



Table Tennis Learning Pack



DOUGLAS THE PRINCE

by George R. Yates

Incredible reflex play often leaving his Chinese opponent shaking his head in bewilderment carried England's **Desmond Douglas** to final success over Yang Chuan-ning in the men's singles event of the Stiga Welsh Open played at the National Sports Centre for Wales over the period Feb. 3/5.

Having suffered a final defeat twelve months previously in the same arena at the hands of Wilfried Lieck of Federal Germany, the Warwickshire left-hander played with the determination not to let it happen a second time nor did he as the English No. 1 shrugged off an opening game defeat to assume the ascendancy which became more and more pronounced as the final set progressed.

Prior to, in the third round, top seed Liang Ke-liang, world ranked at No. 4, had fallen to the comparatively unknown Dutch boy Han Gootzen, aged 18, from Maastricht, who in the deciding game of five struck a purple patch on which he will be inclined to dwell for many years to come.

Not content with appearing in one final Douglas also made an appearance in two others being partnered by **Nicky Jarvis** in the men's doubles and by **Linda Howard** in the mixed. But Des hardly dwell on the glory of success in the



Desmond Douglas: Table Tennis Legend

Not many people know that Desmond Douglas's illustrious Table Tennis career was made by the Germany Bundesliga. Yes, the very same Bundesliga of football fame! The great man was forced to seek economic refuge for his family, at the age of twenty four, by playing table tennis in the Bundesliga from 1977 to 1985, because it was impossible to earn a living playing the game in Britain at the time.

Retired Brian Spicer was then ETTA's Vice Chairman and Public Relations Adviser, as well as Daily Express Correspondent for international table tennis tournaments; he said that: "Desmond was forced out of Britain because the economic structure of the game was non-existent at a time when Britain should have been developing sponsorships and other resources for table tennis. Not much has changed since; it's still very difficult to earn from the British game" Spicer laments.

Desmond Douglas arrived in England with his parents from Jamaica at age five. The family settled in Birmingham and at age twelve young Des started playing table tennis. In his book: **Winning at Table Tennis**, he described his earliest experiences:

"The first time I ever hit a table tennis ball, was when I had a go at playing 'donkey round the table' at Aston Park Play-Centre in Birmingham. There were about twenty of us and we used wooden bricks to hit the ball with. Then later I used to mess about with wooden bats on an old



Desmond Douglas Table Tennis Legend

table a friend had in his back garden. At school, I used to play tennis at lunch times, moving the desks, tables and blackboards out of the way. This didn't leave much room to play in and that is how I developed the habit of playing close to the table, even when my opponents were attacking. It was a case of learn to block or else! Fortunately I had the reflexes to get away with it most of the time. I played a little table tennis for my school, but there were several players better than I was and in my case I was keen on other sports as well. I won a medal playing football, at which I was right-footed and played outside right".

Desmond played his first tournament at age fourteen and soon after, began practicing at YMCA in Birmingham and continued practicing there until he left for the Bundesliga. At first he was told to "keep out of the way" at the YMCA. He had to stand and wait and when he did get a chance, it would be on the worst table, because they thought he wasn't good enough. He didn't play in the English TT League until he was fifteen, which is quite late. Douglas is quick to admit that he received help from a few people like Adrian Evans who was in charge of the school team, Adrian Brandwood of Kings Heath Schools and in the early days, Richard Habgood took him to many tournaments. He also received help from his manager Allen Murray.

Douglas won his first tournament, 'The South of Birmingham', at age fifteen and improved rapidly after he left Gower Boys Secondary Modern School without qualifications in 1971, aged sixteen. He stopped playing other sports and focused on table tennis. Before long he began beating players who had been considered better.



PROFILE

As part of the build-up to the World Championships in Birmingham next March, a new series starts in "Table Tennis News" this month called Profile. Each month one of the England squad will be featured, and we start the series with Desmond Douglas, who pulls no punches in a frank interview with JOHN PIKE.

Birthplace: Wood Hall, St. Catherine, Jamaica, West Indies.

Birthdate: 20th July, 1955.

Which school did you attend?—Gower Street Boys' Secondary, Lozells, Birmingham.

Hobbies: Football and Cricket.

Favourite T.V. Programme: Shaft, but the series ended some time ago now.

