

August 2009

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The classical forehands serve



Two months prior to the Men and Women's European Championships in Stuttgart, the youngest generation of Butterfly players showed their talents mid-July at the European Youth Championships in Prague winning a total of 17 medals in the tournament. Four gold, five silver and eight bronze medals were handed out to them, and their supplier. Six of those went to Butterfly athletes in the Singles competitions.

More about this on the next pages!

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European Youth Championships in Prague: Young Butterfly players fly from one success to another

Quentin Robinot follows in Timo Boll's footsteps



Quentin Robinot uses window of opportunity

A dream came true for Quentin Robinot in the „Golden City“ of Prague, Czech Republic: The 16 year old Frenchman won a gold medal in the king's discipline, the Junior Singles competition, following in German Butterfly star Timo Boll's footsteps, who earned his first European Youth Singles Championships title at the same age.

Robinot took the crown of the European Youth sports in Prague in his first finals, winning four sets in a row after trailing 0:2 against his German opponent Philipp Floritz. He kept his nerve while closing out the sixth set 16:14. „It was a great feeling being in this final. Nobody had expected it. I had a very good day and seized the opportunity,“ the Frenchman said after the award ceremony, still under the emotional influence of their hymn, „La Marseillaise“, whose lines were cheerfully accompanied by his team colleagues and fellow countrymen from the stands. Given the long international drought of the „Equipe Tricolore“, six title wins (eleven medals total) deserved a celebration of that sort in Prague. With his gold medal, Robinot – a talented soccer player, who decided against the sport surrounding the round leather ball in favor of the much smaller, celluloid

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ball in his youth – is now the most successful member of the table tennis boarding school of the French Table Tennis Federation, whose schedule consists of 15-20 hours of table tennis and 30 hours of classes each week.

The most successful young Butterfly player is named Yana Noskova

Russia's Yana Noskova was Prague's most successful Butterfly athlete. She was able to take home two gold medals (Doubles; Mixed, with Benjamin Brossier, France) and one silver medal (Singles) in the Cadet's competitions. The likeable blonde took comfort in her two Doubles titles after losing the Singles finals against tournament favorite Petrissa Solja, Germany. However, Noskova was more than pleased with her EC appearance, as she defeated German Butterfly talent Anna Krieghoff and Petrissa Solja together with her Romanian partner Bernadette Szocs in the Doubles finals. „Germany was the favorite, but Bernadette and I have been playing together internationally for two years and have gained a lot of self-confidence. When we secured the third set after trailing 0:2, we knew we could win the finals after overcoming a nervous start. We are happy that the title triumph worked out.“

Fourth gold goes to Hungary

Butterfly's fourth gold went to the duo Daniel Kosiba/Dora Madarasz in the Junior Mixed competition. The Hungarians defeated their Serbian opponents Marko Petkov/Maria Galonja in the finals. Dora Madarasz was surprised by her success: „Daniel and I are not a well-rehearsed team, and we never practice together. I didn't expect us to win gold.“ Kosiba on the other hand was very excited about his title win: „It was an incredibly tough day for me. Having strained myself in the Singles and Mixed Doubles, I really had to play a lot of sets today. But I played a perfect tournament. Even nicer is the fact that I won a gold medal in the end.“ Kosiba had previously drawn attention to himself by impressively entering the semi-finals in the Singles event, as did Malin Pettersson of Sweden in the Junior Girls competition. In the Cadet's tournament, young Swedish Butterfly player Hampus Söderlund won the silver medal, whereas Philipp Kuimov from Russia was ranked third.

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The results of the Butterfly athletes in the European Youth Championships: 4 x gold, 5 x silver, 8 x bronze

- Junior Boys Singles:** 1. Quentin Robot FRA, 3. Daniel Kosiba HUN
- Junior Girls Singles:** 3. Malin Pettersson SWE
- Cadet Boys Singles:** 2. Hampus Söderlund SWE, 3. Philipp Kuimov RUS
- Cadet Girls Singles:** 2. Yana Noskova RUS
- Junior Boys Doubles:** 3. Jonathan Groth DEN (with Tobias Lau)
- Junior Girls Doubles:** 3. Krisztina Ambrus/Dora Madarasz HUN
- Cadet Boys Doubles:** 2. Benjamin Brossier FRA (**with** Tristan Flore), 3. Robin Saudemont BEL (with Emilien Vanrossomme), 3. Hampus Söderlund/Albin Wemmert SWE
- Cadet Girls Doubles:** 1. Yana Noskova RUS (with Bernadette Szocs ROU), 2. Anna Krieghoff (with Petrissa Solja)
- Junior-Mixed:** 1. Daniel Kosiba/Dora Madararasz HUN
- Cadet-Mixed:** 1. Benjamin Brossier FRA/Yana Noskova RUS, 2. Celine Pang FRA (with Simon Gauzy), 3. Sofia Polcanova MDA (with Ondrej Bajger CZE)



