

TABLE TENNIS

TIPS FROM A WORLD CHAMPION

- *INDIVIDUAL TECHNIQUE*
- *EFFECTIVE TACTICS*
- *SUCCESSFUL COMPETITION*
- *OPTIMAL TRAINING*
- *MANY INSIDE TIPS*

Gross / Schlager

Interviews with
**World Champion
Werner Schlager**


TENERGY

**MEYER
& MEYER
SPORT**

Table Tennis

For better readability, we have decided to use the masculine (neutral) form of address, but the information also refers to women.

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Bernd Ulrich Gross/Werner Schlager

Table Tennis

Tips from a World Champion



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CONTENTS

Preface and Acknowledgements

1 Introduction

2 A few words from Werner Schlager

3 About the Stroke Techniques

3.1 The Service

3.2 Service Return

3.3 Push

3.4 Drive

3.5 Smash

3.6 Forehand Topspin

3.7 Backhand Topspin

3.8 Flip

3.9 Block

3.10 Backspin Defence

3.11 Balloon Defence

4 Technique and Training of Technique

5 Playing Systems in Table Tennis

6 Tactics and Coaching

7 Doubles

8 Fitness and Athletics

- 8.1 Endurance
- 8.2 Strength
- 8.3 Power and Strength Endurance
- 8.4 Coordination

9 Psychology

- 9.1 Mental Strength, Psychological Pressure, Nervousness and Fear, Rage and Frustration, Mental Training, Prestart Condition
- 9.2 Concentration, Trance, Psychological Tricks, Will Power, Body Language, Time-Out, Relaxation

10 Training

11 Resume and Vision

12 Numbers, Dates and Palmarès

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PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

During my extensive life in the table tennis world I was fortunate enough to attend many wonderful events, and two of them clearly stick out:

In 1989, I was allowed to witness how the young German Double Joerg Roskopf and Steffen Fetzner sensationally became World Champions in the sold-out Westfalen Halle in Dortmund. The spectators were filled with enthusiasm! Germany experienced a table tennis boom afterward and international table tennis also gained prestige.

The second unforgettable experience happened in 2003 in Paris, where the World Championships took place. Austrian Werner Schlager turned the *Palais Omnisports de Paris-Bercy* into a madhouse. Although Werner was ranked sixth in the world and belonged to the top players, nobody counted on him winning the tournament. The Chinese superiority was thought to be too strong. However, he played better, round after round, as if in trance, close to defeat several times, but he was triumphant in the end. A dream came true, and the 13,000 spectators dreamed with him because they could hardly believe what this Austrian had achieved. Werner has played himself into the hearts of countless table tennis fans, regardless of their nationality.

I am very grateful that I was allowed to watch his last three games. I lived through the games as if I were standing at the table with all his ups and downs. Since Werner was a junior, he had a contract with the Japanese Table Tennis manufacturer *Tamasu Butterfly*, for whom I have been working as a journalist for 20 years. His World Championship title is absolutely brilliant. Before him, Swedish legend Jan-Ove Waldner was the last European to win the World Championships in the men's single.

Werner's title also sparked an enormous table tennis boom in Austria as a result. He is an ambassador for the table tennis sport; he loves his fans and talks to them openly, honestly and without arrogance. He lives table tennis and

engages wherever possible. He criticizes developments he sees as going in the wrong direction and has his eye directed toward the future. The foundation of the Werner Schlager Academy in Vienna/Schwechat is the best proof that he will continue to promote table tennis and provide new inspiration.

I want to thank Werner Schlager for his wonderful cooperation during our interviews, which we conducted over a period of two years for the Butterfly Internet Newsletter. He has proven that he is a thoughtful player who reflects upon his sport. He was enthusiastic about my idea to compile these interviews into a book which offers a unique look at the sport.

I would also like to thank (on behalf of Werner, as well) *Tamasu Butterfly Europe* and its director Hideyuki Kamizuru, who supported the idea right from the start and made extensive photographic material available to us.

We wish all the readers much fun and hope you gain new knowledge with this book. May one or another tip help you as a player or coach, for then our work was worth it.

