Top Tips You Need To Know Before You Buy Your Table Tennis Equipment

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Introduction

If you're looking to buy some table tennis equipment, then you'll need to know what to look for - otherwise you could find yourself wasting a lot of money.

Deciding which table tennis equipment is right for YOU relies on having a good knowledge of the equipment available, knowing what you should look for, and knowing the right questions to ask.

Well, that's where I can help you.

I've been playing table tennis since 1971, and during that time I've built up a wealth of knowledge which I'd like to share with you. So whatever equipment you're looking for, let me guide you through the multitude of choices you'll encounter. After all ... you don't want to make an expensive mistake!

The question I get asked the most is “Do I need to buy expensive equipment?”

Well, the type of table tennis equipment you'll need to buy depends upon your standard of play. Basically, the higher your standard of play, the better the equipment you'll need to buy. But if you're a beginner, you can start playing table tennis using very simple and inexpensive equipment.

Many general sports stores sell a selection of basic and inexpensive table tennis equipment - but if you're serious about this great sport of ours, you'll need to seek out better equipment from the specialist suppliers of table tennis equipment.

However, I started playing table tennis in my dad's garage, on a home-made table that was about two thirds the size of a full sized table - using very cheap rackets and balls from our local sports store.
And when it was too cold to play in the garage, my sister and I used the dining table in our parents' house as our table tennis table - with hardback books lined up across the middle of the table for a net.

But the more I played, the more I improved ... so I started using better equipment.

So, what equipment will you need? ...

To start playing table tennis, the minimum you'll need is a table tennis racket, a supply of table tennis balls and a table tennis table.

But as your standard of play improves beyond a beginners level, there's a bewildering array of other equipment you'll need.

First you'll need some suitable table tennis clothing - a table tennis shirt, shorts and socks - together with table tennis shoes.

And if you're setting up a club you'll also need other accessories such as barriers, scoring machines and possibly a robot (ball launcher) and a good quality floor covering.

So let me take you through my top tips for choosing YOUR table tennis equipment.

Enjoy,

Martin
www.AllAboutTableTennis.com

PS. You'll find more great information on my web site www.AllAboutTableTennis.com as well as links to different suppliers of table tennis equipment.
1. Table Tennis Rackets

Whether you call them table tennis rackets, table tennis paddles, table tennis bats, ping pong rackets, ping pong paddles or ping pong bats ... we're talking table tennis equipment. The Official Laws of Table Tennis refer to the table tennis racket, so I'll be using that term from now on.

By the way, if you use the term ping pong, you might be interested in my article about the difference between table tennis and ping pong.

Your choice of table tennis racket is one of the most important choices you'll make. How you develop as a player will be determined by your racket choice, so it's important to choose one that will complement your style of play.

So here are my top tips to help you choose your ideal table tennis racket. But before we go too far, let's deal with one popular question...

Can a table tennis racket be of any size?

The official rules state that a table tennis racket may be of any size, shape or weight, but that the blade must be flat and rigid. However you'll find that most rackets are actually all very similar in size - about 6 inches (15cm) across and 10 inches (25cm) long, including the handle.

But do you know ...

What is a racket?

A table tennis racket is made up of two distinct parts - a wooden blade (which incorporates the handle) plus table tennis rubbers affixed to each side of the blade using special table tennis glue.
Because there are so many different types of table tennis rackets available, you may find it difficult to choose the right one for you. So let me help you choose your ideal table tennis racket.

First, you'll need to decide whether you should buy a ...

**Ready-made or a customised racket?**

Ready-made table tennis rackets are ... well ... ready-made!
You take it out of the packet and it's ready to use.
However, the main problem with this type of racket is that you don't know how long it's been in the packet, and table tennis rubbers deteriorate with age and exposure to light, even if they've been kept in a sealed packet.

