

Grippy (European/Japanese Tensor) VS Tacky (Chinese) Rubbers

There is no such thing like "best rubber", the rubber that suits your playing style is the best. Different playing styles demand different equipment.



Characteristics

Chinese rubbers are tacky and have much harder sponges and topsheets. European/Japanese rubbers are grippy with softer sponges. Tacky rubbers use friction to produce spin and grippy rubbers "bite" the ball creating mechanical spin. The big difference in looping, is the amount of spin created and trajectory.

Grippy rubbers create high arc loops and tacky ones low arc. This means that grippy rubbers provide you bigger margin for error when you need to pass the ball over the net, especially against underspin. On the other hand, a successful loop created by a tacky rubber is very awkward to counter because it dips down after the bounce, following a straight line path.

Durability

It all comes down to how much hours you spend per week on training. The clear advantage of tacky rubbers is that their tackiness rejuvenates to a high percentage if you clean it after each session. Grippy rubbers wear down easily. The more spin you produce the more "damage" you make to the rubber's elasticity. Bear in mind that rubbers made with natural gum last much longer than those made with synthetic gum. Generally, after 150 - 200 hours of practice grippy rubber will be completely dead, whereas the tacky will keep going, producing decent amounts of spin.

Economy

The most important factor here is your economical situation and how often you change your rubbers. If you demand quality play but with cheap cost, tacky rubbers are the way to go. Grippy are also a good choice if you can afford it. Comparing price / performance ratio through a year's season, tacky rubbers definitely prevail. For example the best selling grippy rubber is Tenergy05 and costs 70\$ approximately. On the other side the popular Hurricane3 Neo costs 20 - 25\$ (I have also taken into consideration the amount of booster needed per month). I must remind you at this point, that tacky rubbers have optimal performance when boosted.

Eventually it all comes down to precise decision making. Have the following "equation" as a guideline and you will make the right choice for your playing style and economical demands:

Price + Performance After Certain Period of Time + Your Playing Style Requirements = Your Suitable Rubber.

Serving

If you like spinny serves, tacky rubbers are a lot better. The tacky surface offers more dwell time resulting in serves with lots of spin. The ball stays low even when serving side, top or sidetopspin serves. Grippy rubbers are a bit bouncy and less accurate.

In high toss serves this "disadvantage" is even more visible. If you are a variation server you will love the variety of choices that tacky rubbers provide. You can fool your opponents changing from light backspin to heavy backspin serves, with very small differences in the motion range. A clear disadvantage here is that you cannot produce fast paced serves with tacky rubbers. But this fact is of small importance as long fast serves are rarely executed, especially in intermediate/advanced level of play. Overall, Tacky rubbers are superior to grippy and need less practice to master a good spinny serve with placement.

Receiving

In short receives like the short "drop shot" push, Tacky rubbers are definitely dominant. Loads of backspin on the ball when pushing, making it an extremely difficult for the opponent to attack. Soft receives with delicate touch (flicking or pushing) are more effective with tacky rubbers because they produce more spin.

Flicking though is a lot better with grippy rubbers. Flat hits (on top of the bounce) are the way to create fast pace and surprise your opponent. Fast pace flicks though, are very difficult to execute with tacky rubbers because the ball stays on your paddle longer. It's better to execute spinny flicks with placement when using tacky rubbers. So basically it depends on your playing style and how you flick the ball.

On long fast serves, Tacky rubbers allow small margin for error, you will have to practice a lot on your technique and footwork in order to compensate with this disadvantage. Looping with grippy rubbers though is a lot easier and can be executed with small motions.

This is crucial because if your timing is poor, you can still stay into the point by executing a slow spinny loop to counteract the fast pace of the serve. This type of receiving is almost impossible when playing with tacky rubbers.

In general, tacky rubbers are perfect for drop shots off the bounce whereas grippy rubbers are good for opening a serve or short push with a flick.

Short Play

Pushing the ball off the bounce is a very difficult stroke and needs lots of practice to master, especially if your "feel" for the ball is not so good. Tacky rubbers offer extreme balance when executing "soft touch" strokes and enhance the player's natural ability even more. They provide a quite big margin for error because they slow the ball down no matter the spin imparted. Tensor rubbers on the other hand are quite bouncy, and even a small error will cause the ball to bounce high, giving your opponent an easy ball to attack.

