

In the very early 2000's, I was chairman of the board of the New Jersey Table Tennis Club, the oldest U.S. club and one of the powerhouses of table tennis in the country. I was also the *de facto* manager, as I had imprudently fired the paid person in charge of the club, who could no longer diligently fulfill his functions, but without my having first taken time to find a willing successor.

Feeling the weight of all the tasks that had not been handled as well as the many daily administrative and financial matters to attend to, I tried to find some compensation by playing several nights a week, preferably on our tables numbered 1 or 2, which had the least amount of glare (later on, I learned I had incipient cataracts at that time).

One night I was playing on table 1 when the then reigning and several time U.S. champion arrived with his customary playing partner.. He also almost always chose to play on table 1 and as our most august club member, no one would ever contest his right to claim it -- perhaps immediately, even if people were in the middle of a match. That night I was in a sour mood and in no mood to be deferential, as I had just spent several hours on club business, and I felt that I was owed at least some recompense for my efforts. Emboldened as the head of the club, I told him that if he wanted that table, he would have to first play me a game. He agreed.

I served and he immediately attacked but was surprised to see my counter hit rocket off the table past him. After a brief pause, he laughed. We resumed and I never scored another point despite the demonstrated power of my forehand counter and my ability to react in an eighth of a second. I just could not tell in which direction his strong attacking returns with wicked spin were headed.

Rather than feel humiliated, I respected the lesson he had just taught me. Skill in this sport meant that, at least at the professional level, there are many subtle variations and that in reality, you are only as good as your worst weakness, despite what ever other power, speed and strengths you may display in other aspects of the game.