backhand and the forehand in an active and balanced way.

Twiddling

Twiddling (sometimes turning the racket and playing with both the red and the black side on the forehand and/or the backhand) is very effective, but in my opinion also very difficult to master, especially during the point game, because the racket angle is different and also the strokes.

Service

1. Usually, use your inverted (backside) rubber for service, alternating short serves along the line to your opponent's forehand with the occasional fast, long diagonal serve. Always vary your spin according to your tactics. Put a lot of spin on the ball to get a ball with a spin back that you can reverse with your pimples.
2. Sometimes, serve short with your long pimples instead. Either push or swipe the racket, as you would do with the inverted rubber. To control the speed and placement, remember to swish the ball a little extra at ball contact. Then, if you are lucky, your opponent will lift the ball too high (because backspin was expected), and you can attack for an easy winner.

Service return

You'll soon notice that your service return errors will be fewer than with the inverted rubber because the low-friction, long-pimped rubber is much less sensitive to incoming spin than the inverted rubber.

1. Learn to use both rubbers on almost the entire table. Alternate your service reception, sometimes with the inverted rubber, sometimes with the long pips. Your opponent will never know what to expect.
2. Return with the backside (inverted) rubber as usual, opening/looping/flicking on long or high serves, and gently pushing on low and short serves. Medium-high serves will get a harder push with the backside rubber.
3. Return with long pips, with
 - a little swish down for topspin, and with
 - a push, up and forward, for backspin, and with

- a push, down and forward, for no-spin, or
- with a sweep either left or right.

Any spin on half-long serves is easily returned with low-friction long pimples due to the low spin sensitivity.

4. For low-speed serves, regardless of the incoming spin, you can sometimes return these serves with a flat, gentle, straight push. This can be very effective, as your opponent may become unsure of the spin.
5. On long serves that are difficult for you to attack, back off the table and chop instead. Alternatively, go around (pivot). Probably not enough time for twiddling here.

Spin reversal

You can reverse any complex service spin with the low-friction long pimples.

- Topspin becomes backspin and vice versa (horizontal axis).
- Lateral spin left becomes lateral spin right and vice versa (vertical axis). This is the normal side spin.
- More interesting are the effects with the lateral deviation — the right or left side deviation at the bounce (longitudinal axis).

Spin reversal at service return

If your opponent gets her spin reversed back, and the ball also unexpectedly bounces to the side (lateral deviation), your opponent risks missing her third ball attack.

Psychology

When you

- alternate the strokes
- with good placement
- vary and reverse the spin
- change the pace and break the rhythm
- do your best to create difficulties with spin
- deceive and disrupt,

then you might make the opponent

- frustrated
- gutless, and later in the match, even
- apathetic.

Table Tennis is not a beauty contest. It is psychological warfare.

As long as you control the game, you'll slowly break down your opponent.

You shift the success factor from reaction time to your mind.

You know you are winning, or at least that your tactics are working, when your opponent is screaming:

- "There is no play!"
- "I hate this game!"
- "Bloody pimples, they should be forbidden!"

Then all you have to do is patiently move on to the next point and the next ball with full concentration, staying calm and in control. And control the smile on your face.

Summary

When playing with pimped rubbers, you need to open up your racket. With long pimples, you need to make strokes that bend the pimples. Otherwise, you won't get any control.

A long pimped rubber with low friction and no sponge (ox) has the most deceptive or disruptive effect when playing close to the table and is also good for traditional chopping. Preferably combined with a reverse rubber (inverted, backside) on the other side of the racket for attacking play with heavy spin.

Playing with low-friction long pimples can be rewarding but also a bit of a challenge to learn and master. To get the most out of long pimples, you'll need to practice new strokes and be tactical.