Bernd-Ulrich Gross

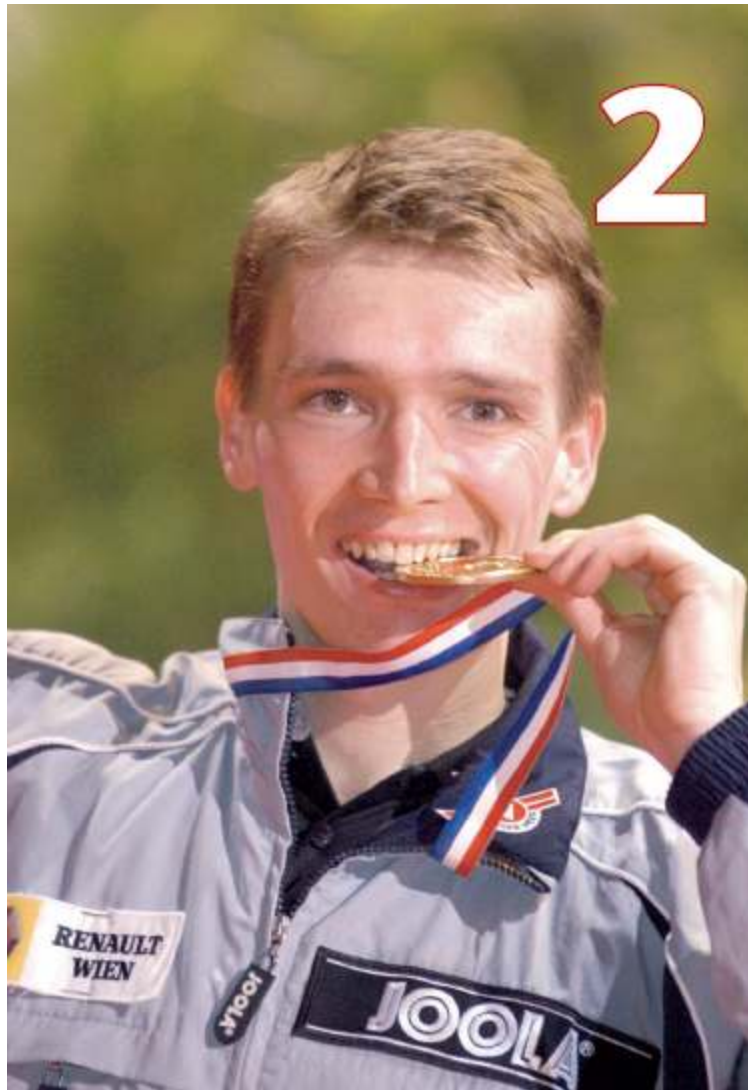


1 INTRODUCTION

The basis for this book is a compilation of 23 interviews which I conducted with Werner Schlager throughout 2008 and 2009 for *Butterfly News*. It soon became clear that these interviews would be perfect material for a completely different table tennis instruction book altogether. The interviews were reviewed, brought up to date and summarized. The goal was to produce a clearly structured book in a new form. No table tennis book has offered continuous interviews (apart from the analysis of picture series) until now.

All major aspects of theoretical and practical issues of table tennis are covered. Naturally, the topics about stroke techniques take up most of the space because Werner offers a lot of tips for training and the game, and surely many players and coaches are very interested in this information. Numerous picture series are meant to contribute to a better understanding.

The nice thing about this book is that you do not need to read it in chronological order. The chapters all stand for themselves, so if you are interested in psychology, you can start reading from that section. If you don't know Werner Schlager that well, you should start with his short account of his accomplishments, *A few words from Werner Schlager*. By reading about Werner first, some of the passages in the interviews will be easier to understand.



2 A FEW WORDS FROM WERNER SCHLAGER

The "seatbelt on" sign is off; the plane has landed in Vienna/Schwechat. One week in China is over. Finally, I am at home again.

With my Bettina, and my son Nick.

At home?

Nearly at home. Yes, here in Schwechat it smells like home even if I still live in Vienna Neustadt.

Schwechat – a few minutes from Vienna International Airport, and close to the city itself. In the heart of Europe. There it is – "my" Werner Schlager Academy. A table tennis world training center has been built here in my honor.

A wonderful world is opening: two enormous gyms. In the bigger one, there is table tennis on 30 tables around the clock. A fitness center with all the latest equipment, large rooms for a team of physicians who take care of our guests around the clock, a restaurant, a players lounge, rooms for seminars... everything a top athlete needs.

My world of wonders – our world of wonders.



Werner's start at his father's homemade table

How many fights did I have to win to get all this? How many bridges did I have to cross? What did I have to win?

Win?

Yes – I did win. I did win a lot. It was a long, strenuous path up to the top. A path with a lot of ups and downs.

A path that started more than three decades ago in Vienna Neustadt.

My father Rudolf was fascinated right from the start by his hobby, table tennis. He got it into his head to lead my brother Harald and me to the top. My brother's path ended at the top of Austria. Mine went even farther.

Was I 5 or 6? It doesn't matter – my father had the brilliant idea to saw off the legs of our table tennis table to give me the opportunity to play at a suitable height very early. He made me listen to Polka music so that I could find a playing rhythm.

I don't know how many people laughed at my father at the time, how often they told my father that I would never get anywhere.

They were wrong. Many were wrong.

World Championships in Paris Bercy, a tournament that seemed to be finished for me already the day before. Wang Liquin, the defending champion from China, was leading 3:2 in sets and had 4 match balls at 10:6 in the quarter-final.

I will never get this film out of my head.

Defended.

Defended.

Defended.

Defended.



The moment of triumph: World Champion 2003!

