

## Step 10 Chopping: Backspin Defense

Chopping is a defensive return of a drive with backspin. Most choppers back up 5 to 15 feet from the table, returning the ball low with variable backspin. There aren't as many good choppers nowadays as there used to be, mostly due to the loop drive; however, the style still persists. A number of players have developed games that combine chopping with another style (such as looping). This step will help you learn both how to chop and how to chop the loop.

There are three ways a player can win points when chopping (aside from a lucky edge or net!):

- *Outlasting an opponent.* Simply chop every drive back until the opponent makes an error.
- *Forcing an error.* Mix up spins or put so much backspin on the ball that the opponent makes a mistake.
- *Attacking.* Look for a weak drive or drop shot and attack, catching the opponent off guard.

Generally, the chop strokes are used either by an all-around player as a variation, or by a chop specialist who uses it over and over (at least until that player finds a chance to attack!).

A chopper should be aware of the expedite rule, since it may affect his or her style. Before the expedite rule, there were often matches between two choppers that would last for hours. (One point at the World Championships lasted almost three hours.) Under modern rules, if any individual game is not complete after 15 minutes (not including official breaks), the expedite rule comes into play for the rest of the match. Under the expedite rule, players alternate serves, and the server has to win the point within 13 shots (including the serve). If the receiver makes 13 consecutive returns in the rally, the receiver wins the point. If a chopper is in a match that is approaching the expedite rule time limit, he or she should attack more and try to end the game before the expedite rule takes over.

### WHY IS CHOPPING IMPORTANT?

Chopping is one of the few strokes that you don't absolutely need, although it will help as a variation

even if you use it only occasionally. However, many defensive players specialize in chopping. The idea behind chopping is that if you can chop all of your opponent's drives back, he or she can't score. If you can further force errors by extreme backspin, by spin variations, by mixing in attacks, or by simply getting everything back until your opponent misses, you can score. If you're an attacker, you'll sometimes find yourself out of position, and a good chop will often get you back into the point.

### EXECUTING THE CHOP

Since the forehand and backhand chops obey the same fundamentals, they'll be introduced together.

Start in a chopper's ready position, with your right foot slightly in front (see Figure 10.1a). Bend your knees, especially on the backhand chop. Rotate your body to the left for the backhand chop, to the right for the forehand chop. For the forehand chop, bring your right foot back slightly. For the backhand chop, bring your left foot back slightly. Make sure to backswing early—early racket preparation is important.

Transfer some weight to the back foot. Bring your arm back and slightly up. Racket should be open, and your wrist cocked back (see Figure 10.1b).

Using your elbow, bring the racket down and forward to the ball. Graze the bottom back of the ball. Contact should be made after the ball has dropped to about table level, lower against heavy topspin (see Figure 10.1c). Use a light touch—this is a defensive shot, not a fast one. The ball should travel slowly.

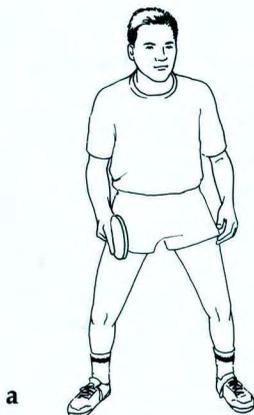
Follow through forward and slightly downward until your arm is almost straight (see Figure 10.1d). There should be some weight shift to the front foot. Return to ready position.

## Figure 10.1 *Keys to Success:* Forehand and Backhand Chops

### Preparation Phase

#### Forehand Chop

#### Backhand Chop



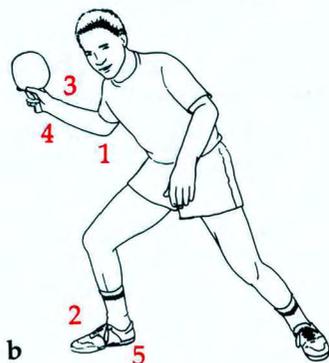
- |     |  |     |
|-----|--|-----|
| ___ | 1. In ready position, right foot slightly in front | ___ |
| ___ | 2. Arm relaxed                                     | ___ |
| ___ | 3. Move into position                              | ___ |

