Coaching Corner

4. Playing with & against antispin and pimple(out) rubbers.

An antispin rubber is so smooth it will not grip the ball. Many very old bats will have a similar effect once the rubbers have perished or become so dirty that they fail to grip the ball. As a result they return the ball but with little change to its spin, only the direction is reversed. **Therefore a topspun ball will be returned with backspin and a backspun ball will be returned with topspin, regardless of whether the bat is ‘open’ or ‘closed’.**

The main advantage of playing with such a rubber is that it allows a player to ignore the spin on the ball and return balls more easily as an opponents spin will have no effect on them. Also many players do not understand what is happening to the spin on the ball when playing against antispin and open their bat when it should be closed and close it when it should be open, with disastrous results.

Pimpled out rubbers make less contact with the ball than the now ‘standard’ inverted rubbers so an opponent’s spin has less effect thereby giving players more control over playing the ball. The three main types are ‘short’, ‘mid’ and long pimpled rubbers.

Short pimpled rubbers provide good control and allow for some spin to be imparted on the ball.

Long pimpled rubbers play similar to antispin rubbers, returning opponent’s spin causing possible confusion. However they are not as easy to play with and require some stroke modifications to play well. They can also be used to punch through the ball removing the spin. This will make the returned ball appear to wobble as it approaches, as having no spin it is unstable in the air. [Top players are also able to get the pimples to flick the ball thus imparting spin on the ball, -but don’t worry about that here]. Since the flexibility of the pimples absorbs the power this helps with playing against powerful hitters and delivers consistent drop shots taking the pace off the ball, however against a slow ball it is very difficult to add pace. Playing with a combination bat (see below) can overcome this weakness.

Mid pimpled rubbers are halfway between the two; They play like long pimpled rubbers but with less effect but are easier to control.

Who plays with antispin and pimpled out rubbers? At one level, players who do not understand spin and don’t want to. Such rubber is often put on the weakest hand, frequently the backhand to disguise the weakness and to enable spin serves to be more easily returned. However they cannot impart much if any spin on the ball. This can leave their opponent in complete control of the spin on the ball throughout the rally. To play effectively with such rubbers it is important to have a spinny rubber on the other side of the bat and to learn to ‘twiddle’ the blade so that you can use either rubber on both the backhand and forehand. Otherwise opponents can force you to play with whichever rubber they choose and be in complete control of the spin on the ball. Always serve with the inverted rubber to get the ball spinning so that your follow up stroke with the pimples will have the maximum effect. Should you serve with the pimples, expect your opponent to attack your float ball. More experienced players may play with a combination bat to add variation to their tactical game.

When playing against antispin or mid/long pimples remember that this rubber is your opponent’s weakness. If you serve a low flat ball to them they cannot spin the ball back and must lift it to get over the net. You will then receive a high ‘float’ ball which you can attack. Alternatively, you can serve a low backspin ball which again they must lift to return and present you with a high topspin ball to attack. If you serve wide to their inverted rubber, often the forehand, because they are not used to dealing with spin, always trying to take spin serves with their pimples, they often fail to read the spin and have trouble returning the ball safely. Should you get into a rally playing against these rubbers remember that you are receiving your own spin back. Therefore either hit flat (no spin) or remember to alternate between chop(or loop) and topspin. It takes some practice, especially in long rallies and when you are getting tired. Therefore try and finish the rally early. Until you have mastered the above it is better to avoid using sidespin serves as the spin will also be returned to you so you must compensate for this with the angle of your bat. Best avoided until proficient in practice.

Playing against players that also ‘twiddle’ is considerably harder as you must pay attention to which rubber is used each time and not rely on say, every backhand being with pimples. Fortunately (for us) only Alex has mastered this in our league.

One further point, when playing doubles, you must pay attention to the spin imparted by your partner to the pimpled rubber as you will be playing the return ball.

So, to sum up; use these rubbers if you have no interest in understanding spin. Playing against them is not as complicated as it might seem, and once mastered you will relish playing such tactical games. **Remember, unless they twiddle, this rubber is your opponent’s weakness - and remember as always, perfect practice makes perfect.**

Next time – Movement and Table position.

*For help or further information please contact Mike Prior at Ryde TT Centre.*