

Step 9 Flipping: How to Attack Short Balls

The flip is an aggressive return of a short ball—a ball that would land on your side of the table twice if given the chance. It's most often used against short serves and short pushes. On the backhand side, the flip is basically the same as a backhand drive, but on the forehand it's different.

A flip can be done either crosscourt, down the line, or to the middle. Flip to your opponent's weaker side most of the time (usually down the line to the backhand), but usually go crosscourt whenever you go for a very aggressive flip (so you'll have more margin for error). An aggressive flip to a player's middle (elbow) is also very effective, because your opponent may have trouble deciding whether to return with a forehand or a backhand.

A flip is done against a ball that has landed short. If it lands short on the forehand side, it can be awkward to reach. For this shot, you'll also need to learn stepping-in footwork.

WHY IS THE FLIP IMPORTANT?

You could use a normal forehand drive against a short ball to the forehand, but it would be awkward because the table is in the way. A flip is less awkward and more deceptive. But don't overuse the flip; just the threat of it makes your other returns more effective. Too many flips and your opponent gets used to them.

EXECUTING THE FLIP

When your opponent serves or pushes short, you'll have to step in to flip. If you reach over the table you'll be off balance and have trouble controlling the shot, especially if you're short. Even tall players have to step in, or they too will not hit their best shot. Most players have little trouble reaching a ball short to their backhand but find it very awkward to deal with the short one to the forehand unless they step in.

If you're a step or so away from the table, step forward first with your left leg, getting it close to the endline. If you're already close, don't move the left leg. The longer your legs are, the easier stepping in will be.

Step in with your right leg under the table and toward the ball. Get the leg as far under the table as you can comfortably. Most of your weight should now be on the right foot (see Figure 9.1a). Reach over the table with the racket, with your body facing where the contact will be. Against backspin, cock your wrist down and open the racket; otherwise, cock your wrist straight back and keep the racket perpendicular to the floor. Bring the racket to a position just behind the contact point (see Figure 9.1b).

Bring the racket forward with your elbow. Then snap your wrist forward (and slightly up against backspin). Your wrist should rotate at contact, which closes the racket some. Contact should be an upward grazing motion against backspin for control, or straight through and forward against topspin or for extra speed (see Figure 9.1, c and d). The stroke against backspin and topspin is essentially the same, but you should open your racket more and stroke slightly up against backspin.

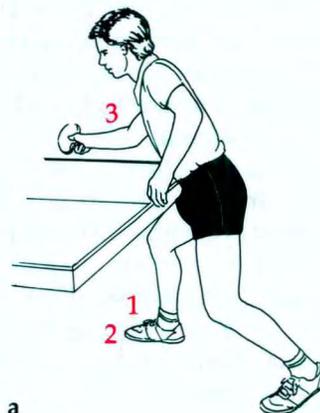
Contact should be on the back bottom of the ball against backspin, on the back or top back of the ball against other spins. Make sure to contact the ball directly opposite where you want it to go. When flipping, make sure to flip to wide angles—either crosscourt at a wide angle or straight down the line (unless you go after your opponent's middle). Step back quickly, and return to ready position.

If the ball you're flipping is high, "flip kill" it. This is just a flip at full power. Use both wrist and elbow snap for power, and go crosscourt so you'll have more room.

Figure 9.1 Keys to Success: Forehand Flipping

Preparation Phase

1. Step right foot under table ____
2. Weight goes to right foot ____
3. Upper body faces ball ____

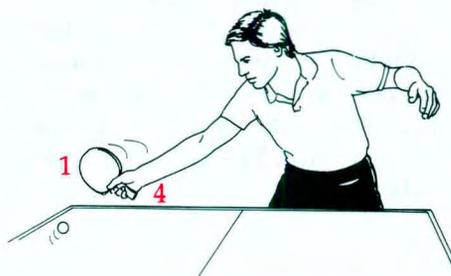


a

Execution Phase

Backswing

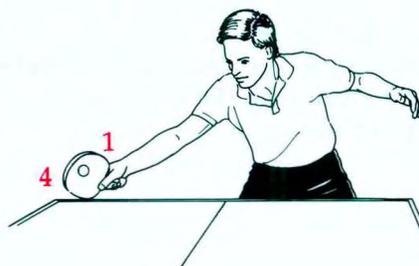
1. Bring racket just behind ball ____
2. Against backspin, open racket ____
3. Against topspin, racket should be straight ____
4. Tilt wrist backward ____



b

Forward Swing

1. Snap wrist and elbow ____
2. Against backspin, stroke slightly upward with grazing motion, rotating racket around ball ____
3. Against topspin or for more speed, contact straight on ____
4. Contact at top of bounce or earlier ____
5. Ball should go to very wide forehand or down line, or at opponent's middle ____



c

Follow-Through Phase

1. Follow through naturally, forward ____
2. Step back quickly into ready position ____



Detecting Flipping Errors

Flipping is a simple motion, with only a few possible errors. Make sure you step in properly, get your racket into position, and make the right type of contact. The rest is all timing.