Favourite Food: Curried Rice and King Prawns.

Favourite Drink: Pop, Lager and Lime and Rum Punch.

Favourite Colour: Blue.

Favourite Singer: Elton John.

Favourite Holiday Resort: Jamaica.

Favourite Car: Jaguar XJ6.

Which person in the world would you most like to meet?—Pele.

Biggest influence on your career: West Midland Passenger Transport for giving me time off to play table tennis.

Ambition: At the moment I have no ambition because I am pessimistic and live from day to day and not for the future.

Earliest Representative Honours: Played for England Juniors in March, 1972, and for the Seniors in a friendly match against France the following year.

Greatest moment in table tennis: Beating Kjell Johansson, of Sweden, in a European League match at Belper.

Most difficult opponent: Another Swede, Stellan Bengtsson.

Finally, what are your thoughts on the World Championships and the future of English table tennis?—At the moment I am not thinking too much about the Worlds. I have my doubts on whether the event will be staged well, and, in fact, if it will be as good as past World Championships.

The future of English table tennis could rest on everyone's performance, including players and officials at the Worlds. There will be a lot of pressure on the England team and myself as the local boy. Personally I do not think we will do very well, and I know that is not being very confident, but it is my opinion. I will not say how I am going to play at the Worlds because I know I have a lot of critics, but I hope to do quite well. If England want to become a top nation in table tennis they will have to put a lot of money into the game and give better incentives to the players. The E.T.T.A. should not expect players to attend camps and pay them only £3 a day. If I was married I could not afford to play for England, and if things continue as they are, only the Paul Days of this world will be able to represent their country.

Tough words from the England No. 1, but that is what this new series is all about. Next month the spotlight falls on Jill Hammersley.

BENSON & HEDGES 'LOVE BIRD' TOURNAMENT

TWO TITLES FOR JILL IN JAMAICA
by "Lawyat"

Co-sponsored by The House of Benson and Hedges and Air Jamaica, the National Arena, Kingston, again provided the setting for this invitation tournament which brought the stars from Asia and Europe to delight the assembled throng, over the period June 1-4.

England's **Jill Hammersley**, the new European champion, was successful in both the women's and mixed doubles, her partners being **In Sook Na-Bhushan** (U.S.A.) and her fellow traveller, **Desmond Douglas**, back in his native land.

Ian Horsham was also an invitee and he, with Douglas, lined up with 14 others to contest the men's singles title last won, but not defended by **Anton Stipanovic**, of Yugoslavia. But the title was destined to return to that country with **Dragutin Surbek**, a hard-pressed winner over his compatriot, **Milivoj Karakasevic**, in a five-game final.

Horsham failed to clear the first hurdle when beaten by **Charlie Wuvanich**, a former Thai and Australian international, now resident in the United States. Douglas progressed to the semis with wins over **Evan Williams**, of Jamaica (13, 13) and **Danny Seemiller**, of the United States, before losing to **Surbek**.

In the counterpart women's event, **Jill Hammersley**, after an easy victory (7 and 6) over **Tina Walter**, a 16-year-old Jamaican schoolgirl, fell to **In Sook-Bhushan**, a former captain of the Korean team which won the Corbillon Cup in the 1973 World's in Yugoslavia. She now plays for the U.S.A.

Katsuyuki Abe and **Yukie Ohzeki** (Japan) were the final victims of Douglas and Mrs. Hammersley in the mixed, whilst the Canadians, **Irene Cordas** (formerly Yugoslavia) and **Violetta Nesukaitis** were the beaten finalists in the women's doubles. Results:—

Men's Singles—Quarter-finals
D. Surbek (Yu) bt **E. Caetano** (Ca) -19, 15, 17, 19.

OLYMPUS SPORTS

WE CARRY A WIDE RANGE OF BATS,
EQUIPMENT IN STOCK—PLEASE

JOO LA, STIGA, SRIVER

TONI HOLD BACKHAND, BAT £12-99
ATTACKING

9 HEADSTONE DRIVE, WEALDSTONE, HA

“I never said to myself I’m going to be the best table tennis player in the country; it just happened; then I started practicing hard and really got better; but I had never set my sights at the top”.



