

Tennis and Ping Pong: A Comparison

In the game of tennis Novak Djokovic is considered to be the best in the world. Behind the comfort of a net and a racquet there are few who can claim to be skilled enough to turn Djokovic's confident stride into a timid toddle. One man who can relate to this feeling of total domination is the number one ping pong player in the world, Ma Long. Unlike Djokovic who wields a racquet and must be athletic enough to swiftly maneuver around the court, Long relies on his reflexes and deceptive serves to win games. Each of these player's talents are reflected back in the nature of their sport. Tennis and ping pong feature similar playing fields and equipment, but differ when it comes to the physical aspects of how each game is played.

From a birds eye view both the tennis court and ping pong table look almost identical. A net lies in the center of the field that divides it into two separate sections. Each player stands in or behind their respective section and is responsible for making sure the ball does not hit the ground and go out of bounds in their area. From here some minor distinctions between the two playing fields can be seen. Table tennis or ping pong requires that the table have uniform dimensions of 9 feet by 5 feet. The ITTF or International Table Tennis Federation allows only wooden tables to be used in competitive play. Regular tennis divides the playing field even further into multiple parts. On one side of the net there are a left and right service box that divide the front half of the field, a serve line that acts as the bottom boundary for the service boxes, and two narrow areas on the right and the left called the singles sideline and the doubles alley.

The equipment seen in both sports is also very similar in appearance and function. Both games involve balls of differing sizes that are meant to be bounced off of the opponent's side of the field. The size and weight of each ball differ quite substantially however. A standard tennis ball should have a diameter of 6.6 cm and an average mass of around 58.0 grams. The ping pong

ball is much smaller and lighter and comes in at just 40mm and 2.7 grams. This differences in size and mass translate to differences in how each game is played. In ping pong, players have to focus less on making sure they have put enough power into their swing and can instead concentrate on style and positioning. The tennis ball is a comparatively heavier object, so someone playing tennis cannot give the ball a light tap like they would in ping pong and expect the ball to go anywhere. Instead they must put a great amount of force behind their swing if they want to deal a powerful serve back to their opponent.

The biggest differences between the games can be learned by asking a simple question – what makes a great tennis or ping pong player? Athletes from both games can find common ground in the fact that they all hate to lose and are perfectionists when it comes to execution. But tennis is a more physical sport simply due to the fact that the playing field is so much bigger at 78 feet long by 27 feet wide. This means that players need to be in top physical condition in order to move around the court to get to the ball. If one player has a cardio advantage over another, that player will have a much easier time getting to where they need to be. Ping pong players still need to be in shape, but much less so because they do not need to move around as much as tennis players do. If a player's reach is long enough they could technically stand in the middle of their side of the table and not move at all except for when they have to hit the ball.

When comparing tennis and table tennis there are enough distinctions in how each game is played to make them substantially different. Ping pong uses a smaller ball, paddle, and playing field. This means that players have to rely less on their athletic abilities and more on their reflexes. Tennis forces players to sprint across the court in order to catch up to the ball, so it is a more physical sport overall. Ma Long might be the best table tennis player, but give him a tennis racquet and make him run across a 27 foot wide court and he will be out of his element.