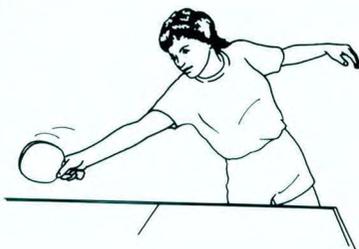
ERROR



1. The ball goes into the net when flipping against backspin.
2. The ball goes off the end when flipping against topspin.
3. You have difficulty flipping down the line.
4. You're off balance.

CORRECTION

1. Open your racket and stroke upward, topspinning the ball. Get racket under the ball, especially against heavy backspin.
2. Close your racket and make sure you aren't stroking upward—stroke straight forward.
3. Make sure your upper body faces the ball. Bring the wrist backward and contact the back of the ball, not the right side.
4. Make sure to step in.



Flipping Drills

1. Stepping-In Footwork

Put your racket on the table on your forehand side near the net. Then, using stepping-in footwork, reach in and pick it up. Step back quickly; repeat, this time putting the racket back. Make sure to stay balanced. This simulates the movement you'll make when you reach in to flip a short ball to the forehand.

Success Goal = Step in and out quickly 20 times correctly

Your Score = (#) _____ correct repetitions

2. Forehand Flip

Have your partner serve short no-spin serves to your forehand. Flip the ball crosscourt, then down the line. Your partner catches the ball and serves again. Hit the right side of the ball to flip to the left (crosscourt), and hit the back of the ball to go to the right (down the line). This teaches you the proper racket angles for going down both lines, without having to adjust for spin.

Success Goal = 15 consecutive flips down each line

Your Score =

(#) _____ consecutive flips crosscourt

(#) _____ consecutive flips down the line

3. Flipping Topspin and Backspin

Have your partner serve first topspin and then backspin serves short to your forehand. Flip the ball. Your partner catches the ball and serves again. Now you're beginning to learn to adjust to different spins by adjusting your racket angle and stroke.

Success Goal = Against topspin, 15 consecutive flips both crosscourt and down the line; against backspin, the same

Your Score =

a. Against topspin

(#) _____ consecutive flips crosscourt

(#) _____ consecutive flips down the line

b. Against backspin

(#) _____ consecutive flips crosscourt

(#) _____ consecutive flips down the line

4. Alternate Flip and Short Push

Your partner serves short backspin to your forehand. You alternate flipping and short push. Your partner catches the ball and serves again. This gives you a double threat: Your opponent has to be ready for a flip that goes deep or a push that goes short—and it's tricky guarding against both these shots.

Success Goal = 20 successful consecutive returns, alternating between short push and flip

Your Score = (#) _____ successful consecutive returns, alternating between short push and flip

5. Attack After Flip

Your partner serves short to your forehand. You flip crosscourt and get back into position quickly. Your partner counterdrives or blocks back to your forehand. You attack crosscourt against your partner's forehand block for the rest of the rally. This is good practice for following up your flip with an attack. Because a flip brings you over the table, it isn't always easy to recover for the next shot.

Success Goal = 10 consecutive attacking shots, starting against a flip

Your Score = (#) _____ consecutive loops, starting against a flip

6. Flip and Attack

Play games to 11 points where your partner always serves short to your forehand, mixing up the spin. Flip anywhere, and play out the point. This is similar to what you will face in a real match.

Success Goal = Win at least half of the games played

Your Score = (#) _____ games won, (#) _____ games lost

7. Flip Against Short Push Game

Play games to 11 points where you serve short backspin anywhere. Your partner pushes short anywhere. You attack with either a forehand flip or a backhand drive, depending on where your partner's push is. Play out the point. In a match situation, the player who attacks first (and most effectively) usually wins.

Success Goal = Win at least half of the games played

Your Score = (#) _____ games won, (#) _____ games lost

8. Flip or Loop Game

Play games to 11 points with the following rules. You serve short backspin. Your partner pushes either short to forehand or long anywhere. You either flip forehand or loop (or drive) either backhand or forehand. Play out the point.

Success Goal = Win at least half of the games played

Your Score = (#) _____ games won, (#) _____ games lost

9. Flip Kill

You serve short backspin. Your partner pushes short to your forehand, slightly high. You flip kill crosscourt. This drill teaches you how to kill a ball that is high, but short on your forehand side. If you learn this well, your opponent will think twice about going short to your forehand.

Success Goal = 10 consecutive flip kills

Your Score = (#) _____ consecutive flip kills

Flipping Keys to Success Checklist

Stepping in is one of the more overlooked aspects of executing the flip. Remember to step well under the table so that you are balanced as you make the shot. The shot itself should be short and placed down both lines, quick off the bounce. Placement is important, so make sure you can flip the ball to either wide corner. You don't want your opponent to have time to react!

To help you perfect your flip, have your instructor or practice partner verify with the Keys

to Success checklist (see Figure 9.1) that you're doing the forehand flip correctly. Have them pay particular attention to the way you step in and to your balance during the shot. Also have them critique your placement—make sure your shots go to wide angles, not to the middle of the table, unless done intentionally.