

## Managing Large Groups and Fun Games

The following information has been gathered from my experience in coaching for 16 years in schools and clubs. These systems seem to work for me. If applied with control and good use of the voice, there is no reason why they can not work for you.

Some main rules for managing a large group:-

- Use of a strong voice to communicate is vital. If you do not have a strong voice, consider using a whistle to gain attention and then a signal to get people to move closer to you so that they can hear you.
- Set your 'rules of behaviour' right at the outset. The larger the numbers, the greater the opportunity for injury due to over-exuberance. (See 1. below)
- 'Risk assess' at the outset and then constantly re-assess as the activity goes on. (See 2. below)
- There are generally a wide spread of skills and abilities in large groups. Try to cater for all abilities without being patronising. This could include adapting some of the activity to make it easier for those who struggle or changing the drill for an individual.
- Avoid using jargon, long words or 'adult language' to children. One lad I taught didn't know what 'consistently' meant so he kept whacking the ball as hard as he could!
- If you are going to offer praise, try to keep a mental or physical note of who you have praised. Everyone, even those who are not achieving should have some praise throughout the session.
- Any bad behaviour must be challenged and if necessary, for the safety of the other students, the culprit should be asked to sit down for a short time. This can be a delicate balancing trick but by determining the group dynamics early on, you should be able to gauge what would be the best way to deal with poor behaviour. (see 3. below)

### 1. Rules of behaviour.

Involve the group in setting the rules. A brief talk at the beginning of the session could be the difference between engaging the group and disengaging them. You're your rules positive. Examples of your rules may be – avoid players when they are in the middle of a practise; use simple words like 'you're to avoid touching anyone'; 'be polite to everyone'. Some of my pet hates are sitting on tables, bouncing a ball when I talk, talking when I talk. So I let all of my pupils know this at the outset by telling them that table tennis tables are for table tennis only; keep all equipment still while I talk; (saying hold onto your balls sometimes gets a humorous reaction!); when the coach talks, you listen.

### 2. Risk assessments.

Risk assessments are a vital part of managing large groups. You must have an idea of the injury potential of each exercise you do. Put in place 'rules' to minimise those risks and constantly re-assess as the exercise goes on. If you document the exercise and write down what controlling factors you have put in place, if an accident happens even

after all you have done, there will be a much lesser risk of suing! Try to write down any eventuality as part of your lesson plan. It is time consuming but you will only have to do it once for each exercise you do. Keep it safe!

### 3. Managing bad behaviour.

If you are coaching in a school, you should request information about any learning difficulties of the pupils. Often, pupils with ADHD or ADD will be sent to you without you knowing that they suffer from this condition. If you are coaching in a Club, then there should be a system in place where you are given this information prior to coaching. Setting the ground rules at the start is a major part of managing bad behaviour. Learn the pupil's names as early as possible. As soon as you see them doing something well or trying hard, praise them. Make them feel good about doing something well. If behaviour falls below your own standard, you will need to deal with it. Ways of doing so could be –

- Point out what they are doing wrong, tell them why it is wrong and what 'danger' or disruption it causes. If it applies, you can mention how it makes you feel or how it makes the rest of the class feel and then tell them how you know they can do it correctly. Always try and finish on a high point of encouragement. Then watch immediately afterwards looking for improvement that you can praise.
- Severe behaviour could be openly dealt with by getting the pupil to sit at the side, explaining how serious it is and why. This has been one of my most effective methods of dealing with poor behaviour as the rest of the class see it and realise that it could happen to them.
- Take the pupil to one side and ask them to explain their actions. This often is enough for them to realise that they have been seen doing something they shouldn't have been doing.

My own belief is that bad behaviour must be fed back to the teacher in a school or parent if at a club as they should have feedback, positive or negative, so that it can be dealt with. This is something that should be discussed with the school or club prior to the coaching taking place.

### Experience

I have dealt with a number of different groups of varying skills and abilities. One school received funding to put on a table tennis club for those who didn't engage in other sports. This meant that we got the 'challenging' pupils in our lunchtime club. I had to split fights up, cope with boys who didn't want to do anything I suggested which involved discipline and, with only 3 tables, manage up to 30 'challenging' pupils in a single half hour session. How did I do it (without medication)!? Trial and error!