The alternative is to buy a customized racket - which means buying each element of your table tennis racket separately.
This gives you greater control over which blade and rubbers you use.
However, the main problem with this type of racket is that you need to select your own blade and rubbers - and there are literally hundreds of blades and rubbers to choose from.

But, even before you choose whether you need a ready-made or a customized table tennis racket, you'll first need to consider...

**How serious are you about playing table tennis?**

Your choice of racket will be determined by your standard of play. Are you going to be playing table tennis regularly or infrequently? Are you just playing amongst your buddies at home, or are you playing at a club or in competitions?

If you're just playing occasionally for fun, then all you need is a ready-made racket, but if you're serious about your game, you should buy a customized racket - and you'll need to consider a number of different criteria.
The first is ...
**What style of play do you use?**

Before you can decide which racket is best for you, you'll need to consider what style of play you use.

Do you have an attacking / offensive style of play or are you a more defensive type of player? Maybe you're neither one nor the other - perhaps you've developed a counter-attacking style?

When you know what your own style of play is, you'll be ready to consider the next stage…

**What type of blade do you need?**

A table tennis blade is made up of several layers of wood, although the [official rules](#) state that small amounts of other materials such as carbon fibre can also be included.

The type of wood used in these layers will be a major contributor to how your blade reacts, but before we look at those options …

You'll need to decide …

**What style of blade should you use?**

There are two distinct styles of blades. The first is a …

1. **Penhold Style Blade**

The penhold style blade is for players who use the penhold grip, i.e. the racket handle is held between the thumb and forefinger. This style is used mainly by Asian players.
The second style is a ...

2. Western Style Blade

The western style blade is for players who use the western grip (also known as the shakehands grip because of its similarity to shaking hands with another person).

The racket handle is held in the palm of your hand so that the start of the racket head fits snugly into the "V" shape formed by your thumb and first finger.

And if you decide to buy a western style blade, you'll also need to consider ...

What shape of handle do you prefer?

This comes down to personal preference with generally a choice of Anatomic, Flared or Straight.

I prefer the Anatomic, but you should use whatever feels most comfortable for you. If you haven't been playing long enough to be able to make a choice, try asking other players if they've got any old table tennis rackets they could let you try out or buy.

So, having decided on a style of blade, and a handle shape, you'll need to consider your final option ...

What type of blade should you choose?

Your style of play will help you to determine which blade to use because you should choose a blade which will complement your style. This means choosing the right combination of wood layers for your blade.
It's also worth noting that blades vary slightly in weight - generally between 75-95 grams.

So, what blade should you choose? ...

Well, you can read my recommendations on my web site - click here

When you've chosen your blade, you'll be ready to consider the next stage …

**What type of rubber do you need?**

Because table tennis rubbers are available in such a bewildering array of choices, it can be very difficult to choose just one.

But, a word of warning before you choose any table tennis rubber ...

**The two colour rule**

Since 1 July 1986 the [rules of table tennis](#) state that one side of the racket shall be bright red and the other side black. This rule was introduced because of the increased use of "combination" rackets in the late 1970s and early 1980s.

Players were using the same colour rubber on each side of their racket - but each side was a different type of rubber - and this made it very difficult for the opponent to know what type of spin was being imparted onto the ball.

So make sure that you buy the correct colours.

And, make sure that you only buy ...

**Authorised rubbers**

Only table tennis rubbers authorised by The International Table Tennis Federation (ITTF) can be used in authorised table tennis events, so you must ensure that the ITTF logo appears on your rubbers.
The ITTF update their list of authorised rubbers every six months, so you should also check that the rubbers you buy are still authorised when you buy them. Here's an example of what you'll see on the lower portion of Butterfly Bryce rubbers.

But how do you decide which rubber to use?
Keep it simple and choose rubbers that ...

**Complement your style**

You need to choose a complementary set of rubbers to match your style of play and the table tennis blade you've chosen, because choosing the right type of rubber is imperative if you want to maximise your chances of improving your game.

