

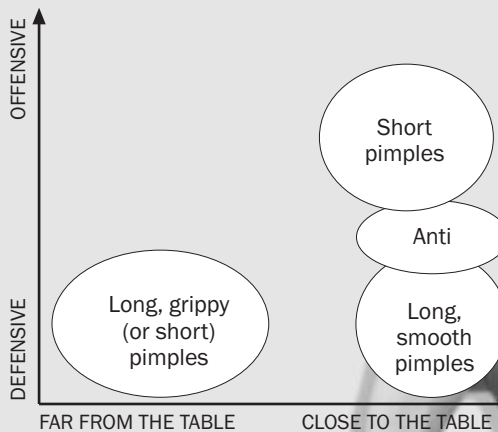
Treated Pimped Rubbers Banned:

Alternatives and Consequences

As a result of the ban of all "treated" pimped rubbers which will go into effect on 1st July 2008, many players have started looking for alternative racket coverings. With this article, we hope to provide a few points of reference, which might be helpful for the decision-making process of finding suitable material for your particular style of play.

First of all, we would like to present a rough classification of the different types of materials available and the playing styles which they facilitate. The inverted rubber covering will not be discussed at this point since it can be used for basically any kind of playing style.

On the other hand, the various pimples-out coverings as well as the anti-top covering only allow for a more limited number and variety of strokes. Naturally, the following diagram does not describe all, but only the most common materials.



| Properties | grippy inverted | pimples anti-top | smooth long pimples | grippy long pimples | short pimples |
|------------------------|-----------------|------------------|---------------------|---------------------|---------------|
| produces spin | +++ | 0 | 0 | + | ++ |
| susceptibility to spin | +++ | 0 | 0 | + | ++ |
| obstruction effect* | 0 | ++ | +++ | (+) | (+) |
| offensive (OS) 1 | +++ | (+) | (+) | + | ++ |
| offensive (US) 2 | 0 | (+) | (+) | 0 | 0 |
| block with topspin | +++ | 0 | 0 | + | ++ |
| block with backspin | (+) | ++ | +++ | ++ | + |

+++ = very possible, huge response; ++ = definitely possible; definite response; + = possible, i.e. little response; 0 = not possible, no response; (+) = basically possible but very difficult or depends on the opponent's spin; * = depends on stroke technique; 1 = offensive techniques played with topspin; 2 = offensive techniques played with backspin

And there are, of course, always exceptions.

In order to be able to evaluate these materials it is necessary to examine the options they offer as well as how tricky they allow a player to play. In the table above, "obstruction effect" represents the so-called spin-reversal.

The anti rubber is better suited for an offensive style of play than the long pimples-out rubber. This is due to the fact that the anti-

spin generally does not allow for much of an obstruction effect. Playing with smooth pimples rubber offers a much better obstruction effect. The anti is much easier for the opponent to predict. Because of this, the anti needs to be used in a more offensive manner.

In this first part of the article we will evaluate the alternatives and make recommendations. To do so, two aspects will be examined. Firstly, the possible stroke techniques along with the so-called obstruction effect which each material allows are presented. Secondly, the subsequent implications for a player's style of play will be discussed. In the following section we will give tips and advice for the stroke techniques which are possible with each material and the necessary changes that will need to be made in the player's style of play. Specific exercise examples will also be given. We will also as-



me that the backhand is generally played with a smooth long pimples rubber (SLP) and the forehand with a grippy or tacky inverted rubber. This is probably true for the majority of SLP-players. For other coverings-combinations the following statements are equally applicable.

The most obvious alternative is anti-top rubber (see the above table). In most areas of the game it allows the player to continue to use the same stroke techniques. It generally does not require changes to be made in a player's playing style. In principle, the anti is the alternative which does not require (hardly) any adjustments to be made. The big disadvantage of the anti-rubber, however, is that it does not allow for much of an obstruction effect to be used. It is especially difficult to play a tricky game in terms of low-spin or dead balls. Players can try to compensate this by playing the ball in a more active way. By increasing time pressure, for example, the opponent can be placed under pressure in a similar way as when the unfamiliar "wobbles" (which are played with smooth pimples) are used. In other areas as well, such as responding to pushes, the slightly reduced effectiveness of the anti can be compensated by a more active style - although always at the price of higher risk.

All other alternatives require players to make technical and tactical adjustments. At the same time, however, they also offer new and different possibilities. The

basic question a player needs to ask is: In which direction do I want to develop my game? Do I tend to a more defensive game (away from the table), to a more offensive and tricky game close to the table, or to a more aggressive and attacking style, close to the table? For a more defensive style of play, the choice of material could be grippy long pimples (preferably with a sponge). If a player tends towards a more offensive tricky game, then the choice could also be grippy long pimples - however a model which is a bit slower and ideally the OX-version without a sponge. The aggressive attacking style is mostly likely to require short pimples. The transition from a tricky game to an aggressive attacking style are just as flowing as the large number of variations of pimples ranging from the very fast short pimples to the medium-length pimples to the very slow long pimples.

For players who tend towards a more defensive style of play, there are quite a lot of literature and technique descriptions available. It will still be important, however, to make adjustments with the forehand. If before, a player using smooth pimples played closer to the table, the distances on the forehand side will change. These include changes in the distance to the table for attacking shots as

well as for the preparation of the attacking shot. Players who were used to using the obstruction effect with the smooth pimples rubber while waiting for the chance to execute a forehand smash, will now have to get used to not being able to execute a smash as frequently as before. And when they do have the chance they will most likely have to execute it while still moving. The other alternative is to replace the smash with a high spin topspin in response to a long push. With smooth pimples, the attack is often prepared by playing a spin reversal with a push using the smooth pimples side. If the opponent generally pushed using SLP, then the second ball was usually too high and dead - or the opponent just lobbed the ball. In both cases, the player could respond with a drive or a hard forehand topspin.

