Alternate Rules of Play Intended for Respectful Submission as Amendment or Appendix to Forthcoming Editions of the Official Handbook of the International Table Tennis Federation (ITTF)

1 CONSTITUTION

1.1 Definition
1.1.1   This is a game piece for piano four hands in which the two performers play in opposition to each other with the general objective of speedily removing table tennis balls from a 'playable' position within the piano.

1.2 Materials
1.2.1   *Piano* – Grand or baby grand.
1.2.1.1   The piano's lid should be removed, and the lid prop flipped up (if not also removed) to expose the strings.
1.2.1.2   Larger pianos and/or newer strings are preferred, as they enable the greatest range in vertical projection.
1.2.2   *Balls* – Two different colors of table tennis balls (most commonly white and orange) represent the two players.
1.2.2.1   Recreational quality balls (one star) are sufficient; professional grade balls (three star) are not necessary.
1.2.2.2   30 to 40 balls per player (60–80 total) are required.

1.3 Designations
1.3.1   *Registers* – The piano's strings are divided into four Registers, separated by the stress bars of the frame, with Register 1 referring to the lowest strings (approximately two octaves), and Register 4 the highest.
1.3.1.1   These four Registers are determined from the keyboard side of the frame, meaning that any additional cross-bars, which sometimes create a "V" shape and appear to divide the frame into extra sections towards the rear of the instrument, are disregarded.
1.3.1.2   Pianos which are separated in three or five registers, although uncommon, are to be avoided.
1.3.2   *Playability* – Throughout the piece, balls are considered 'in play' if they rest on a portion of the strings that can be affected by those strings' vibration or other motion of the hammers or damper heads.
1.3.2.1   If a ball rests on the strings but is beyond one of the end-pins and thus does not move or jump in response to the vibration of those strings, it is considered 'out of play'.
1.3.2.2   Balls that become trapped between the curvature of the damper heads and the frame are out of play.
1.3.2.3   Balls that come to rest on the highest strings (Register 4) are out of play.
1.3.2.4   It is advised that players take a moment before performances to determine whether certain questionable resting spots for the ball (often corners of the frame or areas directly adjacent to/touching but not on top of the strings) are susceptible to inner motion of the piano and thus in play.

1.3.2.5   It is possible for balls which are out of play to be knocked back in play by other errant balls.

1.3.3   *Rounds* – The game/piece is comprised of three short rounds, each creating a slightly different scenario, but each with the objective of being the first to remove one's balls from a playable position by hitting individual notes on the piano's keyboard.

1.3.4   *Server* – The server is that player who begins a round by taking the first stroke.

1.3.5   *Receiver* – The receiver is the player whose stroke follows that of the server in a given round.

1.4 General Procedural Characteristics

1.4.1   Once a ball has been dropped or tossed into the piano, it is not to be touched or moved except by the inner mechanics of the piano as controlled from the keyboard.

1.4.2   Players only drop or toss their opponent's balls into the piano.

1.4.3   During competitive play, only one key may be depressed per stroke, and each note will be struck with a sharp staccato (never held).

1.4.3.1   This can be done with either the pointer or middle finger alone or with the pointer and middle fingers slightly crossed to dampen the impact on either single finger.

1.4.3.2   Although it is possible to depress multiple keys with even one finger, it is generally not permitted as a tactic for increasing one's likelihood of affecting a ball.

1.4.3.2.1   Striking multiple keys will occasionally occur by accident, and this is to be accepted on good faith.

1.4.4   At no point throughout the piece may a player 'test' a key to see which hammer moves; all strokes are an educated guess informed both by the players' familiarity with that piano and corrective actions made to previous attempts.

1.4.4.1   No limit is placed on the amount of time spent associating keys with hammers and Register boundaries prior to the game/performance, although no visual markers should appear on the keyboard or within the frame for the duration of the piece.

1.4.4.2   No time is to be wasted counting strings during competitive play.

2   CHRONOLOGICAL RULES OF PLAY

2.1 Pre-game Rally

2.1.1   Before the first round can begin, it must be decided which player will be the first server. To do this, the players alternate dropping their opponent's balls one at a time into Register 3 of the piano with the objective of getting one ball to remain in play within that Register.