So what do you need to know? ...

**Table tennis rubbers - are they all the same?**

There are three main differences between table tennis rubbers ...

1. The thickness of the sponge

   Authorised table tennis rubbers are usually supplied with varying thicknesses of sponge attached underneath the rubber (sandwich rubber) - generally from 1.1mm to 2.1mm - although a few rubbers are available without sponge.

2. Pimples out

   Authorised table tennis rubbers can also have the pimples (pips) facing outwards or inwards.

   Pimpled rubber (pips) has the pimples facing outwards which means that the smooth side of the rubber is attached to the sponge. So you strike the table tennis ball with the pimpled surface.
Pimples out is available in two basic varieties - short pimples or long pimples - and each one gives you a completely different effect when the ball is struck by the pimples.

3. Reverse rubber (pimples in)

Authorised table tennis rubbers can also have the pimples (pips) facing inwards towards the sponge. You therefore strike the table tennis ball with the smooth side of the rubber.

This is known as reverse rubber and is by far the most popular type of rubber as it allows a complete range of strokes to be played.

So which table tennis rubbers should you choose? ...

Well, you can read my recommendations on my web site - click here

So, after you've chosen your rubbers, the next important question is ... How often should I change my rubbers?

Changing Your Table Tennis Rubbers

Table tennis rubbers deteriorate with age, so you'll need to replace them at regular intervals. Dust particles penetrate the rubber causing it to lose its tackiness and exposure to heat, light and air also causes the rubber to deteriorate.

Professional table tennis players change their rubber extremely frequently - some players change them every day - but they don't have to buy them!

You'll need to change your rubbers when they start to lose their tackiness, so ...

I'd recommend that you change your rubbers at least annually.

When you've chosen your rubbers, you'll be ready to consider the next stage …
Affixing your rubbers onto your blade

There are two ways that you can affix your rubbers onto your blade …

1. Quick glue sheets
   
   Quick glue sheets are 0.05mm thick transparent sheets which have two adhesive sides. They enable you to quickly and easily affix your rubbers to your blade.

2. Table tennis glue
   
   The second method is to use table tennis glue. This takes longer than using quick glue sheets, but it’s the traditional method.

But did you know that there are …

Different types of table tennis glue

Since the 1980s, table tennis players have been experimenting with different types of table tennis glue to affix their rubbers to their table tennis blade.

It was discovered that certain types of glue had the effect of increasing the speed of the table tennis rubber if the player re-glued the rubber at frequent intervals. This gave the attacking / offensive player a distinct advantage and gradually led to the development of "speed glue".

However, this type of glue contained compounds which gave it a distinctive odour and it was considered harmful to players' health. Therefore the International Table Tennis Federation (ITTF) amended the rules and banned certain types of table tennis glue.

So, with effect from May 2007, glues containing harmful volatile compounds (VOCs) are no longer allowed. This includes glues with organic and inorganic volatile compounds, excluding water.
The use of water-based glues, free of harmful volatile compounds, must now be used. And if you play in authorised table tennis events, your racket is liable to be tested for VOCs and if it fails you will be disqualified and penalties will be imposed.

So what should you use to affix your table tennis rubbers to your blade? ...

**Well, you can read my recommendations on my web site - click here**

**Affixing Your Rubbers**

Some suppliers will offer to affix the rubbers onto the blade for you, but they'll probably charge you for this. It's much easier to do it yourself. However, on the first occasion that you do this, I'd recommend asking an experienced player to do it for you and show you how to do it at the same time.

You don't want to waste your money by doing it yourself and making a mistake - but don't be afraid to learn how to do it yourself - it's easy after a bit of practice!

**Important reminder ...**

As we saw earlier, all table tennis rubbers must incorporate the ITTF logo to show that they are authorised rubbers. Therefore, when you affix your rubbers onto your blade you'll need to make sure that the ITTF logo is clearly visible.

