

TT without speed gluing and boosting: what players think

by Radivoj HUDETZ

What are players thinking about the ban of glue? We heard further opinions expressed by many players (men and women) of different ages and ranking.



FREITAS: "We have to work much more on fitness"

Marcos FREITAS, Portugal national men team player, participant at Olympic Games 2008

"At the beginning playing without gluing was a very strange experience for me. First week I was lost in space, I had big difficulties in the game. I had specially big problems when playing topspin from the distance - it was my favourite style of play but then I had to change it and come nearer to the table. I feel now more tired after the practice or a match as I have to use more power for my strokes. It is the same for all players, it is not only for me, we have to work much more on fitness. The racket control on tournaments and league matches is not perfect and I see that some players still use boosters which is simply not fair. This makes me of course angry - the new rule must be followed by everybody and then it will be OK. In the game without gluing and boosting there is less speed and less spin, the player needs more power but we will be able to show good performances. My footwork was not very good before, but I was able to hit the ball with very fast racket even without staying perfect to the ball, but now I have to have perfect position to the ball if I want to hit it properly. This is the reason why I have to improve my footwork significantly."



PAOVIC: "More rotation in the push with backspin"

Sandra PAOVIC, Croatian women national team player, participant at Olympic Games 2008

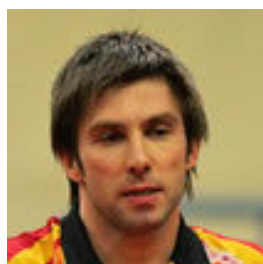
"For me personally the ban of speed gluing is not a big problem at all. My style of playing is to stay near the table in the rallies and play block and counterattack. As I see, men playing topspin attack from half distance have much more problems to adapt their game to the new situation. They need now more power in order to replace the speed gluing effects and they have to adapt their technique as well. I still have some problems with the block, some balls simply fall down, some go out of the table. For me it is still difficult to find right angle of the racket when blocking, I still do not have the feeling how much I have to open or close the racket angle. It is now easier for me to control the ball when returning the service, I can better play shot-short or produce a long ball with heavy back spin. As I stay near the table I have no big problems with the new rule, but when I am forced to play from half-distance I get some - anyway I avoid to play away from the table. The game has obviously become slightly slower and I have the feeling that there is more rotation in the push with backspin."

HADACOVA: "I lost very much of my game's quality"

Jana HADACOVA, Czech national women team player, participant at Olympic Games 2008
"I still haven't got used to the new situation without gluing, I am far away from my normal game. The rubbers I have tried up to now didn't suit me, I am still trying to find a good solution for myself. Before I used rubbers not much used in Europe and without gluing I can not use them more so the change for me is quite big. My service is now with less rotation and of course not as dangerous as before, my topspin became slower and shorter. As my service and my first topspin are my strongest weapons I lost very much of the quality of my game. I almost hated to go to practice as I lost my confidence and even the joy to play. For me it will obviously last longer until I find equipment which suits me and to adapt my technique to the game without gluing. Before I went twice a week to a fitness centre, now I will have to go more often there as I will need more power to perform my game. After first training sessions without speed gluing I got heavy muscle inflammation due to changes in the technique of strokes. It seems that I have even bigger problems than my competitors due to my former equipment and my powerful style of play. Anyway other girls are as well complaining about the missing quality of first attacking stroke. I see that girls playing with pimples outside have some advantage now as the ball is slower and with less rotation so as they stay near the table they have little bit more time and can better control the block strokes."

Fedor KUZMIN, Russian national team player, participant at Olympic Games 2008

"I think that I do not have big problems with the ban of gluing and use of boosters. For me it is easier to play without gluing in a smaller hall, in a big hall like the hall we are playing now European Championships it is more difficult! It is of course lack of experience in this new situation, we all have first to adopt us to it. Table tennis will for sure change. We players are in my opinion put into a difficult situation - the bigger ball still didn't reach the quality of former small ball, different brands of tables are of quite different playing characteristics and now we have to adapt us to the ban of gluing or use of optimizers. The game will probably become slower, the sound of speed gluing is not there anymore. This sound gave us information about the stroke of the opponent and our own, now we have to live without it."