He’s adamant that it wasn’t through coaching that he became good because it wasn’t until late that he got any. He first went to an England training camp at age sixteen. Douglas thinks it’s hard to say whether he’d be a better player if he’d had coaching earlier; and in fact he often thinks he might not have been because those who had been coached at an earlier age than he stopped improving later on.

“I think that maybe they had things drilled into them too much. I was left to watch and practice and learnt the most from playing and watching others players”.

Douglas thinks that when a player is young, their parents can get too involved with the game and players already have enough pressure from the game and the coach, without getting more from their parents. Usually it is better that players are left alone to do their own thing and fortunately that was the case for him.

He recalled: “I knew someone who played TT and worked at the West Midlands Passenger Transport Executives, known as ‘The Buses’. I joined in ‘72 as mechanic’s apprentice and was then transferred to office duties around 1976/1977 because they were worried I might damage my hands. I was playing for the transport team so they wanted to protect their best player”. His employers gave him time off and encouraged him to play, which helped him a great deal. He’s convinced that not many employers would have done as Birmingham buses did. “I’d like to thank whoever it was who had the idea of moving me to that office job”.

Douglas gained an England junior ranking of number six at age sixteen, four years after he started playing and began taking himself seriously. He knew then he could become ‘somebody’ in the game, but didn’t know how good he could be. He first played for England at seventeen.

Desmond Douglas Table Tennis Legend

That year he went to China and the World Championships for the first time. The next year he was England's junior number one and reached the final of the men's singles in the European Junior Championships, where he lost to ULF Thorsell of Sweden; but won the European Junior Mixed Title with Linda Howard-Jarvis of Surrey.

He won the English Closed Championship in 1975-76 season and completed the hat-trick by winning the Men's Doubles with Denis Neale and the mixed with Linda. He did the same again in the 1978-9 season, winning with Jimmy Walker and Linda.

Douglas said that not long after becoming England's number one he made one of the biggest and best decisions of his life to go to Germany and play in the Bundesliga. His big break came at the Table Tennis World Championships in 1977, held at Birmingham N.E.C., where P SV Borussia Dusseldorf saw him play for England and asked if he would be interested in playing for the Bundesliga; Douglas said:

"I was so shocked to be asked but jumped at the chance to become a better player. I had eight wonderful years there and left in 1985. The club couldn't believe I wanted to leave, but I thought it was time to move on. It was my lucky break in TT. I was a little afraid to make it at the time because it was such a big step to give up my job. But it improved my play, improved my confidence, provided me with better practice and competition, and developed me as a person. Since then I have also made a decent living from the game. It was a pity that when I needed help and sponsorship, I had to go to Germany to get it; but I am afraid Table Tennis here in England has been slow to develop. Indeed at one time our best seven men and women were travelling to Germany to play, which seems quite ridiculous. Over there, everyone connected with the Borussia Dusseldorf team helped me a lot. Since then, England have started their own national league with paid contracts to players. I like to think I helped to speed that process up. Let's hope it continues to gather speed".

His legendary game was built on speed. Only a handful of opponents have ever beaten him; one of whom is his old team mate and friend Alan Cooke who said "I eventually worked out that the best way to play against him was to slow him down and it still took me years to implement my strategy". Cooke eventually beat Douglas and stopped him winning his tenth national championship in a row.





Douglas said: “My whole game developed around the block. It was an unusual way to develop and is not suitable for many players. It is said that you should use the block sparingly but I certainly don’t and it really depends how fast you are. If you are a fast player, you would be thinking of standing closer to the table.” But he was really a master at all kinds of shots ranging from the block, loops and topspin drives, to the smash, flick shot and the forehand disguise—the latter he invented: “I didn’t have it until the world championships in Birmingham; but it was satisfying when I did begin to perfect it and it always gives you a lift when you aDouglas a new stroke to your repertoire”.