Kosiba



Pettersson



Polcanova



Ambrus

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07/2009



Dates

12. August - 16. August 2009

Pro Tour: China Open

19. August - 23. August 2009

Pro Tour: Korean Open, Seoul

25. August - 26. August 2009

**Europe-Asia All Stars Series,
Peking/China**

13. Septembre - 20. Septembre 2009

**Liebherr European Championships
Women/Men, Stuttgart**

Impressum:

Editor + Kontakt

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No liability for eventual errors and omissions.

All prices are recommended retail prices.

Our Photopartners: Schillings, Dr. Roscher, Nikelis

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ITTF World Ranking Men (July 2009)

1	WANG Hao CHN	16	LI Ching HKG
2	MA Long CHN	17	MITZUTANI Jun JPN
3	MA Lin CHN	18	CHEUNG Yuk HKG
4	BOLL Timo GER	19	RYU Seung Min KOR
5	WANG Liqin CHN	20	PERSSON Jörgen, SWE
6	SAMSONOV Vladimir BLR	21	PRIMORAC Zoran, HRV
7	Chen Qi CHN	22	JIANG Tianyi HKG
8	JOO Se Hyuk KOR	23	YOSHIDA Kaii JAP
9	HAO Shuai CHN	24	SÜSS Christian GER
10	OH Sang Eun KOR	25	TANG Peng HKG
11	KREANGA Kalinikos GRE	26	KO Lai Chak HKG
12	MAZE Michael DEN	27	GAO Ning SIN
13	OVTCHAROV Dimitrij GER	28	ZHANG Jike CHN
14	SCHLAGER Werner AUT	29	CHEN Weixing, AUT
15	CHUAN Chih-Yuan TPE	30	YOON Jae Young KOR

ITTF World Ranking Women (July 2009)

1	ZHANG Yining CHN	16	DANG Ye Seo KOR
2	GUO Yue CHN	17	Li Jiao NED
3	LI Xiaoxia CHN	18	CAO Chen CHN
4	LIU Shiwen CHN	19	FAN Ying CHN
5	GUO Yan CHN	20	TOTH Krisztina HUN
6	WANG Nan CHN	21	HIRANO Sayaka JPN
7	FENG Tianwei SIN	22	GAO Jun USA
8	KIM Kyung Ah KOR	23	LI Jie NED
9	DING Ning CHN	24	LI Qian POL
10	JIANG Huajun HKG	25	WU Jiaduo GER
11	WANG Yue Gu SIN	26	PAVLOVICH Viktoria BLR
12	Li Jia Wei SIN	27	YAO Yan CHN
13	TIE Yana HKG	28	FUKUHARA Ai JPN
14	LIU Jia AUT	29	YU Meng Yu SIN
15	PARK Mi Young KOR	30	LIN Ling HKG

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Holger Nikelis (31) challenged the German President Horst Koehler in Berlin



A match against the first man of the nation in front of a historic background: wheelchair table tennis player Holger Nikelis challenged the German President Horst Koehler for a match on the green table in front of the Brandenburg Gate last Saturday. Koehler didn't hesitate, took the challenge and played against the twice European Champion Holger Nikelis on the 4th International Paralympics Day in the German Capital. „It was a special moment to play in front of a great audience against Mr Koehler“, said Holger Nikelis from Cologne. He took the opportunity to hand over a present to Holger Koehler as the protector of this event: together with his equipment sponsor Butterfly a shirt with „Holger Koehler“ printed on the back was produced. „He was very happy and said he is going to wear it when he is jogging“, said Nikelis. „I can imagine that he will also wear it to play table tennis again. He is not bad“, said Nikelis smiling.