Slobodan GRUJIC, Serbian national men team player

"The new rule will as I see it cause more difficulties to older players with their automatised techniques, the younger will adapt themselves easier to new conditions. Players with better technical abilities will find solutions for their game more easy. I really do not know what the new rule brings to table tennis sport. At the moment many players have serious problems with adaptation of their game to the ban of speed gluing, everybody makes experiments trying to find best solution for himself. Besides we wait for the new generation of rubbers which shall replace the effects of speed gluing in a better way. I hope after certain time the game will become the same as it was. At the same time I expect that there will be no big changes in the ranking list, the best will remain the best. Today the problem for the players which participated at Olympic Games 2008 is the short period of time they had to adapt their game to the new rule. The rubbers should be further developed for the game without speed gluing. There is now less speed and less rotation in the game, it is not only my opinion, I spoke with many colleagues and they all share such an opinion. It was a big mistake to introduce this new rule without adequate control devices. Hopefully we will soon get reliable control devices for all categories of players. At European Championships I expected control with some new devices because of ban of tuning, but it did not happen, the control was conducted with old devices"



Lubomir PISTEJ, Slovak national men team player

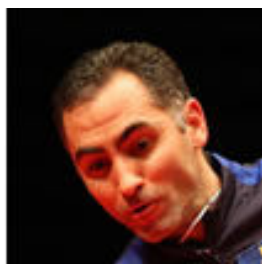
"Without gluing I have a problem with my topspin - when I try to play harder the ball falls down, I make mistakes. I have to correct my swing more direction upwards, which is of course not easy after many years with another movement. For me there are no significant changes in rotation I give to the ball or in the service and return, the real problem is only the topspin. From my sponsor I now got new developed rubbers and my first impression is that it will give me possibility to play better topspin. Anyway I still need time to get used to the play without speed gluing and find best solutions for myself. I don't think the game will generally become slower, I saw that some players can already play fast. Some players are able to adapt their game in shorter time, some need more time. Top players will now change the rubbers they used for speed gluing and everybody has to find for oneself the best new rubber and the best combination between this rubber and a blade."



BLASCZYK: "Players have no influence on decision to be taken"

Lucijan BLASCZYK, Polish national men team player, participated at Olympic Games 2008

"After Olympic Games I started to practice without speed gluing and tuning and all the time I had muscle inflammation as I had to use technique of performing the strokes which I am not used to! As I tried to put into the ball as much as possible speed and rotation without speed gluing I had to use more power with another technique - at the end the result is that I am now injured, which I have not been ever before. I came here to European Championships hoping that I will recover and will be able to play but it was not the case. There are many players injured during this Championships, more than ever – GIONIS, TCHETININ, PRIMORAC, SAIVE, BRATANOV, JAKAB, CIOTI, the title defender in women singles Li from Netherlands and others. I saw here that the ball trajectory is quite different than when speed gluing was used, the trajectory is much more even. As the ball bounces much more even the player have to start the topspin much lower and perform the stroke more upwards and less forwards than with speed gluing. That is why in topspin duels the players make more mistakes than before. I witnessed that the players in the tournament were more nervous than normal because they were making more easy mistakes than usually and besides due to so many changes in the game in last period they are loosing the joy of playing. The bigger balls are still not as good as the smaller were, now the gluing ban and the players have no influence on decision to be taken. After so many years playing with speed gluing there are automatised techniques adapted to the game with glue effects and it is extremely difficult to change such automatised movements. There is so little time to react and hit the ball but when the ball has another trajectory or bounces unexpectedly then you try to change the stroke in extremely short time and try to change abrupt the direction of your movement what brings the danger of an injury. I think that the adaptation time will last one whole year but even after that I do not think that we will have such attractive rallies as we have now - the ball will be slower, topspin duels as with speed gluing will be badly missed. When the players get used to the game without gluing maybe we will have very long rallies but I doubt that the spectators will like it. But as the ball bounces now so even I doubt that it will at all be possible to have long topspin rallies. If somebody like Timo BOLL or Vladi SAMSONOV have a good slow first topspin attack it is extremely hard to do anything now with this ball."



