

Gluing a table tennis top-sheet to a sponge

Table tennis rubbers consist of a top-sheet (the outer surface) and a sponge (that part that is attached to the blade, although some rubbers are used as only the top-sheet. Although the majority of players buy a rubber with the two already glued together, some players, far more common among pimple player, wish to make their own top-sheet and sponge combinations, and therefore need a good procedure for gluing these together.

Gluing a top-sheet to a sponge is a little trickier than gluing a rubber to a blade, but it's not that hard, as long as you don't expect it to look like a bought rubber when you finish. Once it's cut and on the blade you probably won't be able to tell the difference.

To glue a top-sheet to a sponge you need a good glue or rubber cement, the thicker ones are usually better since they have more adhesives in them. I usually use rubber cement from an art supply shop, which tends to be thicker than many table tennis glues.

You need to put glue on both the top-sheet and sponge for proper adhesion. The most important thing to remember is to be PATIENT in every step...there's no need to rush any of these steps, so take your time...

1. Put a layer of glue on the sponge. Now depending on your sponge or glue, this may make it expand a little. It's important to let it shrink back to its normal size before you apply the top-sheet. If you don't do this and let it shrink after you apply the top-sheet, the top-sheet will end up in compression, making it slower and less sensitive. You can usually tell that it's expanding because it bows or domes a little. Usually it will flatten within half an hour or less. If the sponge is already a little curved when new, gluing it to a rigid surface with a thin layer of glue may help and stop it from stretching.

2(a). For an inverted rubber you need to put glue on JUST on the tips of the pips. It's important NOT to get glue between the pips as this might allow it to trickle down to the top surface, making it expand (bubble up) and might affect the playing surface. The way I do it is I brush a flat layer of glue onto a flat surface that does not absorb the glue, like glass, a table surface or many plastics. Then I immediately put the top-sheet with pips down onto the layer of glue, push and slide it around a little on every part of the sheet, then pull it off. Inspect the pips afterwards to make sure ALL pips are covered with glue, or else you need to repeat the procedure. You must make great care to make sure the rubber does NOT fold back onto itself, as it can be hard to pull it apart again.

2(b). For pimped rubber (short, medium or long pips), you need to get a layer of glue onto the whole surface. Put it on a flat surface, pips down, and brush a layer of glue on there. It pays to put some small weights on the corners of the rubbers, as the thin basesheet of the pips rubber easily expands, making it shrivel up very easily. You must make great care to make sure the rubber does NOT fold back onto itself, as it can be hard to pull it apart again. It WILL shrivel up a little, so you must wait till it's pretty much straightens out again. This usually takes somewhere between 10 to 20 minutes. It may still look a little wobbly, but that's not a big issue.

3(a). For inverted, with your hands hold the top-sheet on the edges, line it up with the bottom of the sponge, and simply lay it on there. Try NOT to stretch the rubber while you're holding it, since this would put some uneven tension on the top-sheet. If you DO want some tension in the top-sheet, you can roll it on with a thick roller or bottle, and stretch it a little while you're putting it on. This DOES take a little practice, so I would not recommend this if it's the first time you glue a top-sheet to a sponge. Try not to stretch it too much; a little tension can already be quite effective.

3(b). For pips this is a little tricky, since the sheet tends to be so flexible. Holding it in your hands folded over usually helps (the non-glued sides folded over, never touch the glued sides with each other). Line up the top-sheet with the bottom of the sponge, and put down the bottom 10mm or so. Then use a roller to gently roll the rest of the pips sheet onto the sponge. This is important since you DON'T want any bubble underneath the top-sheet. Try not to tension the top-sheet while you're rolling it on.

4. Put a few books onto the rubber to press down the top-sheet onto the sponge. For pips rubbers, press the bottom part of the top-sheet (part with the label) hard with your fingers, as this will not be pushed down with the books.

Particularly for inverted rubbers, it's important NOT to put too much weight onto the rubber, as this will push the pips into the sponge, and might make the edges of the pips stick to the sponge, potentially producing an uneven and inconsistent surface.

5. I like to leave it overnight, but it should be ready after an hour or so. You can check to see how well it worked by trying to peel the corners. It should be pretty well stuck, perhaps a little loose where you held it in your hand when you put the top-sheet onto the sponge, but this part is not used when cut, so it should not matter. I have used this method many times, and have even speed glued the rubber numerous times afterwards, and it did not come loose. Putting on too much speed glue might weaken it though.

Hopefully this guide will work well for you., and you're ready to try your own top-sheet and sponge combinations!