

## Step 11 Lobbing: How to Return Smashes

Lobbing is a totally defensive shot done against a smash. A good lob (which, done by the best players, is basically a high loop) can go 15 feet or more in the air, has lots of topspin or sidespin, and lands deep on the table. (Some players lob lower but with more spin.) The ball then bounces outward and high, and it might not come down until it's 10 feet past the table! This makes it difficult to smash, since the far side of the table is so far away and the ball has so much spin. If it's smashed, the lobber has a lot of time to react because the shot is coming from so far away. However, good players rarely miss smashes, and even the best lobbers almost always lose more points than they win lobbing. It is recommended that lobbing be kept to a minimum, at least if you want to win! But lobbing is fun, so don't restrict it too much.

Lobbing is similar to chopping as far as winning points. There are three ways to win a point when lobbing:

- *Outlasting an opponent.* Simply lob every drive back until the opponent makes an error.
- *Forcing an error.* Mix up spins or put so much spin on the ball that the opponent makes a mistake.
- *Attacking.* Look for every chance to counter-attack.

Many players lose points lobbing because they lob balls they shouldn't. In this step you will learn how to lob as well as how to smash or smother kill against a lob. Remember, only lob when forced to—when your opponent is smashing!

### WHY IS LOBBING IMPORTANT?

Between players of roughly equal levels, most games are decided by three or fewer points. Therefore, scoring even one extra point in a game means you're a third of the way toward winning it! So even if you only score one or two points each game by lobbing, it's worth it. After all, what have you got to lose? You only lob when the opponent makes a strong smash, so if you don't lob, you're going to lose the point anyway. Besides, lobbing is the most fun part of the game!

### EXECUTING THE LOB

On the forehand lob, your right foot should go back slightly, and your upper body should rotate to the right; on the backhand, do the reverse. On all lobs, bend your knees and drop the racket low (see Figure 11.1, a-d).

Open the racket slightly and get it underneath the incoming ball. Stroke mostly upward, using the same stroke you learned when looping forehands and backhands (Step 8). A lob is essentially a high loop.

If you're in trouble, you may not be able to do the stroke as explained in the looping section. After all, the incoming ball is a smash! Even though you might be rushed, try to do the entire stroke; improvise when necessary. Make sure to hit the ball high in the air with topspin. By grazing the far side of the ball (especially on the forehand side), you can also produce a sidespin that will give many players trouble.

**Figure 11.1 Keys to Success:  
Forehand and Backhand Lobs**

**Preparation  
Phase**

*Forehand Lob*

*Backhand Lob*



- \_\_\_ 1. In ready position, about 15 to 25 feet from table
- \_\_\_ 2. Arm relaxed
- \_\_\_ 3. Move into position as opponent hits ball:

- a. Rotate hips and waist to the right \_\_\_
- b. Bring right foot back \_\_\_

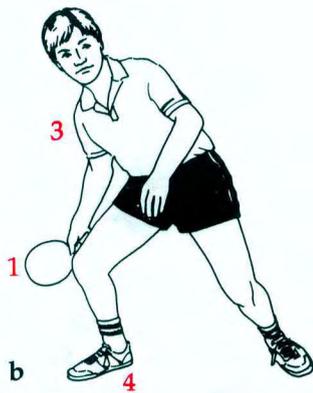
- a. Rotate hips and waist to the left \_\_\_
- b. Bring left foot back \_\_\_

**Execution  
Phase**

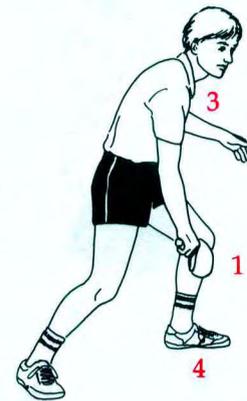
**Backswing**

*Forehand Lob*

*Backhand Lob*

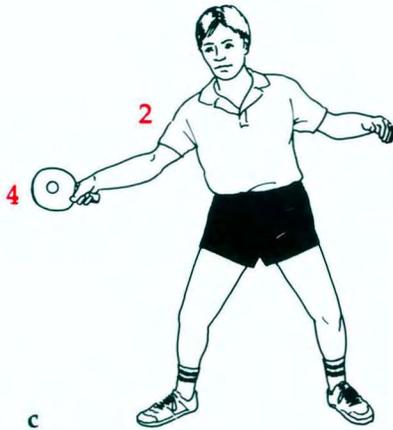


- \_\_\_ 1. Drop arm low
- \_\_\_ 2. Arm straight
- \_\_\_ 3. Drop right shoulder, especially on forehand
- \_\_\_ 4. Most weight shifts to back foot