2.1.1.1   Balls are dropped from a height of approximately 18 to 24 inches above the strings of Register 3.

2.1.1.2   Balls which bounce and come to rest in playable areas outside of Register 3 will remain in place, but do not aid in determining the first server.

2.1.1.3   No drop is to be made until all movement and sound from the previous drop has ceased, including when a ball bounces outside the piano and can be heard rolling on the ground.

2.1.1.4   Each player will have equal opportunity in this attempt, so that if the first player to drop succeeds, the second player still has one chance to land one ball as well.

2.1.1.4.1   If both players succeed in the same turn, the rally continues until one player is at a fair advantage.

2.1.1.5   If a player removes an in-play ball from playability simply by dropping their ball directly onto it, this will be considered a sufficient tactic for gaining (or losing) an advantage and determining the first server.

2.1.2   Once a server has been established, all dropped balls are left in place and the first round may begin.

2.2   Round One

2.2.1   The server and receiver alternate in dropping five each of their opponent's balls (one at a time) into Register 2 of the piano, still from a height of approximately 18-24" above the strings. Once all ten of these balls have been dropped, the server begins play by striking the first note and attempting to remove one or more of her balls from playability.

2.2.2   In this round, players are responsible for removing playable balls only in Registers 2 and 3; balls that bounce into Register 1 are effectively removed during this round and are left in place for round two.

2.2.3   Players alternate striking one note each, allowing only 2–4 seconds between consecutive notes if the previous player strikes a ball, and only 0.5–2 seconds if the previous player misses. This means that they need not wait for all movement to cease before striking, although this extra pause will in some cases be necessary to determine whether the round has ended.

2.2.3.1   All times are approximated.

2.2.4   The round ends when one player has successfully removed all of her balls from a playable position (in Registers 2 and 3). As soon as this has been achieved, the round is over and that player is victorious; the other player is not given a final turn.

2.2.4.1   In the rare event that both players' remaining balls are removed from playability in the same stroke, the player who delivered this final stroke is considered victorious.

2.2.5   The sustain pedal is used neither in this round nor in the preliminary rally.

2.3   Interlude: Improvisation One

2.3.1   The victorious player of round one is allowed a 45-90 second solo improvisation as a form of acknowledgement of this victory.

2.3.1.1   There should otherwise be no gloating or histrionics present in the piece.

2.3.2   Whereas performers are both standing at the keyboard during competitive play in order to improve mobility and line of sight, the improviser may now pull up the bench and sit for this brief interlude.

2.3.2.1   The other performer may take a seat off to the side.

2.3.3   The entire keyboard's range is now available, as are all fingers, but the player still may not reach into the piano and touch or displace the balls.

2.3.4   Pitches should be largely restricted to those strings on which the opponent's remaining ball(s) lie, although some deviation is acceptable, and may occur in an inverse relationship to the number of balls remaining in play.

2.3.5   The dynamic in this improvisation is generally soft. It should be executed with aesthetic care and sensitivity.

2.3.6   Notes may be held in this section, and the sustain pedal is allowed ad libitum.

2.3.7   The strings may be struck just hard enough for a ball to buzz and roll onto other strings (thereby changing the primary target pitches of the improvisation), but the improviser would not want to play so hard as to remove these balls from playability.

2.3.7.1   If any of the improviser's balls are in a playable position in Register 1, they are available target pitches, but the improviser should not attempt to remove them from playability in order to improve their odds for round two.

2.3.8   When the player has concluded the improvisation, the bench is pushed back out of the way, and round two may begin with the *other* player now acting as the server.

2.4 Round Two

2.4.1   At the start of this round, the player who lost round one (now the server) drops balls into Register 2, the number of which corresponding to one plus the number of their balls remaining in play from the previous round (in Registers 2 and 3 only), thereby giving them a slight advantage in round two.

