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

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he 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.

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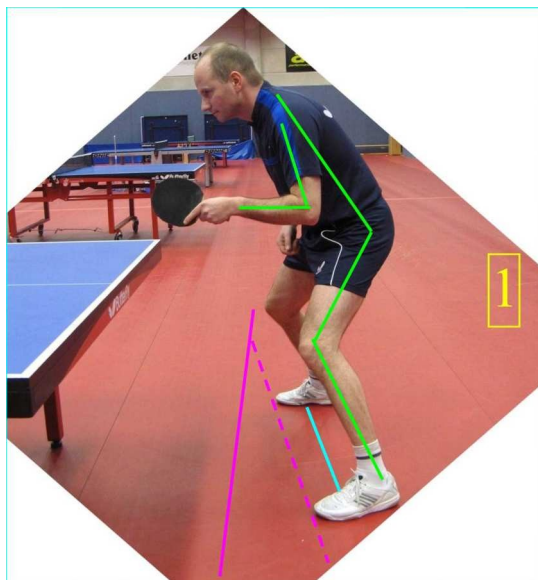
he basic position is very individual. There are some players like Timo Boll who are standing very low down others stand very far in the backhand side and others again in the middle of the table. Even though there are some basic points which every player should pay attention to.

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ay 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.

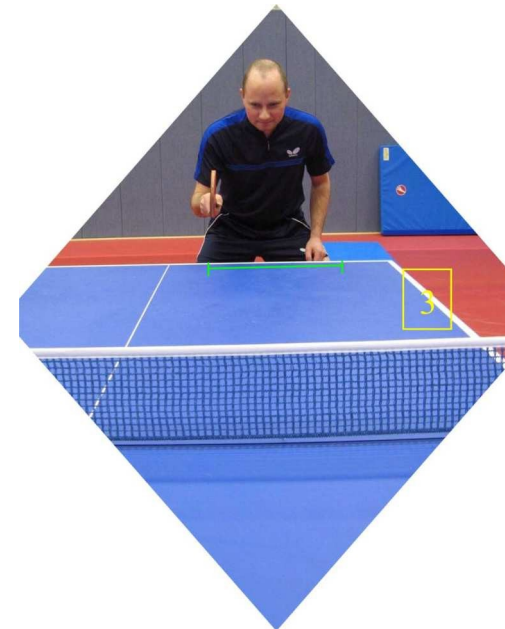
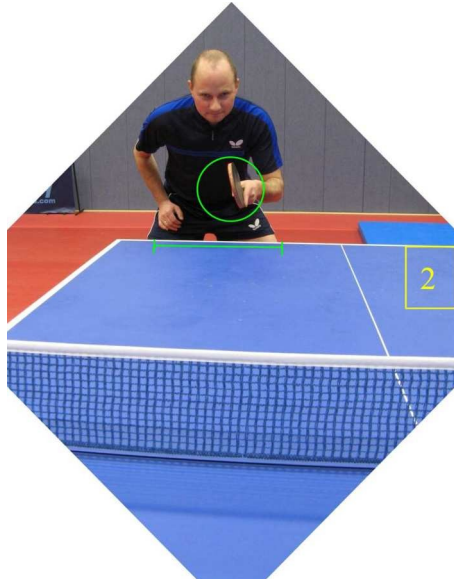
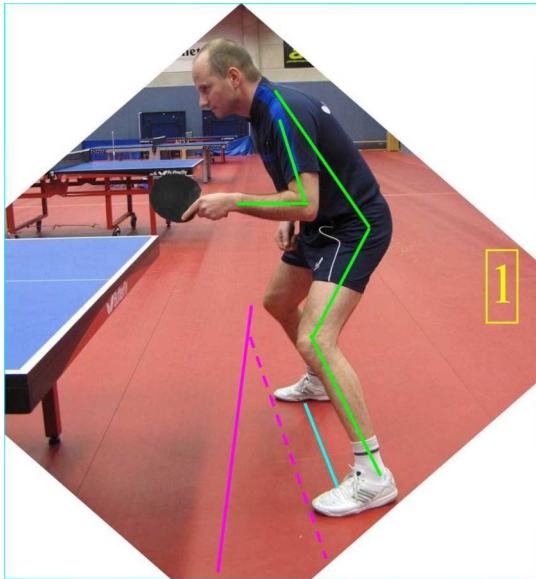
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How do I hold my bat in the basic position? (Pictures 1, 2 and 3)

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.