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„Fan of the month“



The name of this female fan is Maria Dolores Latorre and she is from Elda (Alicante) in Spain. A good idea! These objects can be seen: Shirt ESCULI LADY (colour lime), tracksuit bottoms ZEGRIS, skirt AQUILO (black), mini table SKY MINI, NUBAG II rucksack (lime), NUBAG II double case (lime)

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Andreja Bakula, Croatia

I never gave up hope



Andreja Bakula suffered from a lot of injuries during her career. The Butterfly player lost three years when she was young. She got over it and is a member of the Croatian national team since 13 years. At the moment she is number 123 on the World Ranking List but she thinks that she has good chances to move further upwards. The 27 year old is definitely not looking at the end of her astonishing career. When we took the interview it wasn't clear yet if she will continue to play for the Croatian record champion HASTK Mladost Iskon Zagreb.

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Andreja, how did you get to play table tennis?

Quite simple, in front of our house stood two table tennis tables out of cement. I was eleven years old. We made a net out of card board and then we played as often as we could. I was the only girl. But I could easily keep up with the boys. Some month later I joined a table tennis club near by in Zagreb. There were no girls there either so I changed to a women's club in Zagreb when I was 12 years old.

When did you have your first great successes?

About half a year later – I wasn't even thirteen yet – when I won a bronze medal at an international tournament in Hungary in my age group. That really inspired me.

How did you manage to become so good practically in a year?

It wasn't only the training in the club. My father helped me a lot. He was a tennis player and coach with a lot of general knowledge and could also give me some technical advice. A year later I was already a member of the Croatian cadet team at the European Youth Championships. Altogether I won about fifteen medals at European Youth Championships.

When did you play for the Croatian Senior national team?

When I was fifteen and I was very proud of that.

When did you decide to play table tennis professionally?

I think that was around that time and my national coach Neven Cegnar advised me to do that. At the time I practiced five to six hours daily and I was convinced that I could manage that.

How was the transition from the juniors to the seniors?

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First I qualified for the Olympic games 2000 in Sydney and then I changed clubs and played for the German Bundesliga team TSV Kroppach and then for SV Langweid. But I didn't play a lot, because I got injured right at the beginning of the season with a complicated joint injury at my foot which really made life difficult. I had to be operated and had to use crutches for half a year and put on fifteen kilos of weight. I didn't recover from that for a long time physically and psychologically. That was a really difficult time. I had to play for the second team in Kroppach and then changed to Langweid. I couldn't get on the team there neither at the beginning but during the second season things went upwards again.

How did you manage a come back?

2004 at the European Championships in Courmayeur. We won the silver medal with the team and in the singles I reached the quarterfinals after beating Elke Schall. These successes gave me strength and self confidence. Then I was free from injuries apart from a wrist injury recently which was treated wrongly so that I had a break of 3 months instead of five weeks.

Did you ever give up hope for a comeback after your long injury break from 2000 to 2003?

Naturally there were some depressing moments but I never gave up hope. It was always my target to get back into the national team.

You have now been thirteen years without an injury break and are a member of the Croatian national team and number three of your country. How important is that for you?

That is very important and we are very close to each other. Even during my injuries everybody was on my side and encouraged me.

You are now 27 years old. What plans do you have for the future in table tennis?

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I don't intend to play as long as Zoki Primorac (he is 39 now) but I want to continue for a few more years. I am sure about that. Also in women table tennis there are a few players who play very well when they are in their mid thirties. That is a question of form.

And a healthy body...

Yes, of course, my physical condition is very good at the moment and I can certainly improve my game. I can feel that. My time will come. Altogether I lost about four years and I am getting everything together in my head. That is an age question. When you are 18, 19 or 20 you are not that far yet. Therefore I think that I can still improve. I noticed that already at the WC in Yokohama. The only important thing is to be in good physical and psychological shape. Zoki sets an example here. He lives for his sport and pays attention to his body. Only that way he can achieve such performances.

It wasn't any different than expected. The Chinese dominance in women table tennis is greater than ever before, simply crashing. What do you think are the reasons for that and what do the European players have to do?

We must practice more together with them either in China or in Europe. Naturally the Chinese don't want to do that. At the WC I played against Zhang Yining, the world champion. She is in a class of her own it is possible to keep up with the others. You don't stand a chance against Zhang. Her numerous titles are proof of that. We should be able to practice against her and the others then we would learn. Now we play in Europe and against second class Chinese. That doesn't bring us forward. A young Russian player is at the moment living and training in China. She has improved a lot and plays against the Chinese players without respect because she knows them. She lost against Zhang Yining 4:1 but all sets were very close.

What is the main difference between the Chinese and the European playing system?

The distance to the table, the Chinese are much closer to the table. There is a lot more pressure in their game. We in Europe play very nice but by far not so aggressive. Surely there will be different opinions in China but that is the main difference. In my home club in Zagreb we have a Chinese coach and I improved a lot with him.

