



Doubles - Shortcut To Golds

Needless to say how important doubles games are. They are played in team events, account for half of the official Olympic table tennis golds. In WTTC, three of the seven events are doubles. While singles require pure all-round abilities, doubles are more tactics based. The nature of it offers better possibilities for players of lesser individual abilities to win games at all levels. Your singles ranking could be far lower than that of your doubles.

The characteristics of doubles

1. Co-operation and understanding between partners account for success. While performing on your bit, you have the responsibility to create opportunities for your partner. Remember not to blame your partner at anytime, during either training or match.
2. Make effective use of technical and tactic advantages of both players to attack opponent's weakness; shield partner's weakness and lead game to his(her) favour.
3. Wide range and high intensity of footwork required.
4. Although doubles are based on individual's techniques, there are special requirements. In doubles, the shake-up of two players' techniques is not simple as $1+1=2$. You have to keep eyes open for three players—the one you attack, the one attacking you, and the one on your side. Therefore there is much heavier pressure than in singles. This specific type of pressure is most reflected at important matches. Doubles games often see dramatic score fluctuations, more so with mixed doubles, reason being one player's unexpected technical difficulty may hold down the game and it takes a little while for both players to make any amendment.
5. As service is restricted on half table, doubles serves are not as threatening as in singles. Contrary to that in singles game, reception of serve in doubles game is rather an advantage.

Choosing partners

Basic principles

1. Apart from technical ingredients, partners often need personalised understandings to be successful.
2. Each partner should have own technical characteristics which are supplementary to the other and provide additional ammunition in games. The double 'ready' position for instance is best to be habitual left+right or front+back to avoid bumping into each other.

At top international level, left-handed/right-handed is the most common pairing pattern in men's and mixed doubles. As women players' technical level is lower than men's (more reflected in footwork), advantages are often on those with higher offensive ability on both far-sides of table. With a view, however, women's games are growing more offensive, we suggest every team should pay some attention to the partnership patterns of women's doubles.

3. Doubles players are supposed to be particularly good at 'first-four-balls' and footwork.

Some partnership patterns

1. A looper with a close-to-table fast hitter. For instance, Deng Yaping & Qiao Hong the numerous top event doubles champions. Such partnership gives their game versatility as fast+spin, close to & away from table.
2. Two loop drivers, with one two-wing, the other forehand; or one stronger on forehand, the other on backhand; or one left-handed, the other right-handed; or one to the front, the other at back.
3. One penhold pips out, the other penhold rev. For instance Chen Long Can & Wei Qing Guang. This type of partnership can make game very complicated against opponents.
4. One of the two players uses totally different b/f hand rubbers.
5. Two choppers, ideally one nearer to table to force opponents' corners, the other slightly back to produce variant spins. If both players are good at spin variation, it's advisable that one of them use different b/f hand rubbers. However, at least one of them must be capable of offensive when needed.



To achieve good result, partnership should be long term and regular training is as necessary as with singles. Choosing a partner rather randomly shortly before an event will get you nowhere and is not the right attitude.

Stance in doubles

Correct stance in doubles sees suitable positioning, easy and fast movement and convenient give-way to void bumping into each other.

1. The serving side

Level stance: Mostly used by offensive pairs, with server on right-hand allowing 3/4 of table to partner standing at centre. close to table.

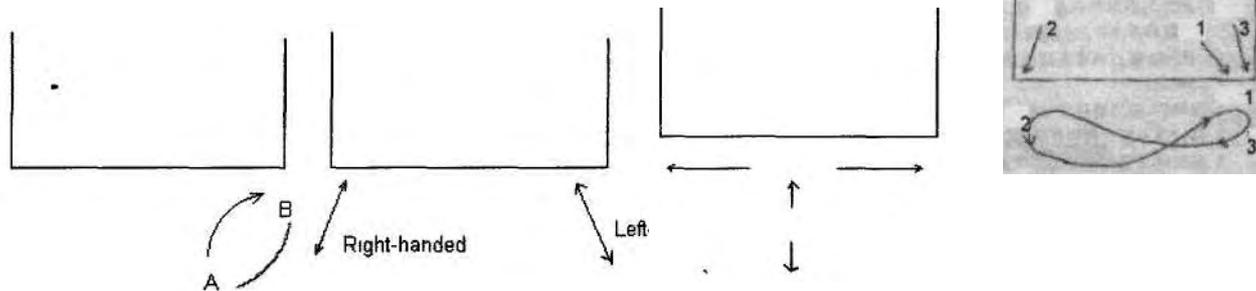
Front & Back: commonly employed by choppers when serving. Server on the right near table. partner at centre and slightly to the back.