So, now that you've chosen your blade and your rubbers, and affixed them to your blade, you'll need to consider protecting your investment by ...
Looking after your racket

If you've invested in a customized table tennis racket, you'll want to protect your blade and your rubbers to ensure that they last as long as possible.

Table tennis blades, although fairly robust, can suffer from knocks and dents at the sides, whilst your rubbers will deteriorate if they are not covered up and stored away when not in use.

There are three major factors which determine the durability of your rubbers...

• tension
• flexibility and
• friction

The tension and flexibility of your rubbers will diminish over time, but you can minimise the loss of friction - i.e. the tackiness of the rubber surface which allows you to impart spin onto the ball - by following a regular cleaning routine.

So what should you do to protect your investment?

Well, you can read my recommendations on my web site - click here

Let's now take a look at how to choose a table tennis table...
2. Table Tennis Tables

If you're considering buying a table tennis table - whether it's a top quality one or just an inexpensive one - there are a number of items you'll need to consider.

So here are my top tips on how to choose your ideal table tennis table.

But first, it's important to know the...

**Official size dimensions of a table tennis table**

The rules of table tennis state that a table tennis table is...

9 feet (2.74m) long,
5 feet (1.525m) wide and
2 feet 6 inches (76cm) high

... and the net is

6 feet (1.83m) long and
6 inches (15.25 cm) high.

So now that you know the size dimensions, let's take a look at the items you'll need to consider before you buy any table.

We'll look at ... the different types of table that are available, the different types of undercarriage and top surfaces that are available - and finally - which table tennis tables are authorised for use in competitions.

But, before you buy any table, the most important question is ...
How will your table be used?

The type of table that's right for you will depend on how you intend to use it.

Therefore you'll need to consider ...

**How** ... often will your table be used?

* Daily
* Weekly
* Monthly
* Occasionally

**Who** ... will be using your table?

* Professional players
* League players
* Club players
* Recreational players
* Family and friends

**What** ... space is available for your table?

* Will it always be erected, ready for use?
* Will it need to be stored away?

**Where** ... will your table be used?

* Table tennis events
* Table tennis club
* Sports centre
* School
* YMCA
* at home
* or elsewhere?

And ... will your table be used indoors or outdoors?

Does it matter? Yes it does...
Indoor v outdoor table tennis table

Table tennis tables are available in many different styles and although table tennis is generally played indoors, it can also be played outdoors. However, to play table tennis outdoors you'll need the right weather conditions. Firstly, it needs to be dry - but just as important, it mustn't be windy as this will affect the flight of the ball. Windy conditions will also cause debris to be blown onto the table surface which can impede the bounce of the ball.

So ... unless you need a table solely for outdoor use ...
I'd recommend ... that you buy an indoor table.
Indoor tables have a much better playing surface than tables designed for outdoor use. You can still use your indoor table outdoors if it's dry and not used in hot sunlight, but you'll just need to move it back inside after you've finished playing.

But what if you really need an ...

Outdoor table tennis table

However, if you do need a table tennis table that'll be left outside permanently, you'll need to ensure that it's designed specifically for outdoor use.

Some outdoor tables have a galvanised steel undercarriage and net and posts, with a weatherproof top surface - like this example from Butterfly - but others do not.

You can read my recommendations on my web site - click here

But if you want the most durable, weatherproof outdoor table you can buy, then take a look at my article all about concrete table tennis tables.

So ... let's now take a look at different types of indoor tables.
What type of indoor table do you need?

Firstly, do you really need a regular, full sized table tennis table, or would a smaller one be more suitable for you? There are many different types of table available.

Junior table tennis tables

If you’re playing table tennis just for fun, or have very young children who want to play the game, there are a number of different junior tables available.
Some have a setting which enables them to tilt inwards slightly to help kids to have a rally with their opponent, whilst others have retractable / extendable legs to vary the height of the table top.
Smaller tables are also easier to store away when they're not being used.