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How is that?

For example there are five different points when you can hit the ball after it has bounced on the table. For each of these moments there is an according stroke technique. For the counter spin above the table I was always advised to take the ball very early with him it was clearly later. The same applies for the different serve and serve return techniques. Basically I think that in China they know a lot more about table tennis.

What is so fascinating about table tennis for you?

I love to play in a team and doubles. I am a team player and I love it to play in a hall with a lot of spectators and atmosphere. For me it would be okay if there were only team events.

If you could change something in table tennis a rule or something which is wrong, what would that be?

The gluing and tuning ban is unfair. Many don't follow it and definitely not the Chinese. They are not controlled in the same way by the umpires either. I experienced that myself. The same applies for the service rules. When I play against Zhang Yining or Guo Yue I don't see anything. The men also complain about this. The Chinese have a definite bonus with the umpires. I am not saying this to doubt their strength, really. But something must happen, because this injustice is unbearable. If there is a rule it must apply to everybody that is only fair.

Do you have any plans for the time when your active career is finished?

Yes, I would like to open a fitness studio. I started my education as a fitness coach already.

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Richard Prause, Germany

A main factor for talent is effort



*Richard Prause celebrates a jubilee: the professional table tennis coach has been working for the German Table Tennis Association (DTTB) for ten years. We are happy too for the sympathetic Hessian who has a contract with Butterfly. The father of two sons managed to get to the top in only eight years and played in the 1. Bundesliga 1990 as a 20 year old. Only two years later he managed to get into the German national team where he played from 1992 to 1997 and played 38 matches. The left handed player put always a lot of effort into his training and always demonstrated a great fighting spirit. Since 1994 Richard Prause is head coach of the German men's national team where he could achieve some outstanding successes. The twice German „Coach of the year“ has a young, hungry team with Timo Boll at the top. In this Butterfly News issue we are starting a practical series where Richard Prause will share all his knowledge and his manifold experiences with us: **Table Tennis Basics with Richard Prause**. Before that, let's get to know him a bit better.*

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Richard, how did your table tennis career begin?

I came relatively late to table tennis, at the age of 12.

With 12 years, that is exceptional. You still managed to get into the German national team, respect. Which sport did you do before that?

I was active in judo. I had some successes on regional level and had a few belts. But in the end it was too boring because there were only a few competitions. Then I turned to my second favourite sport table tennis. I had a table at home and played as a hobby. Then I joined the table tennis club Niederoden and was lucky that I had a very good coach who taught me all the table tennis basics very well and speedily. I didn't lose any time.

This means it went upwards very quickly?

You could say that. When I was 16 I was nominated for the Hessian junior top training group. Helmut Hampl and Juergen Lieder were in charge of the training at the time and they developed my game during the following three years brilliantly. During the season 1987/88 we got promotion with FTG Frankfurt from the 2. to the 1. Bundesliga. Then I moved to TTC Grenzau in the 1. Bundesliga. I was 20 years old then.

Did you decide then to become a professional?

That was not so easy. I took my A-Levels when I was 18 and then I joined the sports department of the army for two years. Then I was thinking if it wouldn't be sensible to study. I really had to think hard and considering my sporting development until then I was convinced that more was possible. So I decided to put everything on one card: table tennis and I didn't regret that decision up to now. During the following two years I managed to get into the German top 10 and in 1992 I had my debut in the German national team. 1994 I played my first European championships in Stuttgart. I was a member of the inner circle of the national team from 1992 – 1998. I continued to play in the Bundesliga until 2000.

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When did you realize that you wanted to become a professional coach?

I was clear about that quite early. Already during the season 1996/97 I planned my later career. At the end of my time on the national team I took my coaching A-License (highest German coaching Qualification).

How did you start as a coach without having to stop as a player in the Bundesliga?

That happened by accident. In 1999 Glenn Østh the German national coach from Sweden retired surprisingly. Dirk Schimmelpfennig, the head coach of the men's team and now sports director called me and said that he needed a new assistant. I liked the offer and asked my club (TTV Goennern at the time) if they agreed to a double commitment. They agreed so I could start with the German Table Tennis Association. That was before the World Championships in Eindhoven and that way this WC was my first WC as a coach or assistant coach.

Then you are celebrating your 10 year jubilee as a coach. Congratulations!

Yes, indeed, I can hardly believe that myself. At first I was assistant coach for two years. After the Olympic Games in Sydney I took over the women's team and worked with them until 2004. After that I took over the men's team.