Douglas’s stellar record of achievement listed below, shows that the legend dominated British and European Table Tennis in the 70s and 80s. His highest ever world ranking of seventh in ’78 and ’83, was a spectacular achievement, given that his competitors were the great European wizards and the Chinese, who seemed to have re-invented the game at the time. He was a fine all-round player who had many triumphs in the game over three decades; but he believes his finest was: “Going through the entire European team championship in Duisburg in 1978 without losing a match; I won nineteen matches out of nineteen and England against all expectations, reached the final before losing three-five to Hungary. But I was able to beat the three great Hungarians—Gergely, Jonyer, and Klamper—who were to win their country the world title against the Chinese the following year. Earlier, I had beaten the reigning European Champion Jacques Secretin of France, and then knocked him out of the men’s singles before reaching the semi-finals where Jonyer world champion in 1975 gained his revenge over me”. Desmond Douglas MBE is a legend—a great Black Briton and certainly Britain’s greatest post war Table Tennis Champion. We salute you!



Desmond Douglas Table Tennis Legend



TT legend Desmond Douglas won the following trophies:

1978-9 English National Champion

English National Men's Doubles Champion with Jimmy Walker;

English National Mixed Doubles Champion with Linda Howard;

Rothman's International Champion, Jamaica;

Runner-up, European Top Twelve competition;

Ranked seventh in the world;

1979-80 Norwich Union International (English open) champion;

English National Champion;

Bronze medal, European Team championship;

Silver medal, European mixed doubles championships with Linda Jarvis (Howard);

Fourth place, European Top Twelve completion;

Third place, Norwich Union Masters;

Number one player with Bundesliga champions, PSV

Borussia Dusseldorf, winners in 1978, 1979 and 1980

1983 Ranked seventh in the world;

1985 Commonwealth Men's Singles Champion

1985 Commonwealth Mixed Doubles Champion

1972-3 English National Junior Champion

1973 European Junior Championships runner-up, Greece;

European Junior Mixed Doubles Champion with Linda Howard.

1975 Commonwealth Men's Doubles Champion

1975 Commonwealth Mixed Doubles Champion

1975-6 English National Champion;

English National Men's Doubles Champion with Denis Neale

English National Mixed Doubles Champion with Linda Howard

English open Men's Doubles Champion with Denis Neale

1976-7 English National Runner-up;

English National Men's Doubles Champion with Denis Neale

1977 Rothman's International Champion, Jamaica

1977-8 English Open Mixed Doubles Champion with Linda Howard

1978 Welsh Open Champion

Welsh Open Mixed Doubles Champion with Linda Howard;

Bronze medal, European Championships

Silver medal, European Team Championships (including 19 out of 19, unbeaten record).

Sources:

1. Winning at Table Tennis—with Desmond Douglas; Edited by Richard Eaton.
2. Desmond Douglas interviews.
3. Rob Sinclair, General Secretary of The English Table Tennis Association (ETTA).



The History Of Table Tennis

The Earliest Years: 1891-1902

Ball games can be traced back more than two thousand years ago, verifiable by descriptive literature and illustrations from Greek and Roman documents. But Table Tennis historian Gerald Gurney¹ locates the origin of the game firmly in England in the last decade of the Nineteenth Century circa 1890s. Born in 1931, Oxbridge graduate, Gurney played table tennis for both universities and combined coaching table tennis with his teaching career from 1954. Thereafter, Gurney became the world's leading table tennis historian, with a vast collection of memorabilia at his home in Colchester.



A small part of the Gurney Collection on display at the 1988 English Championships, Brighton. Photograph by Michael Maclaren.

Gurney has also written a book entitled *'Table Tennis - the Early Years'*², in which he argues that the game was invented as an indoor version of Lawn Tennis by Wimbledon players soon after the beginning of Wimbledon Championships in 1877. Players needed to amuse themselves when inclement weather prevented them from using the courts; so they developed a simple format of lawn tennis for playing indoors, which required a miniature ball with tempered speed, flight and racquet to match. At first the game was played with a cat gut strung racquet similar to lawn tennis ones, using balls covered with various types of fabrics.

Indoor tennis subsequently became a popular recreation for Lawn Tennis players, their guests and friends; and thereafter amongst the 'grand' at dinner parties and soirées, who would simply clear their dining table after dinner to accommodate the new game, hence, how it became known as

The History Of Table Tennis

Table Tennis. One can imagine broken crockery, irate or frustrated servants and stressed hostesses, a few of whom might have found the 'knock about' fascinating enough not to have discouraged the fledgling game or banned it outright. Table Tennis somehow survived its dicey birth.