Novelty miniature table tennis tables

Or how about one of these novelty tables like this one I have.  
It's only 12 inches (30cm) long, 8 inches (20cm) wide and 2 inches (5cm) high.
You also get two rackets and a ball.
They're quite tricky to use, but great fun!

Conversion top kits

Another option you could consider is a table tennis conversion top kit.
This type of table top will fit over a pool table or other suitable surface and it’s ready for you to use in an instant.
When it's not being used you can easily store it away.
**Full sized tables**

However, a full sized table is the obvious choice if you're serious about playing this great sport of table tennis. But, there are a number of items you'll need to consider before you buy one.

First, you'll need to consider ...

**What type of undercarriage is best for you?**

Whether you're buying an indoor or outdoor table, one of the most important items to check before buying it is... what type of undercarriage does it have? There are many different variations available, so you'll need to be clear about how your table will be used so that you can choose the right one for you.

**Rollaway / wheelaway**

Some tables are known as "rollaway" or "wheelaway" because they have the undercarriage, wheels and table all integrated into one neat unit.

They do take up more storage space than other tables and can be up to 6 feet (1.83m) high when closed. This extra height can cause problems if you need to negotiate steps or transport them between venues.

However, if you store them close to where they'll be used, and they're on the same level, they can often be erected and dismantled by just one person, whereas most tables require at least two people.

There are several different variations of "rollaway" design and some can be used "half-open" to give a "playback" facility - so you can practice without an opponent by hitting the ball against the upturned half of the table!
Separate halves

Other tables are supplied in two separate halves. The legs are fixed to the underside of the table top and the wheels are cleverly incorporated into the centre edge of the table.

This type of table is easier to store and takes up less space than a rollaway, but you'll need at least two people to erect and dismantle it.

These tables can have their undercarriage made of metal or wood.

But remember, table tennis is for everyone, so...

Are there any players who are wheelchair users?

If your table will be used by a table tennis player who uses a wheelchair, then the position of the table legs is very important.

Some tables have the legs positioned very close to the end of the table, whilst others are set back towards the middle of the table.

A wheelchair user will need the table legs and undercarriage set back at least 16 inches (40cm) from the end where he'll be playing.

The International Table Tennis Federation recommends that manufacturers add the letter W and "for wheelchair play" either on the frame or on the undercarriage - so look out for that.

And now you can also buy table tennis tables with...
Innovative undercarriage designs

If your table tennis table will be used in high profile events - or if you just want to be fashionable - you may want to consider something more eye-catching!

A recent innovation has seen table manufacturers produce more aesthetic undercarriages for use at televised events. These either have a revolutionary undercarriage design or a fancy cover to hide the table legs.

My favourite example of a new undercarriage design is this Double Happiness (DHS) Rainbow table ...

... but there are other examples...

  like this Andro table ...

  and this Donic table ...

  and this Tibhar table.

So ... when you've decided what type of table tennis table undercarriage is best for you, you'll need to look at one more vital component...the table top surface.

And … Is the colour of the top surface important? ...
What colour surface is best?

The colour of the table top is important because it needs to provide a good contrast between the floor, walls and background colours of the playing area. Traditionally, the surface of a table tennis table was green or grey, but to make them better for television audiences, there was a period of experimentation with different colours during the early 1990s.

A matt blue colour was eventually chosen, primarily because it complements the (reddish) colour of the floor covering which is now used for all the top tournaments.

The International Table Tennis Federation now only authorise blue or green tables for authorised events, so you'll need to choose blue or green if you intend to use it for competitions and match play. However, you may find that green tables are more readily available.

But, more important than the colour is ...

The composition of the table top

The composition of the top surface will have a significant effect on its' playing characteristics. Table tops are usually made of plywood, particle-board, plastic, metal, concrete or fibre-glass and they can vary in thickness - usually between 0.67 inches (17mm) and 1 inch (25mm) - but for major tournaments, only wood or wooden derivatives are allowed.