As a coach you often use experiences which you had as a player yourself. Were there coaches who had a special influence on you?

Obviously these experiences are very important. I already mentioned Juergen Lieder and Helmut Hampl. In Grenzau I was lucky that I could work together with the coach Milan Stencel.

Milan Stencel is known as the discoverer and promoter of Jean- Michel Saive and had a reputation of being very hard. What was special about him?

He was authentic. He invested a lot of „heart blood“ into table tennis. He was always angry when somebody didn't invest the same amount of heart blood as he. I had a lot of fun with him, learnt a lot and profited of him. Naturally I experienced him as being much disciplined but I never thought of him as being hard. He told everybody that table tennis is his life which contains all his heart blood and he will help everybody who is investing the same amount as he. There we were both on the same wavelength.

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Also as a player you were known as a strong fighter who brought all his heart blood into the game. If you play, give all you have, even if you lose in the end. Did this attitude take you to the job as a coach?

Obviously this attitude helped. I think that I can say about myself that I am authentic too. I try to pass on my passion for this sport. I demand this of my players too: that what I am prepared to invest as a coach I demand of my players. The direction must be right.

Your good reputation is not only down to you being a good fighter. You are also known as a hardworking player. When the others were finished you always continued a bit more. What is your philosophy for success?

I have without doubt always practiced with a lot of effort. Effort is a very important factor of talent. Surely I was never a player who had an above average feeling for the ball, another factor for talent. But I was hard working and target orientated and always knew precisely what I wanted and after a while I had a proper playing concept in my mind. I knew what I could play and what not. I tried to improve my strength. Looking back now I think that I didn't quite achieve the maximum but I came close to it. For achieving more I probably should have started with table tennis earlier.

Richard, you were the head coach of the women for four years. What did you learn from that time?

Women are a lot more emotional than men. But it was a very interesting job for me. The men are simply a bit more ready to step over their boarder lines, which they have in mind. When I feel this readiness it is easier for me as a coach to lead them there. Therefore it is very pleasant for me to work with this unbelievable generation of players, which we have on the men team. But I learnt a lot during my time as a women national coach. Working with women and accompanying them on their way and as a psychologist.

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Richard, when you became head coach of the men in 2004 you met the humble top star Timo Boll. Has it been an advantage that you both were Hessian and played together in the Bundesliga in Goennern?

Of course, that was a tremendous advantage. He knew what kind of table tennis I expected of him. Helmut Hampl knew very well why he fetched me to Goennern, so that he could have a player for the young Timo who could set an example in training effort and I played many extra shifts with Timo. At the time Timo was at the beginning of his career and I was at the end. It was quite interesting to experience how Timo developed at the time. Those two years when I played together with him made it a lot easier for me as a coach because I knew how he works and how he sees table tennis. I developed quite a good relationship to him over the years. Our coach – player relationship is really good from my point of view. Concerning some things it goes further than a player – coach relationship.

If you compare Timo from 1999 and Timo from 2009 is that a different Timo?

No, it is still the same Timo. He always was reflecting on things and important decisions were thought through carefully. I know him like that up to now. He knows exactly what he wants. He has a good sense of humour. Before he judges about anything he looks at it carefully and that for me is positive character ability.

How do you see Timo's sporting perspectives, what can your protégé still achieve? In Yokohama he sadly had to pass because of injury.

He will get more chances in the future to win points at a WC or the Olympics. He has got the potential.

Germany has a strong team with Boll, Ovtcharov and Süss. In Peking you won the silver medal. Is it still possible to achieve more?

I said straight after Peking, we must not only continue to keep working, we can do it as well. We had a very young team in Peking, together with Japan perhaps the youngest. That gives us hope for the future because we can develop further. We have to use this young potential of our team even after 2012. We had great successes last year but we cannot rest on it. Now it is important to take the next step and not stagnate otherwise the other nations will overtake us very speedily in the next years. We definitely will try to avoid that by all means.

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You are now a coach for ten years. What do you need as a coach to be successful?

First of all you must be totally motivated. You have to have a lot of passion so that you are prepared to think table tennis 24 hours a day. You must be communicative so that you can approach the players and talk to them. You must have a lot of experience and it is useful when you have played on a high level yourself – it doesn't necessary have to be the Bundesliga - to understand the pressure of the players better. There are surely more factors but these are the most important ones.

Do you regret your decision of becoming a professional coach?

I am convinced that this is exactly what I wanted.

Also for the coming years?

Also for the coming years.