Pimped facts

Technical

Name of rubber type	Inverted	Short pimples	Medium pimples	Long pimples	Long pimples with low friction	Antispin
Official denomination	In	Out	Out	Long	Long	Anti
Common pimple height [mm]		1.0 - 1.2	1.2 - 1.5	1.5 - 1.8	1.5 - 1.8	
Pimple height = h [mm]	$0.5 \leq h$	$1.0 \leq h$	$1.0 \leq h$	$1.0 \leq h$	$1.0 \leq h$	$0.5 \leq h$
Pimple diameter = a [mm]	$1.0 \leq a$	$1.0 \leq a \leq 2.2$	$1.0 \leq a \leq 2.2$	$1.0 \leq a \leq 2.2$	$1.0 \leq a \leq 2.2$	$1.0 \leq a$
Pimple diameter = b [mm]	$0.5 \leq b$	$1.0 \leq b \leq 2.0$	$1.0 \leq b \leq 2.0$	$1.0 \leq b \leq 2.0$	$1.0 \leq b \leq 2.0$	$0.5 \leq b$
Pimple density	$10 \leq \text{den} \leq 30$	$10 \leq \text{den} \leq 30$	$10 \leq \text{den} \leq 30$	$10 \leq \text{den} \leq 30$	$10 \leq \text{den} \leq 30$	$10 \leq \text{den} \leq 30$
Pimple distance = a+b [mm]	$1.5 \leq a+b < 3.4$	$2.0 \leq a+b < 3.4$	$2.0 \leq a+b < 3.4$	$2.0 \leq a+b < 3.4$	$2.0 \leq a+b < 3.4$	$1.5 \leq a+b < 3.4$
Pimple aspect ratio h/a	$h/a \leq 1.1$	$h/a \leq 0.89$	$h/a \leq 0.89$	$0.89 < h/a \leq 1.1$	$0.89 < h/a \leq 1.1$	$h/a \leq 1.1$
Pimple properties				Rugged top	Sleek top	

Figure 10. Facts box — Table of pimped rubbers

Pips-out is not only for elderly exercisers

Top Women - World Ranking 2/2017

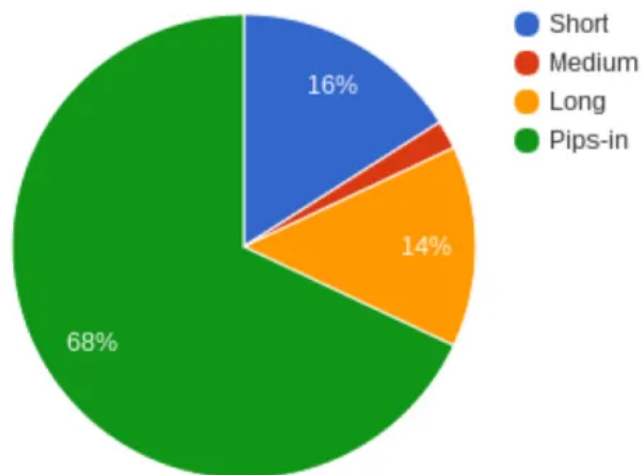


Figure 11. Top 50 women

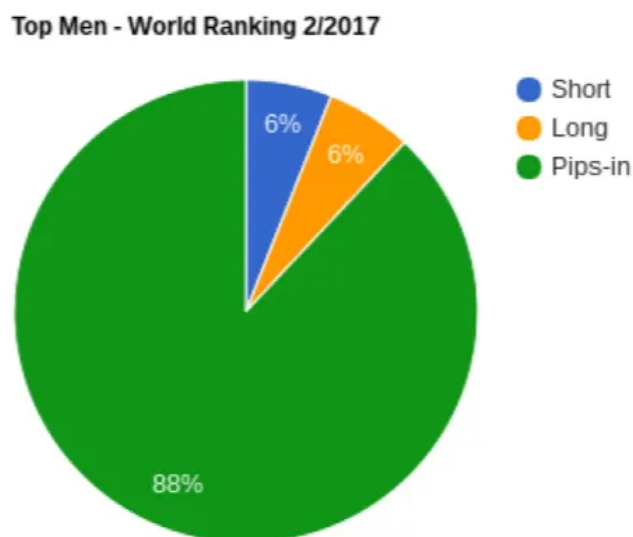


Figure 12. Top 50 men

- 2/3 of the players with pips-out play defensively, 1/3 play offensively
- Almost all with long pimples play defensively
- These distributions have been stable over the years and decades
- Low-friction long pimples are mainly used below the Top 200 WR
- ~60 % of all finalists in veteran classes 50+ play with pips-out rubbers

Credit statistics data Lars Borg 2017–02

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Table Tennis



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WOW! This is some detailed instruction!! Love the stats... we've duly followed.



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1 reply

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Kartik Raju

Jul 10, 2020



Very good article, compliments , Long pimples is a long road and with 40+ ball and ever increasing spin of Inverted rubbers is a tough job. Nice inputs, Thanks



2

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Yen Nguyen

Apr 14, 2018



I read I learn I practice and i will get new level .



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