Coaching Corner

3. Tips for Receive of Serve.

* When returning serve you need to watch the servers bat and observe both the direction in which it travels and the point of contact on the bat. This will determine the direction, speed and the type and amount of spin on the ball.
* If the ball is to only bounce once, then attack with a loop or drive. If the ball is to bounce twice or more, then attack with caution with a fast backspin or flick.
* If you are forced or choose to return short then ensure that you produce some spin which will give the flight on the ball stability and accuracy. Failure to spin the ball will mean that the server’s spin will have maximum effect and will be more difficult to control. Relax your grip on the bat to absorb a little of the pace of the ball.
* Maintain a low crouch posture with your weight forward.
* The point of contact between the bat and ball should be ABOVE THE ELBOW.
* Make contact with the ball at the peak of the bounce except when returning very short and then play on the half volley.
* If the server’s bat is ‘closed’ over the ball this will impart topspin. To counter this spin simply also ‘close’ your bat. How much you ‘close’ it will depend on the amount of spin on the ball.
* If the server’s bat is ‘open’ it will impart backspin (but see previous article). To counter this you can also ‘open’ your bat angle.
* If there is no top or back spin, ie a float ball, you can more easily attack the ball especially if the ball is above the height of the net.
* Direct the ball forwards towards the net as far as possible, releasing contact with the bat close to the net to improve accuracy of placement. You can only control the ball while it is touching the bat, therefore try and make the bat and ball go in the same direction for more control.
* Remember when you hit (smack) the ball you lose contact. Keep your stroke smooth.
* Always be positive and don’t forget to recover quickly.
* A useful motto is – ‘Below the net- spin it; above the net- Hit it’.
* Returning sidespin.
  + To return sidespin watch the direction that the bat travels across the ball. Whichever side of the ball the bat starts from then aim to that side of the table, regardless of from where it is played.
  + Once you have mastered this you will realise that you can direct the ball wherever you want by making contact with the correct side of the ball to counter the sidespin.
  + If in doubt, aim down the centre of the table and note where the ball goes.
  + As well as the sidespin you also need to take into account the angle of the bat as to whether contact was near the top or bottom of the ball. This will of course also add a degree of either topspin or backspin to the ball.

**Remember** the Service Receive is the first opportunity you have of influencing the outcome of the rally. Try and get the first attacking shot in if you can, otherwise try and keep your return short and low to minimise the attacking options for the server.

Next time - Playing with & against antispin and pimple(out) rubbers.

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