Richard we will start a series with practical issues concerning important questions about technique and tactics of training in this Butterfly News issue, where you will contribute as a professional coach and former professional player with all your experience. The Butterfly Team is looking forward to your enthusiasm and future collaboration.

I think this is a brilliant idea and I am equally looking forward to our joint product for the many Butterfly fans.

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Table tennis basics with Richard Prause - Part 1: The basic position

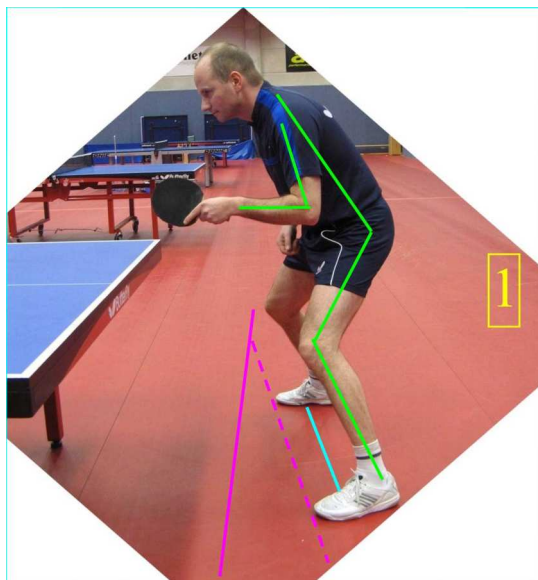
The German national coach Richard Prause is starting with a new series on practical aspects in this issue. The first topic is the basic position. He will try to give some useful tips which are easy to learn for all those players who are interested to improve their game. The former German national player has been working for the German Table Tennis Association as a national coach for ten years. Since 2004 he has been head coach of the men's team. Timo Boll is not only one of his players but he has also a close relationship to him. In the first part of the new series Richard points out the important factors of the basic position. Have fun with Richard Prause and his advice. If you have any questions or wishes, please send us a mail.

The basic position is very individual. There are some players like Timo Boll who are standing very low down others stand very far in the backhand side and others again in the middle of the table. Even though there are some basic points which every player should pay attention to.

Pay attention to the following points.

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Where do I take up my position? (Picture 1)

- * Put your legs shoulder wide apart.
- * Bend your knees so that you can create tension. Keep your back straight.
- * Bend your upper body slightly forwards.
- * Stand slightly square to the table open to the forehand.

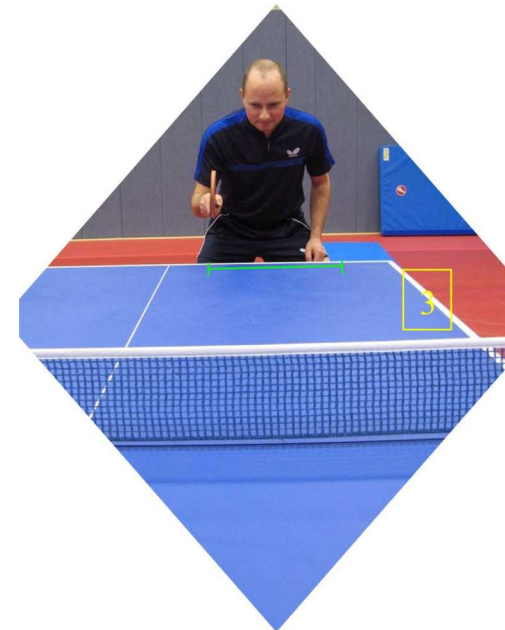
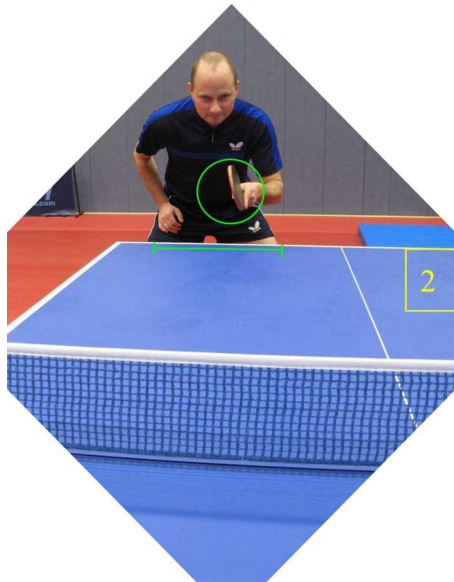
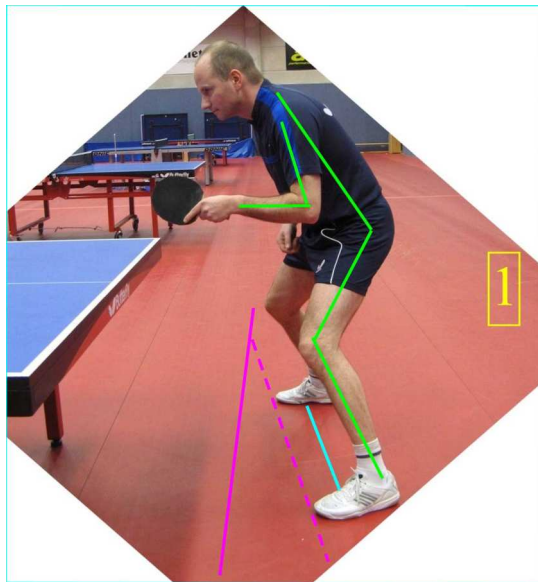
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How do I hold my bat in the basic position? (Pictures 1, 2 and 3)

