

### Block-Variations Part IV:

#### The active forehand spin block in comparison with the forehand counter topspin away from the table

In the last three Butterfly News we looked closely at the passive backhand and forehand block as well as the active backhand block. At the end of the block series we are dealing with the active forehand spin block. Again the 19 year old national player Kenji Matsudaira demonstrates this technique perfectly.

As a reminder: the main difference between the active and the passive block is that the active block in opposite to the passive block includes an active stroke movement to accelerate the ball actively. This is achieved by two possibilities to make contact with the ball:

- a counter or kick movement, which means the ball is hit more centrally (little spin)
- a spin movement, which means the ball is hit on the side (a lot of spin)

Both varieties – the counter and the spin variety – are very similar in point of view of the stroke movement. From the outside a difference between the active forehand block and the forehand counter hit is hardly noticeable. That applies in the same way for the spin block in this issue. Basically it is decided at the moment of making contact with the ball if the counter or spin variety is used. When using spin, the ball is hit more on the side and the player accelerates more from the forearm and wrist. This bat angle is closed. When using the counter block, the ball is hit more centrally and pushed down more with the kick block the wrist is used.

Let's have a look at Kenji's active spin block from three perspectives. Afterwards we show the forehand counter topspin away from the table and then explain the topspin principle of the spin block at the table.

Picture 1 – basic position: At the beginning of the stroke Kenji is standing slightly square and open to the forehand side at the table. The legs are more than shoulder wide apart. His distance to the table is not too close and about half a metre away from the table. His upper body is bent slightly forward. The playing arm is bent at a right angle and is in front of the body. The wrist is slightly bent down so that the head of the bat is pointing forward.



# 10 Technique tips

Pictures 2-3, 6-7, 9 – starting movement: From this square basic position Kenji turns his upper body at the hips sideways and backwards for the stroke. This becomes very clear from the bird's eye perspective (picture 9). Simultaneously Kenji lowers his main body weight by bending his knees and takes his bat backwards. A comparison between pictures 2 and 3 shows his lower position clearly. The body weight is more on the right leg. Also the frontal perspective (see pictures 6 and 7) shows the lowering of the body weight. Picture 7 shows also the sideways rotation of the upper body.



# 11 Technique tips

Picture 4 – main phase and contact with the ball: The contact with the ball can only be seen from the sideways perspective. The ball has just left Kenji's bat. If you compare pictures 3, 4 and 5 you can see the straight line of the stroke which is actually quite short. In certain game situation it might be even shorter. The bat angle is much closed and the ball is hit while it is rising. The speed of the arm movement is very high to turn around the topspin of the coming ball. The stroke movement while hitting the ball is only slightly supported by raising the upper body and its turning inwards at the hips. That is the reason why there is no great shifting of weight onto the left leg in the backswing.

Pictures 5, 8 – backswing: From both the frontal and side perspective we recognize that Kenji does not shift his weight a lot from the right to the left foot. His bat also remains on the right hand side of the head and does not follow through to the left like after a topspin. From this we can draw the conclusion that the forehand spin block or counter topspin is played mostly with the playing arm. This demands a lot of timing and feeling for the ball.



## 12 Technique tips

Now a comparison with the topspin from half distance is useful (pictures 11-15). The following differences between a forehand counter topspin close to the table and away from the table can be noticed:

- starting phase – picture 11-13: longer and lower starting movement
- main phase – picture 14: longer stroke distance, more body movement (legs and upper body), making contact with the ball later because of the longer distance to the table
- backswing – picture 15: clear shifting of weight to the left leg and turning of the upper body at the hips to the left

Conclusion: Whatever name we give to the active spin block which is played early or above the table it is a kind of „mini“ topspin which demands a lot of feeling. Therefore many talk about an early counter topspin. In the end it is important that the ball must be hit on the side with a lot of speed with the arm. Speed and spin of the ball must be judged accurately so that the spin block may be successful.