By the way, did you know?

If you intend to use your table for playing doubles as well as singles matches, you'll need to ensure that the table has a 3mm wide white line down the centre of the table.

So what tables do I recommend? ...

Well, you can read my recommendations on my web site - click here
And after you've chosen your table, you'll want to protect your investment.

**Looking after your table tennis table**

If you've invested in a table tennis table, you'll want to protect it to ensure that it'll last as long as possible.

Table tennis tables are susceptible to warping of the table surface and you'll also find that over time, the top surface will start to lose adhesion and it'll become shiny, making the ball skid rather than bounce properly.

So what do I recommend? ...

*Well, you can read my recommendations on my web site - click here*

And finally...

**Authorised Table Tennis Tables**

There are many different manufacturers who provide excellent table tennis equipment, so deciding which table to buy can often be a matter of personal preference.

However, not all table tennis tables are authorised by the ITTF. So if you're planning on using your tables in an authorised event, make sure that the table is on the list of ITTF authorised tables. *You can find the current list here.*

Of course, when you buy a table tennis table you'll also need...
3. Table Tennis Nets

A table tennis net isn't one of the most exciting items of equipment, but it's important nevertheless. Unlike some items of equipment (such as the ball), a bad net won't necessarily spoil your game, but if it doesn't look good or it's difficult to set up and adjust, it shouldn't be used for serious play.

Some tables will have a net supplied with them - sometimes they are incorporated into the table design itself, whilst for others they are included as a separate item. But not all tables will have a net. So make sure you check when you buy your table. You'll be very disappointed if you receive your table and then find that you can't use it because a net wasn't supplied when you were expecting one!

So what do you need to look for when choosing a net and post set? Well let's start with the basics ...

What do the rules say about the net and posts?

The rules of table tennis state that the net must be ...

- 6 feet (1.83m) long
- 6 inches (15.25 cm) high
- dark green, dark blue or black and have a white top tape not more than 15mm wide

and that

- the bottom of the net, along its whole length, shall be as close as possible to the playing surface and that
- the ends of the net shall be as close as possible to the supporting posts

Regardless of its colour, a net may be used on either a blue or a green table.

Let's now take a look at ...
The net assembly

The net assembly consists of:

1. upright post
2. height adjuster
3. horizontal part of the net post
4. attaching system (clamp)

The net is intended to be an obstacle but it shouldn’t increase the probability of a player gaining a lucky point.

A ball hitting the top of the net should fall back on the hitter’s side or bounce forwards - it shouldn't just flop over onto the receiver’s side. This means that the tension along the top of the net should be significantly higher than the rest of the net. Therefore, the fabric must be suspended by a cord which must be tight and it must be attached only loosely to the posts.

Some net assemblies have no suspension cord and these nets cannot be used in tournament play.

So, how do you choose the right table tennis net for YOU?

Choosing a suitable net and post set

Although some new table tennis tables have a net and post set supplied with them, in most cases you'll need to choose your own net and post set separately.

Generally, there are three types of net assemblies ...

1. Permanently affixed to the table
2. Spring loaded clip
3. Hand tightened screw clamp
1. **Permanently affixed**

Outdoor tables generally have a net assembly which is permanently affixed to the table. These are usually the same width as the table, i.e. five feet long, rather than the official length of six feet, and non-adjustable and ...

Some rollaway tables also have a net assembly which is permanently affixed to the table, although these are usually the correct length of six feet.

2. **Spring loaded clip**

Some net assemblies use a spring loaded clip to attach the net assembly to the table. These are popular because they're quick and easy to attach to your table. However, the spring clip can become worn over time and you'll find that it'll become more difficult to keep it in place.

3. **Hand tightened screw clamp**

The third type of net assembly uses a hand-tightened screw clamp. However, there are many variations of this type of net.