No Spin Balls: When dealing with "dead" balls tacky rubbers are far more effective in keeping the ball low and short, you can even add some spin if your timing is good. It is a great feature especially on receiving no spin serves, where your opponent usually expects you to open up the game for him to counter attack. Eventually, keeping the ball low and short will surprise them and give you the initiative to attack first.

Grippy rubbers demand a flawless technique, if your timing is wrong or the angle of your paddle is incorrect most of the times you will execute a crappy stroke. You must "graze" the ball only with the topsheet with a delicate motion using only your weight to add energy. Waldner and Samsonov are some of the rare examples of top players who can perform excellent short pushes with grippy rubbers. Bearing this fact in mind, you can understand why it is so difficult to perform delicate shots with a grippy rubber, you must have natural talent.

Balls with Spin: Again tacky rubbers perform better although after hours of practice the difference between tacky and grippy rubbers, against spin in short play, is almost transparent. Grippy rubbers can sometimes add more pace (pushing the ball wide & long) when receiving because they are bouncier. So, if you like to use your opponent's spin against him, grippy rubbers are easier to handle.

Eventually it is a matter of preference. Tacky rubbers enhance short play off the bounce and tensor rubbers are better in opening up the game.

Flip

When receiving topspin/sidetopspin serves grippy rubbers are a lot better because they use the opponent's spin against him adding more pace, a feature that tacky rubbers cannot provide. Tackiness slows the ball down so you need a larger motion (losing more time to execute, thus being predictable) to perform a speedy flip. They are also easier to use when lifting heavy underspin serves, taking full advantage of the wrist motion. Grippy rubbers can also provide excellent "mini smashes" when the incoming serve or receive is bouncy. The dynamic synergy of grippy topsheet along with soft sponge (compared to a tacky hard rubber/sponge) allows you to vary the spin and speed when executing a flip. Actually, this is the main reason that Chinese top players use grippy rubbers in their BH side. Using a tacky rubber in BH will make it extremely difficult to lift the ball.

FH Looping

When looping underspin you may find it a bit difficult in the beginning, if you choose a tacky rubber. After you get used to it, it certainly pays off. Your timing must be accurate and you have to use your whole body, to transfer energy to the ball beginning from transferring your weight correctly on your legs. Your paddle should be a little bit more open compared to a grippy rubber.

Grippy rubbers are far more "user friendly" and if you are not interested in developing your FH through training, I recommend you to use a grippy rubber. Grippy rubbers give you a greater window over the net, resulting in high arc loops that bounce deep and long onto the table. Tacky rubbers require good footwork, technique and timing to develop a strong FH. If technique / footwork / timing is wrong, most of the times the ball will go straight to the net.

The main difference of these rubbers in looping, is that you have to execute a larger upwards + forwards motion (using a tacky rubber) to perform the same type of arc with a grippy rubber. A "Chinese loop" give tons of spin with low trajectory, which is far more compensating.

For beginner/intermediate level of play, grippy rubbers have a significant advantage to mid & far distance looping. Tacky rubbers though, are by far more effective in close to the table style of play.

Blocking

Blocking the ball with a grippy rubber is quite easy, you just have to adjust your paddle angle correctly. This way, you can use your opponent's speed and spin against him. However, using a tacky rubber to block off the bounce is absolutely a must with a tacky rubber, the ball is following a straight "downward" path making it extremely difficult to attack again.

Accurate placement on the other hand is easier with a tacky rubber, there is more dwell time and you can even add some spin on the ball (chop block or sidespin block). A clear disadvantage of tacky rubbers is that you cannot perform a "counterhit block" (Gionis and Weixing use this type of shot) from mid distance. Most likely the ball will travel straight to the net.

When dealing with mid-distance shots, the best way to react is to counterloop if you are a tacky rubber lover. I will remind you once again, that this type of play demands good physical condition, fast footwork and excellent timing. Otherwise you should stick with a grippy rubber

Eventually it all comes down to your technique, tacky rubbers are more spinny, accurate and require bigger motions, whereas grippy rubbers demand small adjustments to your strokes.