

How to Play Table Football

Table football, more commonly known as foosball or table soccer, is a popular table game played at bars and other establishments. This game is pretty straightforward, but there are a few simple rules you should keep in mind before diving...

Following the Rules

1. **Choose which player will get to 'serve' the ball first.** Flip a coin to decide if you or your opponent will serve, or hit the ball first. After the initial play, note that the losing player gets to serve the ball in future plays.^[1]

1. For instance, if you get scored upon, you get to serve the ball next.

Did You Know? Some foosball tables have a 3-bar, 5-bar, 2-bar, and 1-bar for each player, while others have a 3-bar, 5-bar, 2-bar, and 3-bar.

2. **Serve the ball so gameplay can begin.** Block off the serving hole with your left hand, then slide the ball into the hole. Place the index finger of your right hand along the top-left corner of the ball, or the 11 o'clock position. Lift your left hand away from the covering and move it to the handle of the 5-bar offensive pole. At this point, spin your right hand counterclockwise, allowing the ball to land on your side of the table.^[2]
 1. Don't worry—this is perfectly legal gameplay! Your opponent is welcome to serve the ball in their direction on their turns.
3. **Pass the ball to your 3-bar row of players.** Secure the ball beneath your 5-bar pole after your serve. Rotate the pole so the player's foot is at a 90-degree angle behind the ball. Move the player forward to 'kick' the ball, but continue to swing the player upwards to follow through with the kick. With your 3-bar row, 'receive' the pass by holding your 3-bar player at a 30 to 45-degree angle behind the ball.^[3]
 1. Similar to real football or soccer, passing is a valuable strategy that can help you keep the ball moving.
4. **Make your plays within 10 seconds of getting the ball.** Keep a mental clock going in your head as you play the game. Countdown from 10 as soon as 1 of your players receives the ball. You can't dawdle with the ball forever, so try to make a skilled, calculated play as soon as possible.^[4]
 1. If you don't play the ball within 10 seconds, the play is reset and your opponent gets to serve.
 2. Some players allow a 15-second time limit. Talk with your opponent to see what works best for your particular game.^[5]
5. **Block your opponent's plays with your 2 defensive bars.** Slide and rotate your 2 bars that are closest to your goal, which will help you block and defend your goal. Keep an eye on the ball and slide your defenders and goalie accordingly so the ball stays away from your goal.^[6]
 1. While the goalie and defending bars can be used to score, they're usually used to defend and clear out the ball.

6. **Clear the ball from your goal with 1 of your defensive bars.** Put a lot of power into your 'kick' when the ball ends up in your defensive area. Pause the ball with your player before passing or kicking it forward. If you send a rolling ball towards your opponent, you may give them a free shot on your goal.^[7]
 1. The main focus of clearing the ball is keeping your goal safe, not collecting points.
7. **Reset the ball when it's 'dead.'** Grab the ball if it gets stuck in a corner or if it flies off the table. Place the ball near the player's 2-bar so they can restart the game again.^[8]
8. **Score 5 goals before your opponent does.** Keep track of each goal that's scored in the game. Declare a winner after a fifth win, or play however many matches you'd like.^[9]

Trying New Techniques and Tricks

1. **Keep your thumb wrapped around the handle without touching your index finger.** Try not squeeze or grip the handle too much—instead, wrap your hand around gently, with your palm on top of the handle and your thumb and fingers on opposite sides of 1 another. Grip the handles in this fashion so you can make sturdy, stable plays.^[10]
 1. Try not to keep your thumb on top of the handle, or else you won't have a lot of control over your swings.^[11]
 2. You don't want to have white knuckles while you play.
2. **Try an open-handed grip when making offensive shots.** Loosen your grip, leaving the bottom of your palm and the top of your wrist touching the handle. Slide your wrist and hand up to create a powerful offensive kick. Try to flick your wrist as you do this, so your movements can be as fluid as possible.^[12]
 1. Avoid spinning the rod in a full circle, as this is illegal.
3. **Line up your playing bars so you can make clearer shots.** Keep your 2 offensive playing bars spaced out, leaving an ample gap for passing and serving successfully. Keep your players lined up so you can pass the ball cleanly and neatly, which lets you make more effective shots on the goal.^[13]
 1. Try to stagger your offensive players so they're spaced between your opponent's defensive players.
4. **Combine your defensive bars to make more effective plays.** Slide your defensive bar so your goalie and 1 of your defenders are shoulder-to-shoulder. Keep these players close together so your opponent doesn't have as many clear opportunities to shoot on your goal.^[14]
 1. The ball shouldn't be able to pass through your goalie or your defender.
5. **Deflect bad shots from your opponent into their goal.** Keep your eyes peeled for weak shots leveled by your opponent, which leave the ball rolling toward your players. Take these opportunities to kick the ball with your own players. Depending on the set-up, you may be able to turn your opponent's bad play into an unlikely goal!^[15]

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