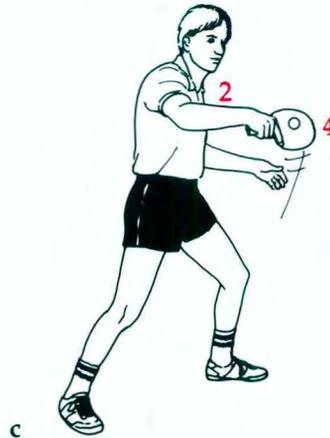


**Forward Swing**

*Forehand Lob*



*Backhand Lob*



- \_\_\_ 1. Push off with legs
- \_\_\_ 2. Stroke with elbow and shoulder
- \_\_\_ 3. Stroke mostly upward
- \_\_\_ 4. Graze back bottom of ball at contact
- \_\_\_ 5. Contact ball on drop, well away from table
- \_\_\_ 6. Hit ball high into air with topspin
- \_\_\_ 7. Lob should land deep on table

**Follow-Through Phase**

*Forehand Lob*



- \_\_\_ 1. Follow through up naturally
- \_\_\_ 2. Return to ready position

*Backhand Lob*



## Detecting Forehand and Backhand Lobbing Errors

Lobbing is a very physical shot that requires fast footwork and good reflexes. However, by using the correct techniques and avoiding the following errors, you should be able to execute a good lob—and, with practice, perhaps become a very good lobber!

### ERROR



1. The ball goes off the end.
2. You're not getting enough topspin on your lobs.
3. You're unable to react to smashes.

### CORRECTION

1. Hold the racket less firmly. Open the racket and lob higher so the incoming ball's speed dissipates into upward motion. Make sure you aren't too close to the table.
2. Make sure you're grazing the ball at contact. A spinless lob is not nearly as effective as a topspinning one.
3. Make sure you aren't too close to the table. Try not to move too soon—wait until your opponent is committed to a direction. Be light on your feet so you can react quickly. The instant your opponent strikes the ball, move!

### TOPSPIN DEFENSE

An advanced version of lobbing is called "topspin defense." Topspin defense is a mixture of looping and lobbing. Instead of lobbing the ball high in the air, use a looping motion and try to topspin the ball without letting it get too high—no more than 4 to 6 feet above the net, preferably lower. Because of the flatter trajectory, and because of the topspin, the ball will take a fast hop when it hits the table, with a lower bounce. This will force many mistakes, and a slow opponent might even have to block if caught out of position. Control is more important on this shot than extreme topspin.

### SMASHING THE LOB

Some players have very good smashes and yet have great difficulty when faced with a high, spinny lob. On the other hand, many players smash poorly but when faced with a lob have no problem. It's all a matter of correct technique. When your opponent smashes, you will always

smash with your forehand. If a ball bounces higher than your head, it can be very difficult to smash it with the backhand, but relatively easy with the forehand. Because the ball is traveling very high, it will take longer to reach your side of the table, thereby giving you more time to prepare for a forehand smash.

There are two common ways to kill a lob. First, there is the regular smash of lob. This is similar to a regular smash but there are differences. The regular smash you learned earlier was geared toward smashing balls that landed below eye level. When the ball goes much higher, as it does in a lob, you have to raise your arms higher. This could throw you off balance if you don't adjust. Also, when you smash a lob, you have more time to put full power into the smash. This is important because a lobber stands far from the table and has more time to return any hit except a hard smash.

Another common way to kill a lob is the smother kill. This is like a regular smash except the ball is taken right off the bounce. (See Step 3, Forehand

Smash.) It's difficult to do consistently but is nearly unreturnable. A smother kill should be done only against a ball that lands short on the table, especially if it has little spin.

### Smash Against the Lob

Start by judging exactly where and how deep the ball will land and how much spin it has. Get into position. If you're confident that you have read the ball correctly, stay close to the table and take the ball on the rise. Otherwise, step back and take the ball as it drops.

