

## Block variations

### Part I: The passive backhand block

The block is a stroke technique which must be explained tactically first. In the early times of a forehand topspin about the middle of the sixties of the previous century the, block was discovered as an answer to the new developed topspin. The coming ball with topspin was met by the bat with a more or less closed angle when it was still rising above the table. Using the speed and rotational energy of the ball it was returned accordingly fast or slow. This basic block – the passive block – is still an important variety of the block. Especially the new-beginners gets the opportunity to learn the necessary feeling for blocking a ball. The passive „holding“ block is also used at top level in situations when the player runs out of time to to answer the opponent's spin ball actively. Being under time pressure he is trying to get his bat somehow to the ball and block it. Sometimes the return is not at all passive and very fast depending on the arriving ball and their playing material. Therefore the word „passive“ does not express the tactical meaning of the stroke but the moving aspect. The passive block is no active stroke movement. It is right the opposite the bat is only put into the right place. That makes the difference from a passive block to all other block varieties:

- the active counter block
- the counter spin block
- the backspin block
- the sidespin block

We will look at the counter and spin block in the following issues. Now we are concentrating on the passive backhand block which is demonstrated by a young Japanese national player. The 19 year old attacking player ranked number 10 in the U21 and number 114 in the men's World Ranking List. He is a promising talent with a lot of feeling for the ball.

### Die Technik im Überblick



# 18 Technique tips

The classical passive block is not divided into three phases – the starting phase and the backswing are missing - , therefore we concentrate on the moment of making contact with the ball and the accompanying movement. The pictures 1 (from the side) and 6 (from the front) show Kenji ready for returning the ball. He has the typical low basic position: feet parallel and a little bit more than shoulder wide apart, ankle, knee and hips bent. This way he has the optimal balance which enables him to bring his upper body forward and above the ball. The shoulder of the playing arm is moved slightly forward and the bat angle is closed.



Pictures 2 and 7 show Kenji just before making contact with the ball.

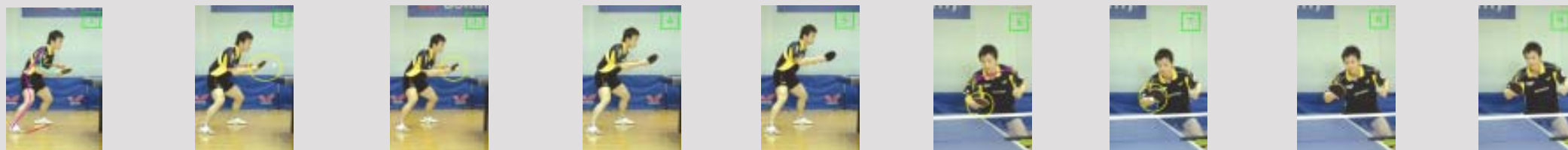


On picture 3 he is making contact with the ball.



# 19 Technique tips

If we look at the following pictures 4/5 and 8/9 after hitting the ball and compare these with 2/3 and 7 we can see that there is hardly any movement forward and up and he basically only holds the bat to meet the ball. Kenji hits the ball exactly in front of his body when the ball is still rising. Kenji lowers his bodyweight slightly towards the contact point and straightens it straight afterwards again (compare pictures 1-5 and 6-7). By doing this he has an even better position when making contact with the ball.





## 20 Technique tips

In comparison to other stroke techniques the passive block might look easy. This impression is deceiving, because the passive block demands the correct evaluation of the coming ball concerning rotation, placement and speed. The player must adjust the angle of the bat accordingly (more closed with a lot of spin, less closed with less spin). The feeling for the correct bat angle is important for the passive block: ball feeling pure. Therefore it is a basic stroke which is always used in certain game situations, especially in emergencies.

Let's have a look at the three pictures with typical mistakes which always occur more or less in this manner. They also apply for all the other block variations. Optimally the player is supposed to hit the ball right in front of his body (YES – yellow triangle). Kenji shows us two mistakes. At first he has his elbow up too high. Then it is difficult to find the right bat angle. Secondly we see exactly the opposite: Kenji has moved the elbow too close to the body. Now it is even more difficult to find the right angle and an optimal stroke position.

The second YES picture is stressing once more the optimal position of the body when making contact with the ball. The player shouldn't be too close to the table and not take the ball too early, that means not straight after the ball bounces but when the ball is rising. Let's have a look at the picture. Kenji is standing much too upright and has no optimal angle at the elbow of his playing arm. It will also be very difficult to achieve the right bat angle from this position.