Thirteen thousand people jumped up and cheered, and I was qualified for the semifinal the next day. And again there was a mountain to climb – the Olympic Champion Kong Linghui – a giant from China. Against him, I had to defend a match ball in the seventh set. A few hours later and six sets against the Korean Joo Se Hyuk and I was standing on the winners' podium listening to the Austrian national anthem. I really had accomplished my win.

I arrived at the Olympic Single World Champion ranked number 1 in the world ranking.

I couldn't achieve more as a table tennis player. Even then – apart from some setbacks, which accompany every athlete – there are so many hours and days I will never forget.

When I ...

... following a poll of the Chinese news agency Xinhua, was the most popular foreign athlete in the world in front of Michael Schumacher, Tiger Woods,

Ronaldo, and the tennis player Michael Chang, who was an idol in China his whole life.



Sportsman of the year in Austria, Idol in China

...together with my friend Karl Jindrak, won gold in the doubles at the European Championships in Aarhus in 2005.

... among others, sensationally beat my friend Vladimir Samsonov and got to the final at the European Championships in Stuttgart in 2009, where I could not prepare myself properly because I was already busy with the preparations for the Werner Schlager Academy in Schwechat.

Yes, I can talk a lot about three decades.

About my trips around the world, and my experiences in Asia, especially China, where I was always met with a lot of respect.

About the birth of my son Nick, and seeing him grow – a fascinating present from heaven.

About Bettina, the woman of my life, the mother of my son.

And about the Werner Schlager Academy. About the idea, the planning, and the sport political talks, which made the realization of this wonder world possible.

I was so lucky to achieve almost everything an athlete and person can only dream of.

Here and now, I would like to pass on everything I learned as an athlete, a table tennis player and person.

Great coaches stand by my side: "Mister Butterfly" Mario Amizic, who once worked with stars like Vladimir Samsonov, Michael Maze, Petr Korbel, Jun Mizutani and Zoran Primorac.

Richard Prause and Dirk Wagner are on my team – Germany's success coaches, when Timo Boll was rising to number 1 in the world rankings, to the Olympic Final and to a world star.

I found coaches from all over the world, who could help with mental care, physical coaching, advising for nourishment, massage and even physicians – they all should and want to continue with me and my team at the Werner Schlager Academy where I will one day end my career as a player.

"If table tennis would be simple, it would be called football." I read that once on a T-shirt of one of my national team colleagues. Table tennis is not simple – table tennis is a world sport that never rests. It is a sport that develops quickly and will continue to develop quickly. I am not only there with my team, but we are all in the middle of it. One day, we will move forward. It is a long way. I am looking forward to it ...



Werner Schlager Schwechat, September 2010

A dream comes true: World Champion!



3 ABOUT THE STROKE TECHNIQUES

3.1 The Service

"The service is the most important stroke in table tennis"

The game is opened with a service. It is the only stroke technique that is played without the influence of an opponent. No other technique can be varied so much concerning rotation, placement and speed. It is a stroke technique, which decides the outcome of a game to a large extent. Despite its importance, a lot of amateurs don't pay a lot of attention to service training.

This technique is special. Some love it, some hate it. As the stroke that opens the game, how important is the serve generally?

The service is without a doubt the most important stroke in table tennis. At the same time, it is also the visiting card of each player because the possibilities of variation are endless. A bad serve is very often followed by the loss of a point in the same way a clever and varied serve often leads to winning a point.

There are good servers and not-so-good servers. At the top level, there are surely differences but not as obvious as with amateurs. How important is the serve for your game?

For me, the service is a very important tactical tool.

You prefer serving forehand, but I think I have also seen you serve backhand. What are the advantages of a forehand serve, and when is it worth using the backhand variety?

I practice the forehand serve much more, therefore I use the backhand variety very seldom.

Have you got one secret serve that you keep for important match situations to surprise your opponent?

I have some service varieties that I use very consciously. I would not call it a secret serve though.

There are only a few players, like Samsonov, Primorac, Saive and now Ovtcharov, who frequently serve with their backhand. Is that because of their aptitude, their former coaches or just coincidence?

I would call it preference; a preference that is connected to their aptitude. Not so much in the case of Samsonov (more a tactical variety) than with other players.

Would you tell younger players to practice forehand and backhand serves equally?

Yes, of course. Personal preferences should be supported.

You played in Magdeburg against the young German, Dimitrij Ovtcharov. When I saw him a year ago for the first time, I noticed his unconventional serves straight away. Side spin serves with the forehand from a low position like you saw during the '60s and '70s, and backhand side spin serves that remind me of Stellan Bengtsson or Peter Stellwag. Wang Liqin had big problems with these during the German Open in Bremen. Does this mean that anything is possible with serves?

It shows that serve varieties can be very effective every now and again. The more attention drawn to a special technique, the more it is going to be analyzed and lose its effectiveness. Therefore, all top players must constantly think of new varieties. That is the only way to survive several years as a world class player.