Reading spin against a lob can be tricky at first. Watch to see if your opponent grazed the ball, or simply hit it straight on. Also, watch to see how the ball curves in flight; if it has spin, it will curve. If the ball has topspin, it will curve down. If it has sidespin, it will curve sideways. Against topspin, aim lower, and be ready for the ball to jump fast

when it hits the table. Against sidespin, aim to the side, and be ready for the ball to jump to the side when it hits the table.

Stand sideways, with your right foot back. Shift your weight to the back foot; drop your playing arm and shoulder. Rotate your upper body back (see Figure 11.2a). Then bring your playing arm back up (see Figure 11.2b).

Push off your back foot and drive your upper body forward. Snap your elbow forward. Your playing arm will move in a continuous half-circle up and over your head, and over the contact point (see Figure 11.2c). Your right foot should lift off the ground just before you contact the ball. Contact the ball just above eye level, either on the way up or on the way down. Contact should generally be very flat, but if the ball is near the net, you can add chop or sidespin to your shot to make it harder to return. Follow through naturally, with your body rotating almost 180 degrees (see Figure 11.2d).

## Figure 11.2 Keys to Success: Smashing Lobs

### Preparation Phase

1. Relax arm \_\_\_\_
2. Judge depth and spin of lob \_\_\_\_
3. Move into position, several feet from table \_\_\_\_
4. Right foot back \_\_\_\_
5. Drop playing arm and shoulder \_\_\_\_



### Execution Phase

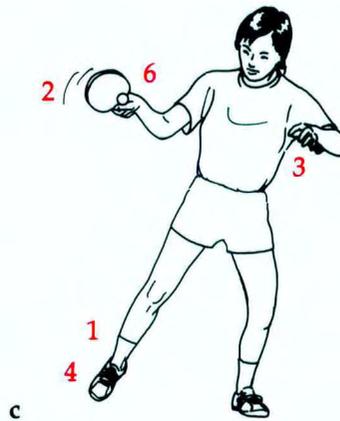
#### Backswing

1. Rotate upper body back \_\_\_\_



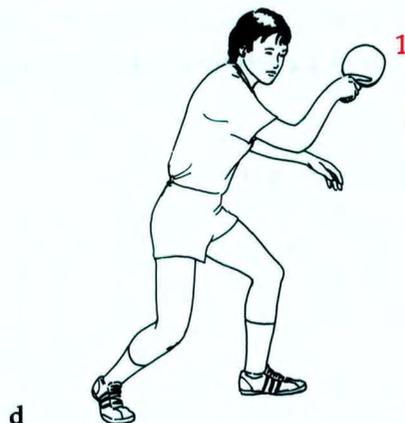
#### Forward Swing

1. Push off of back foot \_\_\_\_
2. Raise arm \_\_\_\_
3. Throw upper body into shot \_\_\_\_
4. Right foot lifts up \_\_\_\_
5. Snap arm through ball \_\_\_\_
6. Contact ball on rise below eye level, or just above eye level on drop \_\_\_\_



#### Follow-Through Phase

1. Follow through naturally \_\_\_\_
2. Return to ready position \_\_\_\_



### Smother Kill Against the Lob

A smother kill is just like a normal forehand, except the ball is taken just after the bounce. However, the timing is far more tricky, so you must make sure to do it just right, or you'll miss it. Watch the ball closely so that you can judge where and how fast it will bounce. A smother kill should usually only be done against a lob that lands very short. Stand close to the table and contact the ball right after it hits the table (see Figure 11.3).



**Figure 11.3** A smother kill requires accurate timing.

### Exhibition Lobs

Try some exhibition lobs with or without a partner: Lob while sitting in a chair, lob with your back turned (turn back at the last minute), smash your own lob (lob high, and run like heck to the other side of the table!) or eat a candy bar while lobbing, throw

the wrapper over your shoulder and countersmash! Half the trick, however, is getting a partner who can smash accurately. Your partner should smash to a prearranged spot, not too hard, and no smother killing.

## Detecting Smashing of Lobs Errors

Smashing lobs is quite different than most other smashes, and many players with great smashes have difficulty in smashing lobs. Check to make sure you aren't making any of the mistakes below, and you should develop an effective smash against lob.