2. The receiving side

Level: Often used by pairs of left-handed and right-handed combination; also used by offensive players when backhand receiving serves.

Front & back: Used when attacker's forehand receiving serves. The one at reception stands at close-to-table centre to enable forehand offensive and the other slightly back. Choppers are advised to take this stance no matter they receive serves by forehand or backhand.

Footwork in doubles



1. Basic requirement,

Move away immediately after stroke to avoid body-chase ball.

One's movement should not weaken partner's action.

One's position should be nearest to the next stroke.

2. Some common movement

'V pattern' - Mostly used by pair of left-handed and right-handed offensive players. After each stroke, players move to backhand side, first to clear enough room for partner, also facilitate effective use of own forehand.

'Circle' pattern - Two right-handed players.

T pattern - By players of close-to-table and medium range away from table. For instance, a fast attacker and a looper; a close-to-table hitter and a medium range attacker; a near table chopper and an away-from table chopper. Also used by the combination of fast attacker and offensive oriented chopper.

'8' pattern - Used when opponents deliberately cross-attack one chosen player's both far sides.

The above are only the basic patterns. In practice, they always used in combination and it's down to the players to make effective use of them.

Tactics in doubles

1. If possible, always choose to start game by reception.

This is important as the reception side has the chance to decide the serve and reception order to own favour.

Strong to strong, strong to weak. This is the most common rally order in mixed doubles, i.e. man to receive man's serve. Women players are usually weaker and are likely fall easy victim of men's serves and attacks. However. if own side woman player uses different rubbers or long pips, it may be wise to select own side woman to attack opponent side woman(usually weak in dealing with long pips).



Strong to weak, strong to strong. This order disables the ability of the stronger player of opponent side. Often used in men's and women's doubles.

If one player(A) of own side knows a player(B) of the other side with each other very well, the game should ideally start by A's reception of B's serve.

In the event opponents' levels are little known, start by serve is also workable.

2. When opponents have chosen reception to start, the first round of service should be delivered by the player with better service techniques to secure an upperhand for the start of a game. In mixed doubles, the first serve is usually by a male player.

3. Serve and offensive reception.

As service area is set to half table, reception has become a lot easier. Therefore serve in doubles is a very demanding job. In doubles, serve must be fast and flat, with ideally second bounce to centre edge which causes difficulty for reception end to return wide angle shot. If reception player is left-handed, serve may be delivered to his right hand near net.

Offensive reception is comparatively difficult to execute in doubles games. Therefore offensive players should be well prepared for returning serve by a controlled delivery.

A doubles player should develop to the habit of notifying partner of his type of next serve with hand signals.

4. Reception

Doubles reception specifically focuses on positiveness and flexibility, with priority for offensive whenever possible and awareness of creating offensive opportunities for partner. With long shot, there is usually no reason why one shouldn't attack; with short one, it's best to 'thrust' (Chinese team) in-table, or return wide angle. Statistics show offensive reception accounts for 1/3 of doubles games among top players.

Keep in mind your partner's game styles, e.g. if push is his main reception stroke, be well prepared for opponents' offensives.

5. Keep pressurising one corner (usually the weaker corner) to force opponent side both players jammed, then shift to the other corner or 'body-chase' centre.

6. Chase the player who has just finished a stroke. This is very effective and causes their bumping into each other or at least awkwardness returning properly.

7. Cross attacking both corners alternatively and lead opponents to constant wide-range moves.

8. Two offensive players in pair should clarify roles as main attacker and supportive attacker. Offensive is usually initiated by main attacker, backed by partner's follow-up attacks.

Doubles training

To achieve high level, long term scheduled training is required to develop both personal understanding (feeling sometimes) and technical co-ordination. In the National Team of China, women's doubles are trained around one hour everyday.

Certain training methods,

1. One player to two. Usually one player's return strokes are faster than two in turn.

This is proven effective in improving doubles players' reaction speed and footwork.

2. Restrict both players on half table (left or right) to train their coordinative moves.

3. Half table vs. full table.

4. One side on tennis rule (players don't have to stroke in turn), the other on table tennis rule.

5. Multi balls. Versatile in training footwork and technical co-ordination.

6. First-four-ball training. First four balls are the decisive (60-65%) element in doubles games, even more so in men's doubles. To certain extent, we can say the first four balls decide a match result.

There are of course many other ways of training doubles players. Any method must suit specific players situation and be tailored to solve their specific problems.