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Now the opponent will return a long backspin defensive shot which is far from the table with a long push. This can be provoked by returning a backspin with topspin.

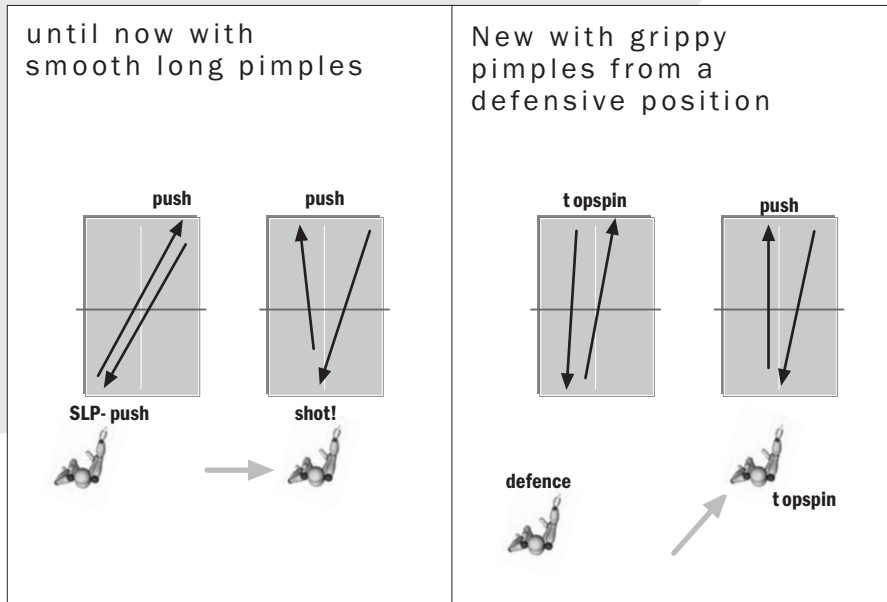
Besides the changes which will need to be made in terms of stroke technique, it will also be of utmost importance to practice the resulting changes in distances the player will have to cover to make his shots. It is also necessary to be able to play the necessary strokes from a distance. These could either be forehand counter-spins, a forehand (backspin-defence) or even a forehand lob. Its success, however, ultimately depends on how well the



ball is placed - ideally long and on the base line. For players who with SLP already have the tendency to move back away from the table, the transition to a more defensive game can be made with long, grippy pimples. The same is true for players who already tend to a more defensive style, even before changing to SLP.

Further options include offensive shots (topspin with pimples). Compared to how a game is developed with SLP, spin variation is much more important now. Before, the spin reversal properties of SLP either forced the opponent to make a mistake or play a bad ball, allowing the player to attack. Now, the player's ability to change

players many more possibilities to defend themselves against opponents who are good at playing against this kind of material. Once a player has mastered the art of spin variation he can continue to use a forehand smash. It would, however, also be recommendable for players to include the ability to respond to backspin with a topspin stroke in their repertoire of strokes. This way, they will also able to attack when an opponent places a good push on their forehand side. The ability to block an opponent's topspin with the pimples rubber side of the racket requires adjustments to be made. It is, however, generally possible with almost all grippy, long pimples rubbers. Depending on the technique used, an absolute spin reversal may no longer be possible. The block, however, is almost dead (or has only a little topspin or backspin).



SLP-players who want to continue to play close to the table still have the option of using grippy long pimples (with or without a sponge) or short pimples. The grippy, long pimples rubber allows for a similar style of play as does the smooth, long pimples rubber (SLP). The effect on the ball's spin, however, is different. This has consequences for stroke techniques as well as for the game-development tactics. Grippy pimples rubber allows a player to respond to an opponent's push in a number of different ways. The first option is to play a push with almost no spin - and which is the closest to a push played with SLP. The result is a ball that is almost dead. The second option is to execute a backspin push. This is achieved by a stronger wrist movement and a different racket angle than when executing a push with almost no spin.

and influence the ball's spin is what provokes the opponent to make a mistake or play a bad ball. This game is more difficult and requires much more training and practice than playing with SLP. At the same time, however, it gives

The last pimples option is short pimples rubber. It caters to a more aggressive game and is best suited for players, who while playing with SLP, already tried to exert a lot of pressure on their opponents using attacking shots. In order to be able to play successfully with the short pimples rubber the crucial criteria which determine the quality of the shot include the



PHOTO: Roscher

point of contact with the ball - while the ball is still rising, shortly after touching the table - and the wrist movement - which should be short, fast and explosive. The ball should generally be played in an active way. In terms of game development, this means that the rallies will be more dynamic. This means that short, quick strokes become necessary with the forehand as well and the player should also play as aggressively as possible on the forehand side. The basic requirements include fast feet and good stroke techniques - especially for the forehand.

So in summary, the first question SLP-players should ask is not the question of which material would best replace the SLP used until now, but what kind of a style of play can and do they want to play in the future. This decision has to be made before the question of the alternative material can be dealt with in a sensible and goal-oriented way. Changing the

material also means that not only the pimples-side will require more training (in our example this will affect primarily the backhand), but the forehand may also need to be adjusted as may the player's footwork. Obviously, changes will also need to be made in terms of game tactics. If the adjustment takes place after adequate consideration, keeping the player's goals in mind, and if the advice referring to the necessary changes in a player's game is taken seriously and followed, then the SLP-player will most likely be able to continue to play at a similar level with the new alternative material as previously with SLP.



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