Another author-historian of the game Ron Crayden wrote a book titled: *'The Story of Table Tennis - the first one hundred years'*³, in which he said that in 1901/2 Arnold Parker published a book titled *'PING PONG-the game and how to play it'*. Parker asserted that Table Tennis was first started by James Gibb, a noted athlete who in 1891 persuaded Messrs. John Jaques and Son, the sports manufacturers, to market boxed equipment under the title GOSSIMA. Crayden revealed that originally india-rubber balls were used but apparently they were replaced by celluloid balls in 1900, when a batch was brought back from America by the aforementioned Mr. Gibb. The cadence of the lively balls as they bounced from the table on to vellum covered 'battledore' racquet, produced an uneven tone and was responsible for the onomatopoeic name Ping Pong. GOSSIMA was registered at the Patent Office in London on 16th July 1891, a date that has been generally accepted as the birth-date of the game of Ping Pong.

London Mayor's Boris Johnson famous Whiff-Waff gaffe caused delightful controversy which served to highlight the history of Table Tennis; or the history of Table Tennis, Ping Pong and Whiff-Waff. According to Gurney's book, *'Table Tennis - the Early Years'*, the game was called Table Tennis with its inception because of how it was played; but was marketed by entrepreneurs as:-

Whiff-Waff registered on 31 December 1900; Trademark number 235,131, **by Slazenger & Sons.**

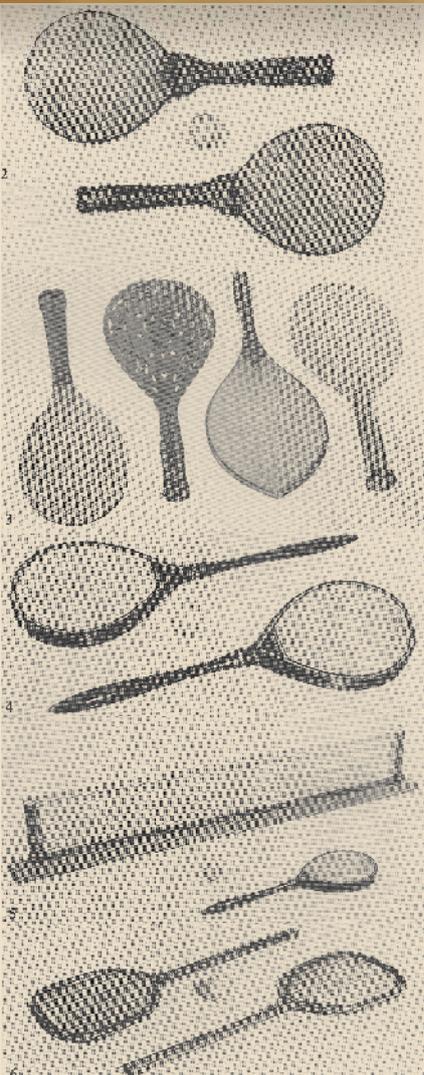
Gossima registered on 16 July 1891, Number 157,615; as Table Tennis kit **made by John Jaques & Son.**

On **21 January 1891, 7 months before Gossima, Emma Barker (London)** filed for an American patent, No. 454,700. Actually for a net fixture, the patent has a sketch of a table laid out like a lawn tennis court, describing the game as played much like lawn tennis, using racquets with straps for the hands. An 1891 advertisement in the USA by Spalding proves the game was made, under the name Indoor Tennis.

Ping-Pong, trademarked on 20 Sept. 1900 by Hamley Brothers, who became "jointly concerned" with Jaques, as the game was renamed first as "Gossima or Ping-Pong", then "Ping-Pong or Gossima", and finally just "Ping-Pong".

But the crown jewel of Table Tennis history" is the very first game, made by **David Foster of England in 1890**. Only one example is known to have survived, now featured in the ITTF Museum. Strung racquets were used, with side nets designed to catch the cloth-covered rubber balls. English Patent No.11.037, filed 15 July 1890, a full year before Jaques "Gossima".





Equipment & Etiquette

TABLE: Cavendish Club laws of early 1901 established that a table should be nine feet by five feet and the earliest Ping Pong Association (PPA) laws ruled that the height should be two feet six inches, to be painted dull, dark green, with three quarter inch white line round the edges. These measurements for tournament standards have since remained fixed.