The cheapest available in this category has a very basic clamp as shown here and the net is usually only 5 feet or 5 feet 6 inches long and the net height may not be adjustable.
Another variation is as shown here.
This also has a very basic clamp, but the net is the official length of 6 feet, although the height may or may not be adjustable.

Another variation is shown here.
The screw clamp is more sturdy and the net height is adjustable which means you'll be able to ensure that the net is secure and at the right height and tension.

So unless you have a table tennis table which has a net assembly permanently affixed to it, you'll need to choose either a spring loaded clip or a hand tightened screw clamp net assembly.

So what type of net do I recommend? ...
Well, you can read my recommendations on my web site - click here

However, not all table tennis nets are authorised by the ITTF. So if you're planning on using your nets in an authorised event, make sure that the net is on the list of ITTF authorised nets. You can find the current list here.

You'll also need a …

**Table tennis net gauge**

A net gauge enables you to quickly and easily set the net to the correct height (6 inches / 15.25 cm).
Additionally, a net gauge can be used to quickly measure the thickness of your racket rubbers to ensure that they do not exceed the 4mm limit.

They're made of plastic and are really easy to use.
4. Table Tennis Balls

Let's begin with a quick history lesson ...

From 38mm balls to 40mm balls

Following trials in the late 1990s, the official rules were amended with effect from 1 October 2000 when the size of the ball was changed from 38mm to 40mm.

The International Table Tennis Federation took the view that:

- The use of speed glue had increased the speed of the game and it needed to be slowed down
- By slowing the game down, the length of the rallies would increase which in turn would make the game more appealing to television viewers, and
- A larger ball travels more slowly through the air and is not as receptive to heavy spin.

So what do the rules now say about the ...

Table tennis ball

The official rules of table tennis state that the ball shall be:

- spherical, with a diameter of 40mm and
- weigh 2.7g and
- be made of celluloid or similar plastics material and
- be white or orange, and matt

So, are all balls the same?
Star Quality

Table tennis balls are not all the same. There are a wide variety of different types available and each one will be suitable for a different purpose.

Let's take a look at each of them ...

Firstly there are the fun or novelty balls. These are available in lots of different colours and sizes and are particularly suitable for children and for fun recreational play.

Next, there are non-classified balls which are sometimes referred to as practice or training balls. These tend to be low quality, soft table tennis balls and are prone to breaking if hit with force.

Then there are balls which are classified as one star. These tend to be not quite as soft as the practice or training balls but are still a little soft, and again are prone to breaking more easily if hit with force.

Then there are two star balls. These tend to be slightly harder than one star balls but not as hard as 3 star balls. You may also find that they are not as spherical as they could be.
And finally, there are three star balls.

These balls have to meet specified standards for Appearance, Weight, Size, Sphericity, Veer, Bounce and Hardness. These are the highest quality balls available - and the only type which are authorised by the International Table Tennis Federation.

The International Table Tennis Federation also produce a list of authorised 40mm table tennis balls - so if you're planning on using your balls in an authorised event, make sure that they are on the list of ITTF authorised balls. You can find the current list here.

So which table tennis balls do I recommend? ...

Well, you can read my recommendations on my web site - click here.
5. **Table Tennis Shoes**

Your choice of table tennis shoes will largely depend upon your own personal preferences. However, the main criteria for good quality table tennis shoes are that they need to have a grippy and non-slip sole, together with an upper material that allows your feet to breathe.

They also need to be light-weight and sturdy but have a flexible upper part.

So which table tennis shoes do I recommend? ...

[Well, you can read my recommendations on my web site - click here](http://www.AllAboutTableTennis.com)
6. Table Tennis Robots

Let's start with the basics ...

What is a Table Tennis Robot?

A table tennis robot is simply a machine that can automatically fire table tennis balls from one end of a table tennis table to the other end in a controlled manner.

The majority of table tennis robots consist of three main elements ...