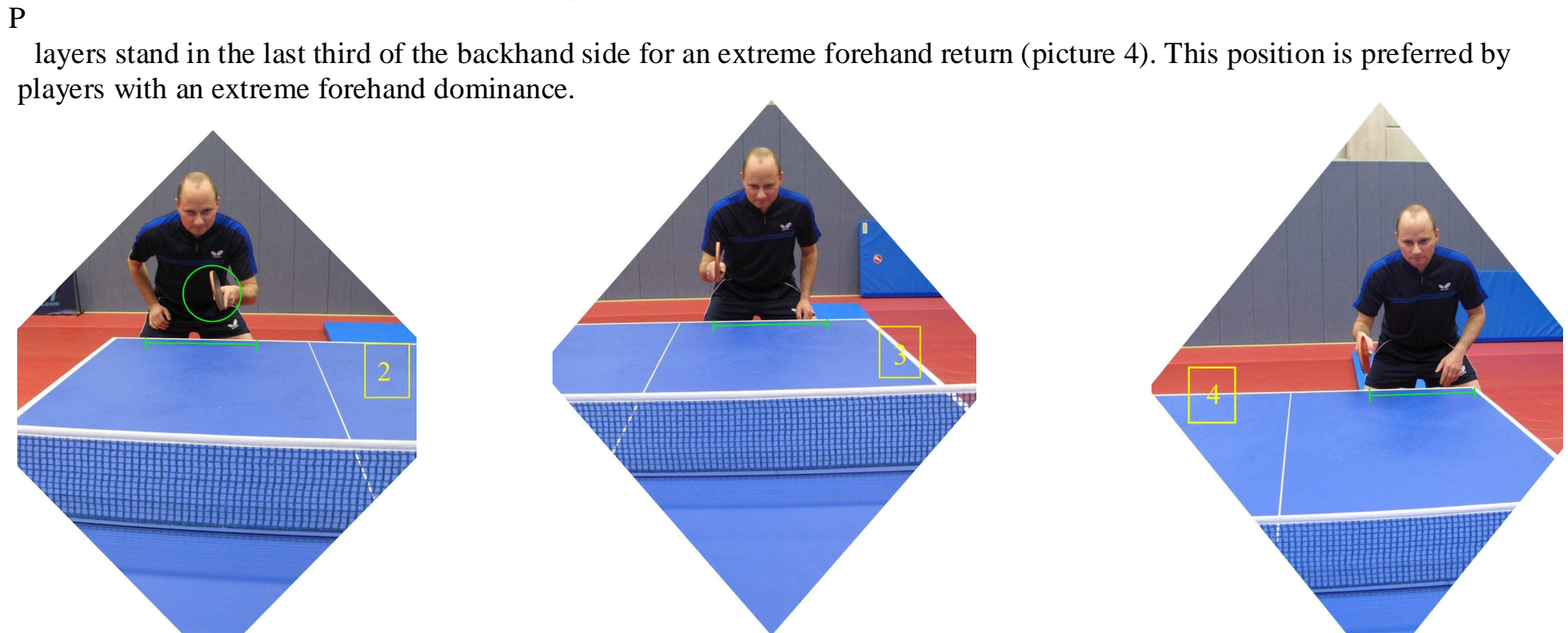
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here do I take up my basic position? (Pictures 2, 3, 4, 5a-c)

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.