Keep your bat in front of your body in a neutral position so that you can react quickly with your forehand and backhand. This is the neutral position. The bat is straight and the top of the bat points forward.

Important: Hold your bat above the table so that you can also return short services.



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Where do I take up my basic position? (Pictures 2, 3, 4, 5a-c)

In Europe you can often see that most players are standing in the backhand side because they prefer the forehand. If you are a left handed player you are standing more in the right half of the table and the right handed player more to the left. This position is quite natural because you cover the bigger part of the table with your forehand. Of course there are alternatives to this.

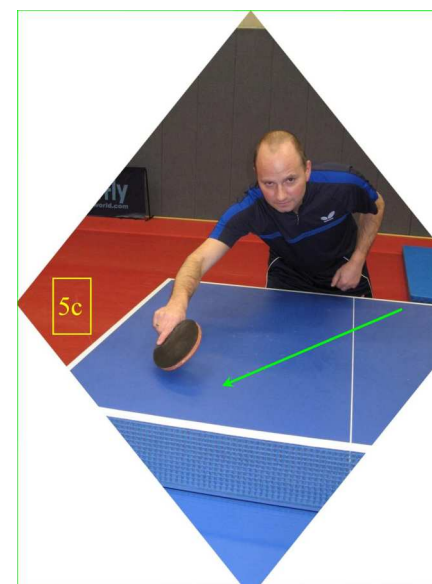
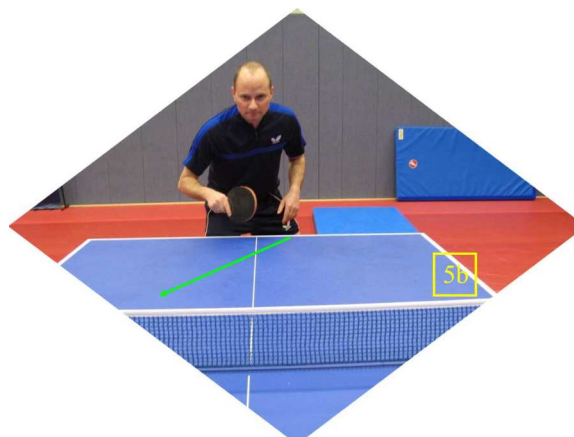
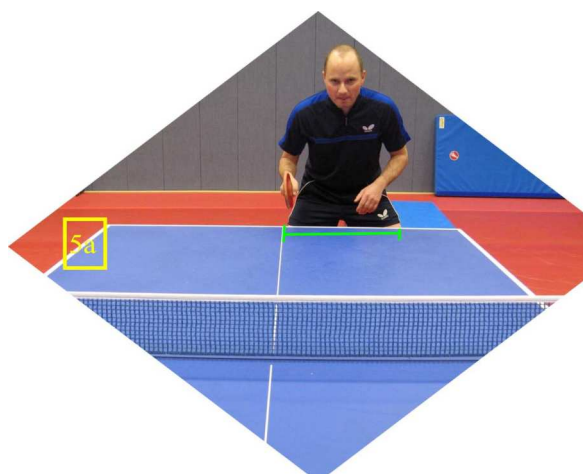
Players stand in the last third of the backhand side for an extreme forehand return (picture 4). This position is preferred by players with an extreme forehand dominance.



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Then there are players like Dimitrij Ovtcharov who are standing more centrally in the middle of the table to cover a bigger part of the table with his dangerous backhand return (5a, b, c). He is orientated more to the middle of the table to use his dangerous backhand. This position is depending on the opponent and their services. That is variable.



