

# Zone It!

*by* DENIS ORY



Lets Talk About Zones! What is a Zone?

- A Zone is basically a percentage style defense.
- A Zone is designed to get the most out of a defense with the least amount of movement.
- A Zone forces the opponent to shoot the holes you are leaving.

Are you one of those individuals who frantically shakes the men back and forth hoping for a block. Have you noticed most pros don't do this? The problem with this frantic style defense is that both you and the opponent have no clue of what you are doing. You better have a party after every block you get because it may be your last. What will you do when the opponent starts scoring on you relentlessly? Oh I know! Move Faster...

With a Zone you know exactly where your men are at all times and you also know exactly where the ball must travel to score on your Zone. Through the course of a game or match you can make small adjustments in your Zone based on the opponents;

- shot selection (favors one hole over the other)
- percentage of scoring (can/cannot consistently hit the hole/holes you are leaving)
- favorite shots to shoot (Does the opponent shoot the same two holes no matter how large the other holes are)

Are you a Rookie, Semi-pro, or even a Pro? Do you understand Zones? I am definitely **not** saying that learning a Zone requires no physical ability, but lets face it, learning a good Zone is more about discipline and knowledge and has less to do with shear talent or skill.

Look here! Listen closely! A Zone defense **does not** guarantee you will get a block. What it **does** guarantee is that you have given yourself the best opportunity for getting a block, and you have also made the opponent earn his/her shot.

**This** article is intended to show one basic **singles** Zones; I am not writing to argue which Zone is better. I am merely presenting one time tested Zone which is currently used on the pro circuit. Are there others? Yes. Do they work? Yes.

I chose to discuss the Zone based on how I use it. However, it is possible to reverse the Goalie men in the back and play the whole zone in the opposite direction. In that scenario, the goalie Three-Row blocks hole 2, and the goalie Two-Row Blocks hole 4. All explanations for a pull would now apply for the push and vice versa.

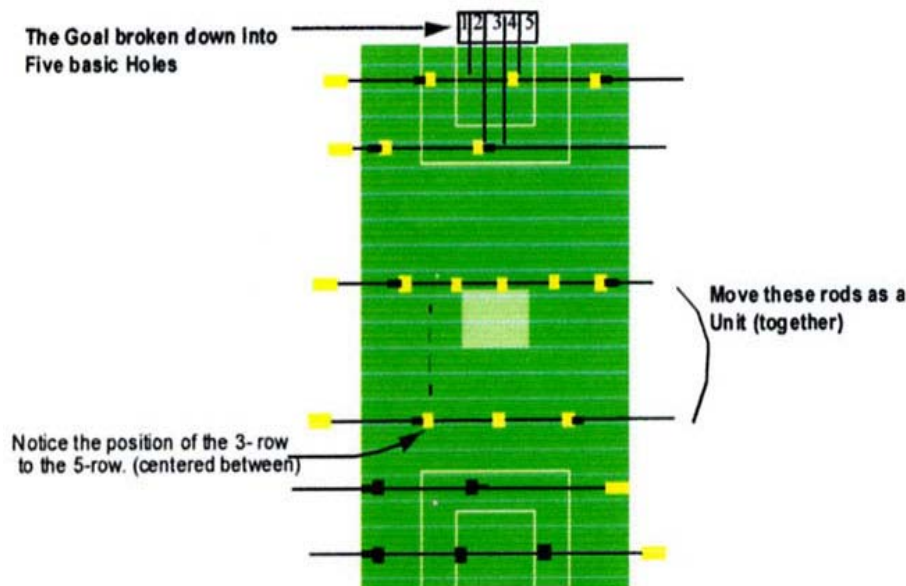
So, the first question one may ask is which Zone is better? The simple answer is that they are the same, but the truth is that this depends more on the characteristics of a foosball table and the opponents abilities.

Have you ever heard the push and pull argument? If you believe that a push and a pull are equal, then both Zones are the same. If you believe a push and a pull look the same, but are mechanically different when it comes to execution and ability, then the zones are completely different.

I personally believe a push and a pull are very different for several reasons which I will not go into here, but I will say it has more to do with table design, physics, and the fact that I have not seen ONE (not one) push that looks as good as the top 50 people in the World. Heck its probably a wider margin than that, but I am just trying to be nice (Don't want to offend any push shooters).

**Okay here we go;** Remember this is only a guide and does not consider every possible hole on the zone. The fact that the offensive player can start a shot from any position can have a drastic effect on the Zone and defensive strategy you use. For simplistic sake we will only discuss a few options and the main holes to look for on the following Zones. From here hopefully you will be able to make your own judgments and adjustments.

**Every aspect of the pictures are drawn to True Scale (table dimensions, men width, goalie lines, etc ...). So, watch closely the position of the men to the Lines on the table. Small movements are big in foosball.**



# ZONE IT

(CONTINUED)

## **Zone Blocking from a Pull Set:**

1. The Goalie men are placed in a standard position covering the 2nd and 4th hole.
2. The basic Zone requires that the two Forward Rods move as a unit. Exceptions to this rule can be made sometimes to possibly bait the opponent into taking a certain hole or simply because the defender cannot hit one of the Zoned holes. So, why block it!
3. Within this particular example it is assumed that the opponent is shooting from a pull set and either shooting a Pull shot or Pull Kick.
4. From a pull set (from the wall) the 4 basic Holes which the opponent should be looking to shoot and you should be looking to block are described in the following figure.