KORBEL: "Table tennis has become a new, different sport"

Peter KORBEL, Czech national men team player, participant at Olympic Games 2008

"With the new rule table tennis has become a new, different sport. It is now very important to combine rubbers with new blades, find the best combination. Much more athletic abilities will be needed in the game, you have to be perfectly positioned to each ball when hitting and use much more power when performing strokes. The difference is at the moment that if you hit the ball with full power you make mistakes, if you hit the ball with 80% of power the ball will land on the table! The game has become slower, the difference is not so big when you stay at the table but becomes big when you play from distance. When playing from the distance it is much more difficult to replace the speed gluing effect, you have to put more power into your strokes. As the problem of racket control has not been yet satisfactorily solved some of players misuse the situation and tune their rackets. I hope the problem will be soon from the table, reliable controls will be conducted. Tuning can only partly replace speed gluing but either everybody shall be allowed to use it or nobody - so it is not fair. In the game without gluing and tuning there is no difference when playing short-short, but when you try to block harder then the ball lands mostly in the net, it is much safer to give the ball some rotation than to hit it directly. For the player who played at Olympic tournament it is really hard time, we had very short period to adapt our game to totally new rubbers and most of us to new blades as well. In future we will have to have much more fitness training. The best players will stay on the top, it is a process of adaptation, you have to solve it in your head too and we will get used to it."



SMIRNOV: "We need more time to adapt our game"

Aleksey SMIRNOV, Russian national men team player, participant at Olympic Games 2008

"The time for adaptation to the changes caused by the ban of gluing was really much too short, most of us are still experimenting to find the right answers to it. Besides after Olympic Games we were empty, we needed some rest but we were faced with this new big change in the game. When I hit the ball the ball falls down, my coach wants me to hit the ball with more spin and not so directly, but I automatised my strokes in another way. Some players have less difficulties to adapt their game to the new situation as for example OVCHAROV, who is playing a safe spin, not hitting the ball hard. Players playing faster and hitting the ball directly have more difficulties. Anyway the game without speed gluing is slower and I am not sure that it is good for table tennis. The way how it was done was for sure not the best one and it is the reason why the performances on European Championships are rather poor. In the game you can see mistakes which you otherwise would never see, we need still a lot more time to adapt our game to the new situation."



TSCHETININE: “For all defence players nothing has changed”

Evgenij TSCHETININE, Belarus men national team player

"As a defence player I have never used speed gluing and for me ban of gluing makes no difference. Playing at European Championships I didn't see that I have any advantages against the attackers now, for me everything is the same as it used to be!"

APOLONIA: “We have to play closer to the table”

Tiago APOLONIA, Portugal national men team player, participant at Olympic Games 2008

"The players still need more time to adapt their game to the racket without speed gluing, specially the players which played at Olympic tournament as we had extremely short time for the change. In Germany we started to play Bundesliga team matches only one week after the Olympic Games and it was impossible to adapt the game in such a short time. The new developed rubbers are already quite good and I think that soon we will get rubbers which will be very near to speed glued rubbers. The technique of the strokes will change a little bit, we have to play closer to the table, the game has already become slower. It is now more difficult to play topspin from distance but I have less difficulties to control the ball when the opponent attacked first. The biggest problems to adapt their game will have topspin players playing attack from distance. For me it means that I must stay closer to the table - this is anyway what my coaches always wanted from me, now I am simply forced to do it! "

ZMUDEKNO: “Psychological approach is very important too”

Yaroslav ZMUDEKNO, Ukraine national men team player

"As I see it I have to focus much more on precise technique when performing the strokes. The game is slower now, because of that it is more difficult to play from the distance. I must obviously come nearer to the table. When serving I have to change slightly the technique in order to produce the same effect as before, when returning the service there is no difference for me. But it is not only the necessary change and adaptation of stroke and footwork technique, very important is the psychological approach too - you must accept the change in your head! "