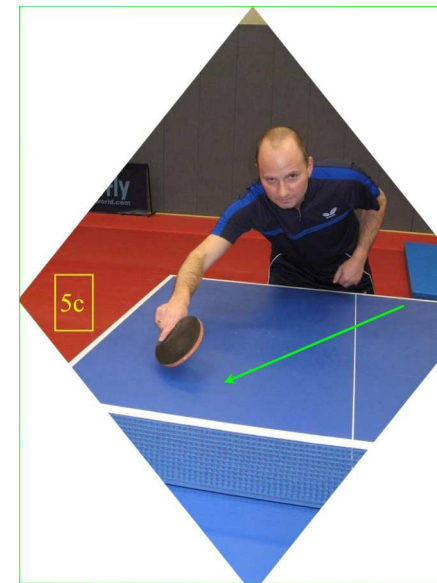
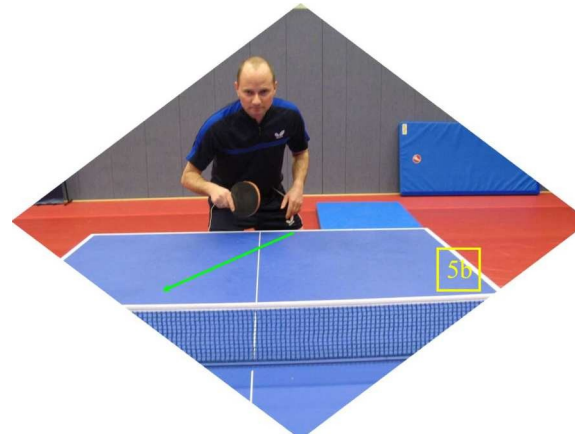
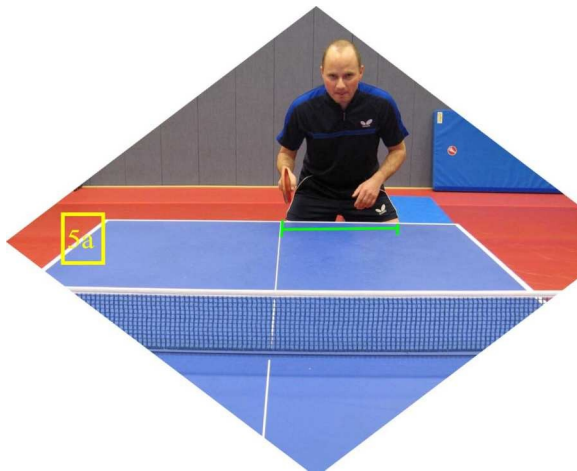


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hen there are players like Dimitrij Ovtcharov who are standing more centrally in the middle of the table to cover a bigger part of the table with his dangerous backhand return (5a, b, c). He is orientated more to the middle of the table to use his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



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W **hich distance to the table should I have in the basic position? (Picture 6)**

W hen 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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T **echnique 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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ictures 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.

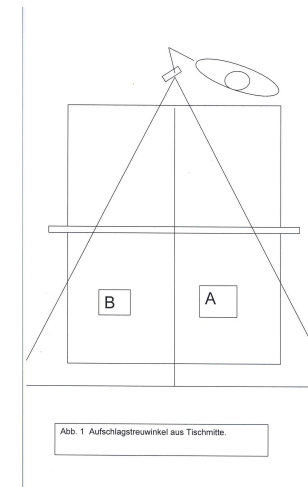
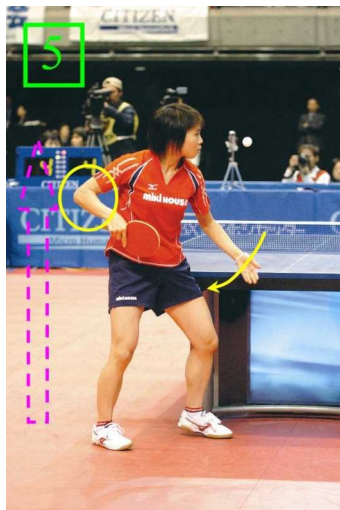


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ictures 5-7 – main phase: Now Sayaka pulls her bat backwards and up as far as possible (pictures 5,6). She does not change her grip like it is normally done with forehand sidespin serves. The high position of the elbow on picture 6 shows this clearly. 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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ictures 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.

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onclusion: 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.