I learnt the name of every pupil who came in, asked them why they wanted to come to table tennis and then tried to put them with someone they knew. I set up small dinner tables or desks with dividers as nets. Thankfully, I never ran out of bats so they could all have a bat each. I then rotated them around the tables in groups of 4 or sometimes more. I also did lots of challenges like keeping the rally going for as long as possible and the last couple going were the winners.

For those boys who refused to do structured things, I played 'cricket' with them so that they could hit the ball hard! This seemed to work and I still considered it 'structured'! I normally concluded with a game of 'English' (see below on games).

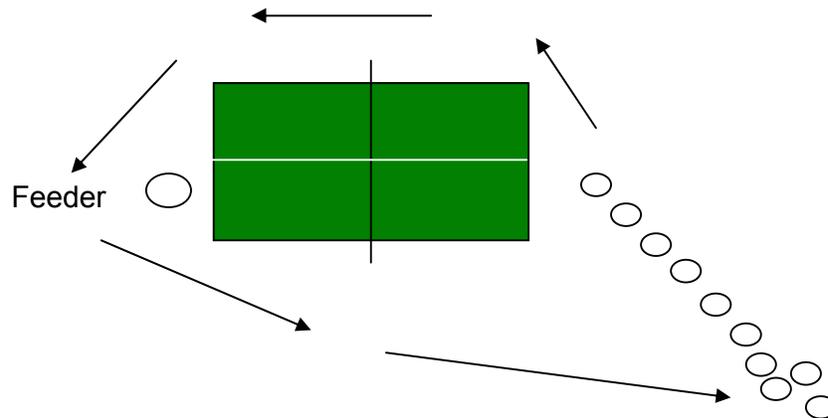
### Summary:

Know your group as well as possible. Set rules early and enforce them. Children prefer structure to chaos so structure your session. Finally, don't get involved playing on the tables, unless you are using the whole group. You cannot control the rest of the pupils if you are on focused on one table.

## Fun Games

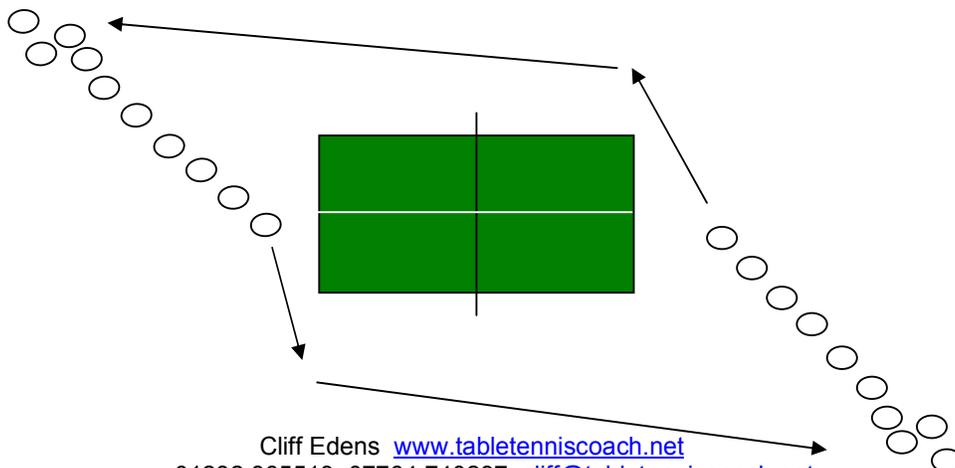
Many of the following games are 'well known'. Some are my inventions but may have been done elsewhere in different formats. Please feel free to use them, adapt them, change them completely and invent your own. If you do invent your own, I would really like to see them and, with your permission, I would like to send them on to as many coaches as I know.