- a mechanism to load and fire table tennis balls
- a control box / remote control to program the firing of the balls and
- nets to catch the returning balls

As most of these robots are powered by electricity, an electric supply will also be required close to where they are being used.

So ...

How do table tennis robots work?

The firing mechanism is attached or placed at one end of a table tennis table pointing towards the opposite end of the table. Some robots will include nets that you attach to the sides and end of the table to catch the balls which you've hit back.
Some robots can also feed these returned balls back into the firing mechanism so that you don't run out of balls too quickly.

Some control boxes are designed to be attached to the table, whilst others may have a remote control box. This device enables you to program the firing mechanism to impart different speeds and spins onto the balls as they are fired.

Most robots have a controllable directional firing mechanism. So if you want the robot to "serve" to you, the firing mechanism needs to be angled downwards ...

![side view](image)

And if you want the robot to "play" to you, the firing mechanism is angled upwards ...

![side view](image)

By using the control box, you can program the robot to deliver shots which have either topspin, backspin, left side spin, right side spin or even combination spins. However, not all robots will have the ability to impart all types of spin onto the ball.

Also, you'll find that some robots are very bulky and will take time to set up, whilst others are quick and easy to set up.

Another consideration is ...
How much room will you need?

The good news about robots is that they don't take up much room - in fact it's much less than if you were playing against a real person.

Because the robot is usually fixed to one end of the table, or sits on top of it, you can push that end of the table right up against a wall.

Of course you'll still need enough space at your end to be able to play your own shots, but the total space will be much less than if you were playing against a real person.

So ...

Why would you want a robot?

There are many reasons why you would want a table tennis robot.

Let's take a look at some of them …

1. Play without needing an opponent
   If you don't have a real person to play against, it's a great substitute ... and much better than using a "return board" or having the table in the “playback” position.

2. Practice and "groove" your strokes
   Once you've learnt the basic strokes you'll need to practice them to get better.
   Robots are ideal for this because they "feed" (deliver) you the same shot over and over again so that you can "groove" (replicate) your strokes.

3. Improve your footwork
   The robot can be programmed to fire the balls to specific locations, so they're ideal for practising your footwork.

4. Improve a weak stroke
   If, for example, you're an offensive, attacking style player, but you're weak against low backspin / chopped returns, you can set the robot to deliver a ball with backspin and improve your stroke against that type of shot.
5. As a coaching aid
   A table tennis coach can set up the robot to "feed" (deliver) a particular shot, leaving him to concentrate on the stroke being played by the pupil and not having to both feed the ball and coach the player at the same time.

6. Make table tennis fun
   A robot can be great fun if you have a group of people, especially kids. They'll love it. Make up your own games and competitions ... beat the robot or beat your buddies.

7. Exercise and/or improve your fitness level
   A robot can be programmed to fire balls to specific locations all over the table, over and over again, at a speed and frequency of your choice. This will give you a great workout.

But let's take a look at ...

What can't a robot do?

Table tennis robots are great for practising a specific stroke or routine because they can "feed" you the same shot with the same spin, over and over again. Therefore they'll allow you to "groove" your strokes quickly and efficiently. But it's also important to remember that a robot is not a coach.

So you must get your strokes right first, or you'll be practising and re-enforcing bad habits ... and that can be very difficult to unlearn.

So if you're using a robot with the intention of practising your strokes, make sure you've been taught the correct stroke before you start.

However, if you're just wanting to improve your fitness, reflexes, coordination, footwork etc, then use a robot and just have fun!

So which table tennis robot do I recommend? ...

Well, you can read my recommendations on my web site - click here

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### 7. Table Tennis Brands

Do you know who the biggest table tennis brands and manufacturers are? Well, they are (in alphabetical order) …

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NAME</th>
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<td>Andro</td>
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And Finally...

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You can contact me via my web site at www.AllAboutTableTennis.com

I look forward to hearing from you.

Best wishes,

Martin

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