### ERROR



1. The ball goes into the net or off the end.
2. You're not getting enough power.
3. You're inconsistent.

### CORRECTION

1. Read the spin and adjust the racket angle.
2. Make sure to push off your back leg, throw your upper body into the shot and snap your arm. Accelerate through the shot.
3. Get in position. Don't get too close to the table. Relax your muscles, and watch the ball. Make sure to drop your arm at the start of the stroke or you'll be off balance. Don't smother kill unless the ball lands near the net.

## Lobbing Drills

### 1. Lob Against Bounced Ball

Stand about 15 feet from the table. Drop the ball on the floor so that it bounces to waist height. Lob the ball on the table. Try to put topspin on the lob. The ball should go at least 10 to 15 feet in the air. This is a good way to get the lob form right, without having to react to a smash.

**Success Goal** = 15 consecutive lobs from a bounced ball, both forehand and backhand

**Your Score** =

(#) \_\_\_\_\_ consecutive forehand lobs

(#) \_\_\_\_\_ consecutive backhand lobs

### 2. Lob Against Smash

Have your partner smash (not too hard at first) to your forehand. Lob the ball. Then do the same with your backhand.

**Success Goal** = 5 consecutive forehand and 5 consecutive backhand lobs

**Your Score** =

(#) \_\_\_\_\_ consecutive forehand lobs

(#) \_\_\_\_\_ consecutive backhand lobs

### 3. Lob Against Random Smash

Have your partner smash (not too hard at first) randomly to any side. Lob the ball.

**Success Goal** = 5 consecutive lobs, forehand or backhand

**Your Score** = (#) \_\_\_\_\_ consecutive lobs, forehand or backhand

#### **4. Smash Against Lob**

Have your partner lob. Smash, going for consistency first and then speed as you get consistent.

**Success Goal** = 10 consecutive smashes against lob

**Your Score** = (#) \_\_\_\_\_ consecutive smashes against lob

#### **5. Lob Game**

Play a lob game with the following rules. Your partner spots you 10 points in a game to 21. You start each rally from 15 feet or so from table, and serve a lob. (Just toss the ball up and lob it.) Keep the serve deep! Your partner smashes to forehand over and over, and you lob. Then do the same, with your partner smashing to your backhand. Then repeat, with partner lobbing this time.

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

**Your Score** =

- (#) \_\_\_\_\_ games won lobbing
- (#) \_\_\_\_\_ games lost lobbing
- (#) \_\_\_\_\_ games won smashing
- (#) \_\_\_\_\_ games lost smashing

#### **6. Smother Kills**

Have your partner lob. Smash until the returned lob lands short, then smother kill.

**Success Goal** = 5 consecutive successful smother kill attempts (not necessarily on consecutive shots)

**Your Score** = (#) \_\_\_\_\_ consecutive successful smother kills

#### **7. Countersmash**

Have your partner smash to one side while you lob. When you see a chance, countersmash. The most important thing to look for when deciding when to countersmash is whether you're in position or not. Mostly countersmash with forehand.

**Success Goal** = 10 countersmashes

**Your Score** = (#) \_\_\_\_\_ countersmashes

## 8. Group Lob Game

Get three or more players together. One person is the lobber, one person is the hitter, the rest get in a line. The lobber lobs, and the hitter smashes. If the lobber scores, the next person in line takes the place of the hitter, and the lobber gets one point. If the hitter scores, she becomes the lobber. (You can only score when you're the lobber.) Game is to 11 or 21 points, with everyone competing against everyone else. The lobber has the option of countersmashing, but the countersmash has to win on one shot—if returned, the lobber loses the point immediately. When a lobber successfully countersmashes, the player who lost the point gets a point taken away from his score! This helps reinforce the idea that when smashing against a lob, a player shouldn't give the lobber a chance to countersmash—smash mostly to the backhand.

**Success Goal** = Win at least one of the games played

**Your Score** = (#) \_\_\_\_\_ games won in group lob game

## Lobbing Keys to Success Checklists

Have your instructor or practice partner verify with the Keys to Success checklist (see Figure 11.1) that you're doing both the forehand and backhand lob properly. Have them verify that you're not just "getting it back." Have them pay particu-

lar attention to depth and spin of your shot. Also have them use the Keys to Success checklist (see Figure 11.2) to check that you're smashing lobs correctly.