### "English".



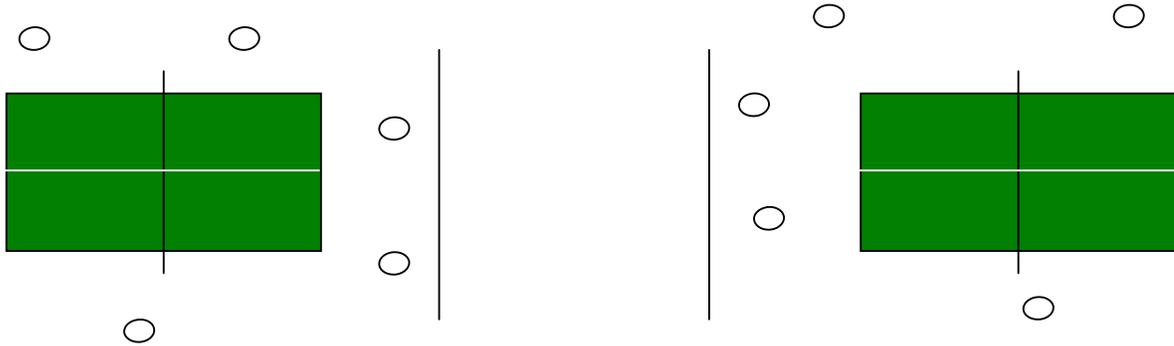
Objective:- Keep the rally going. Those that miss are out!

### "American"



Each player has one hit.  
If you miss, you're out or you don't get a point.  
Rotate after each hit.

### Table Targets:-



Objective: To score points by throwing the ball onto the opponents table.

Rules: Players must throw from behind their barriers. Once a person scores a point, they cannot score until all of the rest of their team score.

### Big Table Tennis:-

Place 6 tables together to form one big table. Use barriers across the middle of the table and then you can play 'American' around the big table. Good fun and large numbers can play.

### Cricket :-

There are a number of ways to play to make it harder or easier for the player. Feeder drops the ball near the net and the pupil hits the ball onto the table to score 1 run if it hits the floor or 4 if it hits a 'boundary without being caught'. You can make this harder by dropping the ball closer to the end of the table and lower so it doesn't bounce as high. For skilled practitioners, the ball can be fed from a bat 'in the field'.

### Dodge Ball:-

This is a good game to warm up or cool down. One person starts with a ball in their hand and can run and throw the ball at any person. Once another person has been hit with the ball, the two players then work as a team to hit others. They then cannot move their feet if they have the ball. Keep going until everyone has been hit. The last person to be hit is the winner.

### **Volley Ball Table Tennis:-**

Two teams are separated by barriers, with bats in a badminton court or similar. The ball is only allowed to bounce once on the floor but needn't bounce at all. Play starts from the back of the court and the objective is to win the point as in Volleyball. There can be 3 hits per team each time the ball comes over the barriers. Players rotate when a point is won by their team. Ideally have two teams of 6, three at the front and three at the back and they rotate one place clockwise.

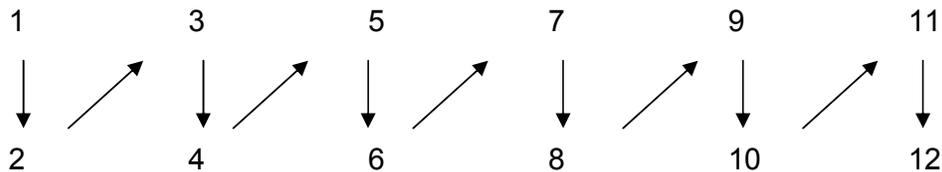
### **Table Games**

#### **Top table with a difference:-**

Play the normal top table however; if the player hits a ball and it hits the opponent's side of the table then hits the torso of the opponent, that player wins the game there and then. This game teaches players to open up an attack at the body of the opponent.

#### **Pass the ping pong ball:-**

Tables need to be in a line across the hall and at least one person on each side of the table. In a zig zag fashion, the ball must go up the line of tables and then back along the tables to the first player. Players must hit the other side of the table. 1 to 12 then, without stopping, reverse the direction. Not for beginners!



There are so many fun games on and off the tables. The main point about these games is to 'have fun'. If it turns out to be too competitive, adapt it to make it less competitive although, to date, I haven't needed to do this to any of the above.

The ITTF coaching manual has a number of 'on table' games for beginners.

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