### Execution Phase

#### Backswing

#### Forehand Chop

#### Backhand Chop



- |                                       |                                    |                                      |     |
|---------------------------------------|------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|-----|
| 1. Rotate hips and waist to the right | ___                                | 1. Rotate hips and waist to the left | ___ |
| 2. Bring right foot back              | ___                                | 2. Bring left foot back              | ___ |
| ___                                   | 3. Bring arm up and back           | ___                                  | ___ |
| ___                                   | 4. Cock wrist back                 | ___                                  | ___ |
| ___                                   | 5. Most weight shifts to back foot | ___                                  | ___ |

**Forward Swing**

*Forehand Chop*



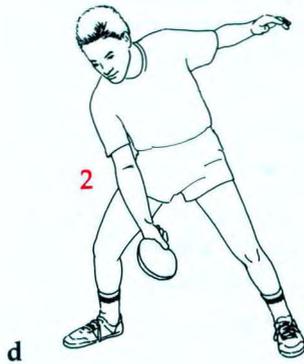
- 1. Bring racket down and forward using elbow
- 2. Snap wrist at contact
- 3. Contact ball as it drops
- 4. Racket is open
- 5. Graze back bottom of the ball

*Backhand Chop*



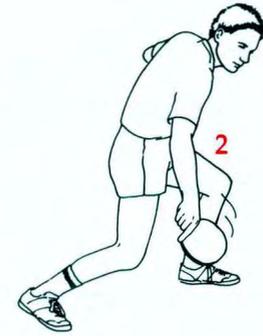
**Follow-Through Phase**

*Forehand Chop*



- 1. Follow through naturally, down and forward
- 2. Arm should straighten
- 3. Racket should point in direction ball is struck
- 4. Return to ready position

*Backhand Chop*



**CHOPPING THE LOOP**

Against a loop, you have to adjust for the extra topspin or your return will pop up or go off the end. Take the ball a little lower and have your racket a little less closed. You will need to contact the ball lower, so bend down low and bend your knees (see Figure 10.2). You may want to chop down more vigorously to overcome the spin, but do so smoothly. Contact should be more behind and less under the ball.



**Figure 10.2** Bend down low to chop the loop.

## Detecting Forehand and Backhand Chopping Errors

A chopper can be thought of as a machine. If well-oiled, a machine is flawless, and similarly, a chopper's defense must be flawless. It only takes a minor mistake for the machine to fail, and similarly, a chopper has to do everything correctly, or the shot falls apart. With most other shots, a player can do something incorrectly and still get away with it for a time (which leads to players not making necessary changes until the bad habits are ingrained). Choppers, however, have to be precise, or they can't even keep the ball in play. Fortunately, most chopping errors are fairly obvious and easy to correct.

### ERROR



1. The ball pops up.
2. The ball goes into the net
3. You can't react to the shot.
4. You're not using enough backspin.
5. Your backhand chop stroke is too short and jerky.
6. You're off balance.

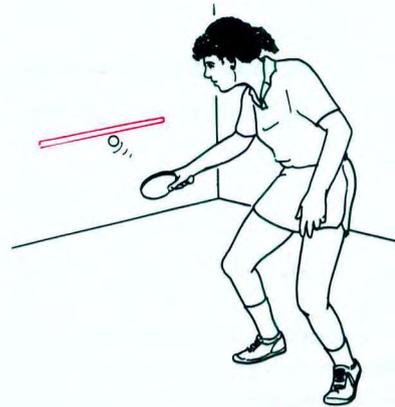
### CORRECTION

1. Close the racket, or let the ball drop more before contact. There may be more topspin on it than you think. Against heavy topspin, let the ball drop more and contact it more behind, less underneath.
2. Open the racket. There may not be as much topspin on the ball as you think.
3. You may be too close to the table. Back up and give yourself more time. Choppers typically return shots from 5 to 15 feet back.
4. Make sure you're grazing the ball. One option is to snap your wrist to increase spin, but reduce control. As you improve, snap your wrist more for extra spin.
5. Turn more sideways to allow room for your backswing, and take a longer backswing.
6. Move to the ball, don't reach.

