

# Table Tennis

## I. INTRODUCTION

Table Tennis, also known as Ping-Pong, fast-paced racket-and-ball game played on a table by two or four persons, usually indoors. Named for its resemblance to the outdoor game of tennis, the game is similarly popular both as a recreational pastime and as a competitive sport, especially in Asia.

## II. RULES AND EQUIPMENT

Table tennis is played on a table measuring 9 ft by 5 ft (2.74 m by 1.52 m), with its upper surface 30 in (76 cm) above the floor. The table is divided into opposing courts by a net 6 in (15.2 cm) high and a white stripe, running lengthwise down the center, that is used only for doubles play. The surface of a standard table is typically about 0.8 in (2 cm) thick and made of plywood or particle board. The resiliency of the surface is such that a standard table tennis ball, when dropped from a height of 1 ft (30.5 cm), will rebound to a height anywhere from 8.75 to 9.75 in (22.2 to 24.8 cm). The ball is hollow and made of either white or orange celluloid; it is about 1.6 in (40 mm) in diameter and weighs about 0.1 oz (2.7 g). The rackets (also called paddles or bats) may be any shape but usually are oval and made of wood, faced with rubber or sponge that may be pimples or smooth.

Like tennis, table tennis involves hitting the ball back and forth over the net until one of the players misses the ball, or hits it into the net or off the table; in each of these cases the opponent scores a point. To make a legal serve a player holds the ball on the flat, outstretched palm of the hand anywhere behind the end of the table, then throws it up and strikes it as it falls. No spin can be imparted to the ball on the toss. The server must move his or her free arm to the side as soon as the ball leaves the hand to ensure that the free arm does not block the opponent's view of the serve. The ball must hit the table on the server's side of the net first, then hit the table on the receiving side before being returned. When a serve touches the net but is otherwise a good serve, it is called a "let" and played over.

One player serves until 2 points have been scored, after which the opponent serves for the next 2 points. The player who reaches 11 points (formerly 21 points) first wins the game. If the score is tied at 10-all (known as deuce), the service changes after each point until one player gains a 2-point advantage to win the game. Players change ends after every game (and also when one player reaches 5 in the deciding game of the match). So-called net and edge balls—that is, shots that touch either the net or table edge—are valid shots. When a ball hits the side of the table instead of the edge, the player who made the shot loses the point. Matches may consist of any number of odd games. Best-of-five or best-of-seven game matches are common in tournament play.

Doubles play in table tennis differs from singles play in several ways. In these games, the service must be from the right-hand court into the opponent's right-hand court, marked by the stripe running the length of the table. After a successful service and return, each player alternates hitting the ball until the point ends. Each player receives service for 2 points, then, as the opponents shift positions, serves for 2 points. The sequence of one specific partner hitting to one specific opponent must be changed after each game and when one side reaches 5 in the deciding game of the match.

### III. HISTORY

Most authorities agree that table tennis is of English origin and that it was first played with improvised equipment on dining-room tables in the late 1800s. Around 1900, when celluloid balls began to replace rubber and cork balls, the game became very popular in England and the United States. Early manufactured sets were called Gossima, Whiff-Waff, and, more commonly, Ping-Pong, the latter being a patented trade name. Its popularity as a parlor game quickly waned, but in the early 1920s a simultaneous movement started in several parts of the world to revive table tennis as a serious sport.

A meeting held in 1926 in Berlin, Germany, resulted in the formation of the International Table Tennis Federation (ITTF), still the international governing body for the sport. The USA Table Tennis Association (USATT—formerly known as the United States Table Tennis Association), founded in 1933, governs tournament competition in the United States. The annual national championships consist of matches in about 60 different classifications, such as men's and women's singles and doubles, junior and senior events (with players ranging from under the age of 10 to over 80), and wheelchair competition. Other major tournaments are the U.S. Open, which is held annually in a number of categories, and the annual North American Team Championships, in which groups of three to five players team up much like in tennis's Davis Cup competition.

The ITTF, composed of about 190 member nations, sponsors annual world championships that alternate individual and team play every other year. The ITTF also sponsors a professional tour with prize money. Chinese players have dominated tournament play since the 1960s, especially in women's competition. Since table tennis was made an Olympic sport in 1988, however, South Korean and European players—most notably from Sweden—have emerged as strong contenders.