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Which distance to the table should I have in the basic position? (Picture 6)

When you point your playing arm from a standing position square forward you can find out about the distance. This is not about centimetres but about a rough guideline. If you are too close to the table you might be surprised by a long serve, if you are too far away short services might be dangerous.



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Technique Tipps

The classical forehands serve with a lot of spin and placement varieties

The Japanese national player Sayaka Hirano, at the moment number 27 of the World Ranking List, shows us in this issue the classical forehand serve which saw a revival also in top table tennis during the last years. When serving the special service grip – the bat is only held by the thumb and index finger - is not used. Especially the Chinese top players and their colleagues use this service variety perfectly. Also other players are using this serve more often again just like the 24 year old Sayaka who was ranked 15 on the World Ranking List once in March 2008. The offensive right handed player shows us in this picture series the important features of this forehand service.

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Pictures 1-4: Starting phase: Sayaka is standing almost with her back to the table and makes it very difficult for her opponent to see the bat. The legs are more than shoulder wide apart and the knees are bent. Her upper body is leaning forward. She is leaning towards the ball which is on her flat hand in height of the table.



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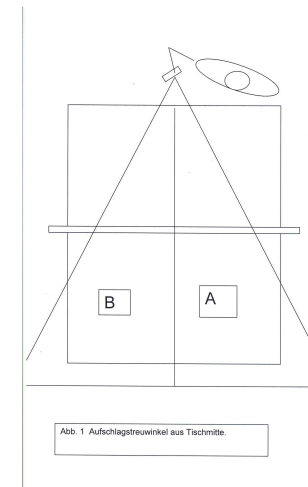
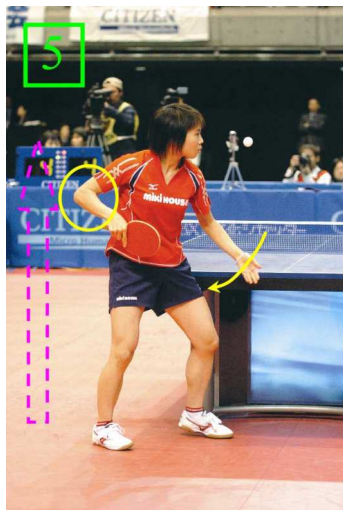
If we compare pictures 2-4 it becomes very obvious how Sayaka straightens her body while she is throwing the ball upwards. She throws the ball up to the height of her eyes. The bat is wide open (pictures 1,2) and Sayaka holds it vertically (pictures 3,4) which the opponent probably can't see.



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Pictures 5-7 – main phase: Now Sayaka pulls her bat backwards and up as far as possible (pictures 5,6). She does not change her grip like it is normally done with forehand sidespin serves. The high position of the elbow on picture 6 shows this clearly. Then she turns her upper body speedily towards the point of making contact with the ball because otherwise the service would be against the rule. The same applies to the arm which is throwing up the ball. We can see very well on the pictures 4-6 that she quickly pulls her arm downwards. All this happens in a split of a second which explains that some players like Andreja Bakula (see interview) complains about it to the umpires. We can't see exactly when she is making contact with the ball because the ball has left the bat already on picture 7 and we can only speculate about the spin. Let's look at the position of the bat and the arm movement now. The bat is moved in a semi-circle. It is slightly open and the ball is hit with a downward movement (compare picture 6 and 7). This would hint at a slight side-back spin. Apart from pure side spin, pure back spin and different side-back spin variations you could also produce side-topspin and –very important – balls without any spin. The placement can also be very short or very long. Illustration 1 shows the possible placements of these serves which can be taken from the middle of the table or even from the forehand side. The best placement varieties are possible from the forehand side (A). Generally it is also possible to place the ball in zone B by changing the bat angle when making contact with the ball.



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Pictures 8-10 Backswing and going back to a stroke position: Hirano follows the ball and her body weight is on the right forward leg (picture 8). Then she pushes back from the front leg (picture 9) and brings the right leg back into a stroke position which she has taken on picture 10 already.

Conclusion: Naturally the forehand services where the fingers are not holding the bat will still play an important role. Sayaka Hirano is also in command of those. But the forehand service variety which we presented here could be very effective against certain opponents and playing systems even if only used as a surprise. One player who could do these kinds of services perfectly was the Olympic Champion of 2000, Kong Linghui, who now is the head coach of the Chinese national team with a Butterfly contract.