2.4.1.1   If after this is done, the total number of balls in play in Registers 1–3 does not exceed 7 (i.e. 8+), the players will alternate dropping one ball into both Registers 1 and 2 (i.e. 2 each, 4 total).

2.4.2   Players alternate strokes in a similar fashion to round one, and must now remove all balls that are in play in Registers 1, 2, and 3.

2.4.3   In this round the sustain pedal may be introduced and is controlled by the server, but is only to be depressed while a struck ball of any color is in motion and is not to be held continuously for longer than a single player's turn. This is intended to encourage the resultant reverberations excited by the ball on its downward (or lateral) course, but to not let ring the initial struck notes.

2.4.3.1   This timing can be very difficult, and is done to the best of the server's abilities.

2.4.4   In this round, each player must wait until all movement from the previous turn has ceased.

2.4.4.1   When the sustain pedal is in use, the next stroke shortly follows the release of the pedal.

2.4.4.2   The server need not wait for the strings to fade to complete silence on every turn, and the sustain pedal is held at least until movement has ceased, but occasionally slightly longer.

2.4.4.3   This will make for relatively slower pacing than round one.

2.4.5   Round two is concluded and a victor declared similarly to round one.

2.5 Interlude: Improvisation Two

2.5.1   The victor of round two engages in a solo improvisation with rules and general characteristics identical to those of the first interlude.

2.5.2   The third and final round may then begin, and the other player is now the server.

2.6 Round Three

2.6.1   Just before this round begins, the sustain pedal will be fixed such that it remains depressed for the remainder of the piece.

2.6.2   The round begins with both players simultaneously tossing all of what remains of their opponents' balls into the piano from a similar distance of 3 to 5 feet away from the side of the piano closest to Register 4.

2.6.2.1   Since the number of balls was adjusted in round two, the winner of round one may again have a slight advantage in round three.

2.6.2.2   The number of balls per player will likely exceed what can be held in one's bare hands, so the balls may be thrust from a bowl or other vessel, just as if one were tossing a bucket of water towards a small fire.

2.6.3   Players remain standing at this distance until all movement has ceased and the piano is nearly silent. The players then approach the keyboard and the server takes the first stroke.

2.6.4   In this round, alternating turns are not taken. Instead, each player may strike keys as quickly as desired, ignoring the other player, yet still striking notes individually.

2.6.4.1   This may result in a somewhat frantic free-for-all, but will be punctuated by necessary pauses to track the movement of balls in motion and determine whether the balls have been successfully removed.

2.6.5   With such rapid exchanges, physical space may become competitive, and the players do their best to avoid obstruction of one another (or collision).

2.6.5.1   The server takes the right-hand side of the keyboard to begin the round with the receiver directly to her left, although they may switch positions throughout the round when necessary.

2.6.5.1.1   This distinction is largely unimportant in the previous, slower rounds, and is unspecified, but it is given that this reversal of positions may take place in all rounds.

2.6.6   Play continues until both players have removed all of their balls.

2.6.6.1   If one performer finishes first, she ceases to take turns and waits for the opponent to clear the remaining balls.

2.6.6.2   The last remaining player should not lose this sense of urgency when attempting to remove her final balls.

2.6.6.3   If one of the first-finished player's balls is knocked back into play, that player must resume participation until it is once again removed.

2.6.6.4   Since it is by now more likely that removed balls will re-enter play, the first instance of one player removing her balls does not necessarily determine the winner of this round. It is only after all of both players' balls have been removed that the last player to do so is declared the loser.

2.6.7   Once all balls have been removed, play ceases, and the piano is permitted to fade to silence.

2.6.8   The victor of this round is given no improvisation and receives no public acknowledgement, although the performer victorious in only one (or zero) of the three rounds will owe the overall winner a drink that evening, or at a later date.

2.6.8.1   This stipulation is required only of public performances, and not of practice runs or when becoming familiarized with the rules.

2.6.8.2   Although the overall winner may possibly be established before the start of round three, the loser will still engage fully in the third round in an attempt to win it as a point of pride.

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