NET: The net started at a height of six and three quarter inches until lowered in 1937 as solution to the prolonged 'pushing' play that was such a feature of the 1936 World Championship.

RACQUETS: First table tennis racquets were gut-stringed, very like Lawn Tennis racquets. American Ping Pong technology changed these to the 'battledore' made from vellum or skin. Later these were replaced by pimpled rubber bats and by sponge bats, followed by wooden or 'sandwich' bats; so called because the wood was wrapped by sponge. Bat never replaced bat in a linear way; they crossed paths or overlapped. About 1902, the Table Tennis Association (TTA) ruled that the circumferential measurement of the blade (wooden at the time) should not exceed twenty and one half inches.

BALL: The earliest Table Tennis balls were made with cork, which gave a very poor bounce. These were bettered by Jaques' 'elastic balls'. But celluloid balls were universally accepted and specified by law as soon as they appeared. The laws of the combined TTA/PPA laid down colour, size and weight.

SCORING: Lawn tennis scoring rules were used from the outset: 15-love, 30-love etc. with games and sets; but the 20-up method soon came in, particularly for matches. Initially, the best-of-five points were played from 19-all, but later a two-point lead was required. Games of 30-up and even 50-up were also played-in tournaments with single game matches.

DOUBLES: Doubles known as the 'four-handed game' (again an imitation of lawn tennis) was introduced relatively late.

THE UMPIRE: The ideal umpire was described as someone who: thoroughly understands the game, possesses great observation, gives prompt decision without being impetuous; does not allow personal feelings into his work; does not permit discussion; consequently there have been very few umpires.

ETIQUETTE: Sport and games cannot be played without etiquette or rules of conduct. For the game of table tennis, the main rules of engagement are that: Players should [i] Not lose their temper, as loss of temper loses points, [ii] Argumentative players should never play without an umpire, [iii] When in doubt, play the stroke again; [iv] When beaten, don't make excuses—such as – saying you're out of practice, or the light was bad; or that your opponent was lucky.

SOURCES:

Book by Gerald Gurney:
Table Tennis - the Early Years'

Book by Ron Crayden :
*'The Story of Table Tennis - the first one hundred years'*³

ITTF Web site:
<http://www.ittf.com/museum/TTC16.pdf>

ITTF Web site: <http://www.ittf.com/museum/indexculture2.html>



Alan Cooke's Comments On Desmond Douglas



Alan Cooke's Comments On Desmond Douglas

Table Tennis legend Desmond Douglas is highly respected and admired by contemporaries, who played with or against him, like his ex-roommate Alan Cooke, who played with/against him at club, national and international levels. Cooke had this to say about his good friend:

"Desmond is a quiet, gentle professional, who went about the game in the best way. He's the best role model I could have had and I was lucky to play along-side him".

Cooke said Douglas played Table Tennis at a time when the game was graced by the strongest players. Douglas started in the '70s when Stellan Bengtsson was at the top of his game. Bengtsson was the best player in Europe and world champion. Douglas beat him and went on to enjoy a very long unbeaten run,

winning nine English championships in a row and eleven in total. Douglas dominated the game in the eighties and had one of his greatest moments when he beat Jan Ove Waldner, to win the European Top Twelve Championships, which is one of Douglas's biggest career achievements.

Desmond Douglas retired briefly but returned to the game in 1995 to help out the British team. At the age of forty, he beat the best Chinese player Lou Gouliang and then retired for good. Gouliang became the Olympic Champion in '96.

According to Alan, the phenomenon was that Desmond Douglas was so good for so long. He was unbeatable and tough to beat even when he wasn't at his best. His biggest asset was his catlike speed. "It was like there was a wall behind him. You just couldn't get the ball pass him. We used to say that the harder you hit the ball to him, the faster the ball came back at you. My goal was to beat Des; so I eventually worked out that the best way to play against him was to slow him down and it still took me years to implement my strategy. Des never lost to more than a handful of people". Cooke beat Douglas and stopped him winning his tenth National championship in a row. Cooke said he had literally just started playing the game when he saw Douglas win his first national championship. He and Douglas have remained steadfast friends over the years and now work together coaching the national team. Douglas coaches in West Midlands where he's working with the region's best young players, trying to find another Desmond Douglas MBE.





www.rootsofsport.org.uk