## Chopping Drills

### 1. *Chopping Against a Wall*

Find a wall with a hard floor next to it. Drop a ball on the floor and chop it against the wall after it bounces. When the ball bounces back, chop it against the wall again. You might also draw a line on the wall 3 feet from the ground, the height of the net. Try to chop the ball a few inches above the line each time. This is an easy way to develop your chop without the uncertainties of an actual rally. Ten-time U.S. National Men's Champion Richard Miles, the best chopper in U.S. history (and one of the very best ever) developed his chop this way.



**Success Goal** = 30 consecutive forehand and 30 consecutive backhand chops

**Your Score** =

(#) \_\_\_\_\_ consecutive forehand chops

(#) \_\_\_\_\_ consecutive backhand chops

### 2. *Chopping Topspin Serve*

Have your partner serve topspin to your forehand. Chop it back. Your partner catches it and starts over. Then do the same with your backhand. This enables you to practice the shot without having to worry about the following shot. Make sure each shot is correct and precise—be a perfectionist.

**Success Goal** = 30 consecutive forehand and 30 consecutive backhand chops

**Your Score** =

(#) \_\_\_\_\_ consecutive forehand chops

(#) \_\_\_\_\_ consecutive backhand chops

### 3. *Chopping a Drive*

Have your partner drive with his forehand to your forehand. Chop the ball back. Then have your partner attack with his forehand to your backhand chop. (You can also have your partner attack with a backhand, but in actual match play, 90 percent of attacks against backspin—especially against choppers—are done with the forehand.)

**Success Goal** = 15 consecutive forehand and 15 consecutive backhand chops

**Your Score** =

(#) \_\_\_\_\_ consecutive forehand chops

(#) \_\_\_\_\_ consecutive backhand chops

### 4. *Forehand/Backhand Alternate Chopping*

Have your opponent drive with her forehand to your forehand side, then your backhand side. You alternate chopping forehands and backhands, using chopper's footwork. This lets you simulate the actual movements you would use against an opponent who attacks to both sides in a game.

**Success Goal** = 15 consecutive chops

**Your Score** = (#) \_\_\_\_\_ consecutive chops, alternating

### 5. *Random Chopping*

Have your opponent drive with her forehand to all parts of the table randomly. Chop with either your forehand or backhand. This is exactly what a chopper will face in a match against a strong attacker.

**Success Goal** = 15 consecutive chops

**Your Score** = (#) \_\_\_\_\_ consecutive chops

### 6. *Chopping the Loop*

Have your partner loop to your forehand. You chop and rally continues, all crosscourt. Then do the same with your backhand chop, with your partner attacking using his forehand into your backhand, crosscourt from his backhand side.

**Success Goal** = 10 consecutive chops against the loop, forehand and backhand

**Your Score** =

(#) \_\_\_\_\_ consecutive forehand chops

(#) \_\_\_\_\_ consecutive backhand chops

## 7. Chopping Game

Play games to 11 points where your partner serves topspin to your forehand. You chop crosscourt, and your partner attacks with forehand crosscourt, either hitting or looping. (No pushing allowed!) Rally continues this way, all crosscourt, until someone misses or hits to the wrong side.

**Success Goal** = Win at least half of the games

**Your Score** = (#) \_\_\_\_\_ games won, (#) \_\_\_\_\_ games lost

## 8. Chop and Push Game

Play games to 11 points where your partner alternates attacking and dropshotting to your forehand, which is how many players play choppers. You move in and out, chopping and pushing. If the drop shot goes high, smash. If you do attack in this game, you have to hit a winning shot on the first try, or your partner wins the point! This forces you to win on your chopping alone (which choppers must have confidence in to be successful), and it also reinforces the idea that when a chopper attacks, the game is won by surprise because the point must be won quickly, before the opponent recovers.

**Success Goal** = Win at least half of the games

**Your Score** = (#) \_\_\_\_\_ games won, (#) \_\_\_\_\_ games lost

## Chopping Keys to Success Checklist

The most important thing for a chopper to learn is confidence. Develop precise chopping strokes and footwork, and then your confidence will grow. Choppers who really believe they can chop back more balls than opponents can attack have already very nearly won.

Have your instructor or practice partner verify that you're doing both the forehand and back-

hand strokes properly, according to the Keys to Success checklist (see Figure 10.1). Have them be perfectionists—get the stroke down perfectly. Pay particular attention to bending at the knees, especially for the backhand, and adjusting for different spins.