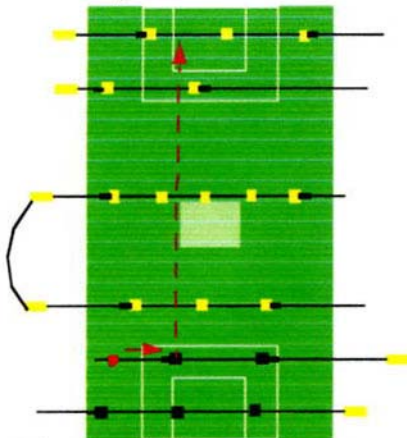
*Generally the rods move as a unit. Within option 3 notice how the five-row is leading the three-row which has opened a new hole between the defending three-row and five-row.*

As an offensive player sometimes I will shoot this hole just to make sure the defender is truly in Zone. Plus sometimes the ball will slip between as the defender is attempting to move outward to block option 1.

**One of the key factors in any Zone is to not over run a hole.** It doesn't mean you shouldn't block a particular hole if the opponent can hit the hole. It just means don't block past the hole you are trying to block. If the opponent hits a particular hole that you don't feel is really open, then you must evaluate over time whether it was simply luck or part of his arsenal. From here you can make adjustments. **Option 4 is an example of an Error in your Zone. Remember, it is only an error if it was not part of your plan or strategy.**

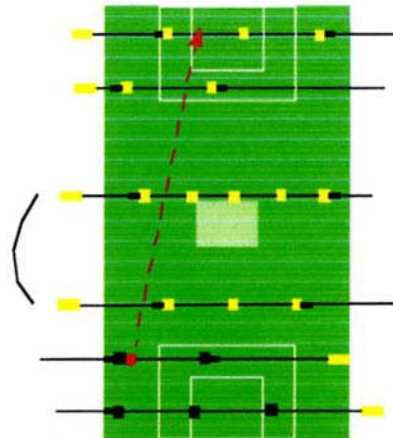
Just knowing which way to move when a shot is coming at you will help greatly when blocking with a Zone. For example, most people have a tendency to move outward when they see a pull-kick coming, but in reality based on there Zone they may have had a better chance of blocking the shot if they were to move inward. Once your Zone becomes second nature, you will easily be able to tell whether you simply let a **shot** slip by because you were out of position or it was truly a good shot which you simply wasn't able to defend. Any other excuse and you did not put enough time into understanding the Zone you are using (No excuses accepted here).

Option 1



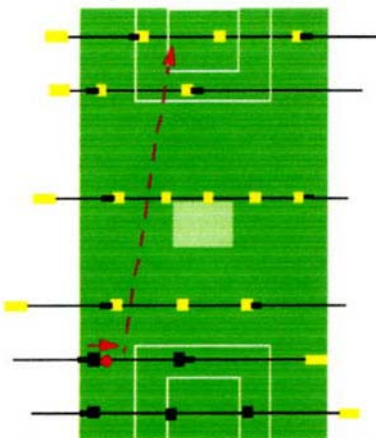
Unit moves **inward** leaving the following shot open. Square Pull.

Option 2



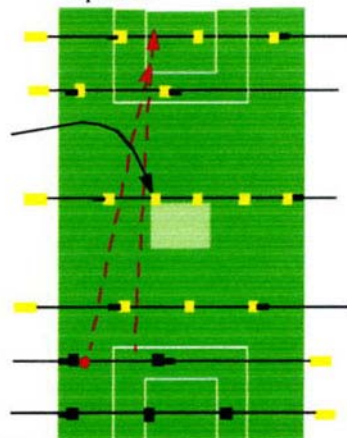
Unit moves **outward** leaving the following shot open. Spray Pull, with very little lateral movement.

Option 3



Generally the rods move as a unit. However, sometimes you may lead with the five-row, but realize that you are leaving the split hole between the three-row and the five-row.

Option 4



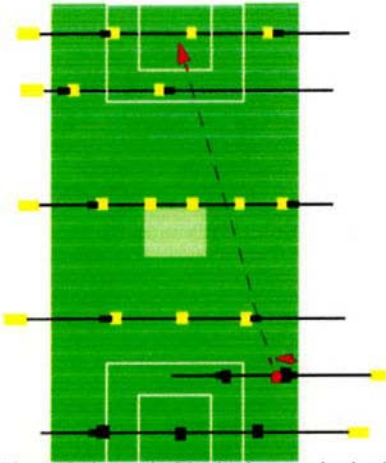
You moved too far  
You are trying to block option 1, but you have created a new hole for the opponent to shoot at which is much easier to hit because he doesn't have to square the shot off. You also opened the short slider. Now you are leaving two holes open instead of one hole. You have just increased the opponents chance of scoring. He should thank you after he scores.

Another thing to consider is that many shooters will attempt to confuse you by not setting the ball in one



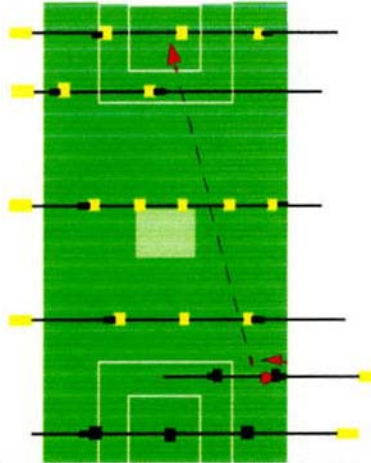
# So lets take a look at a few options:

Option 1



Finesse is the word of the day because that is what is needed to hit this shot. The ball never moves and is simply brushed up into the hole.

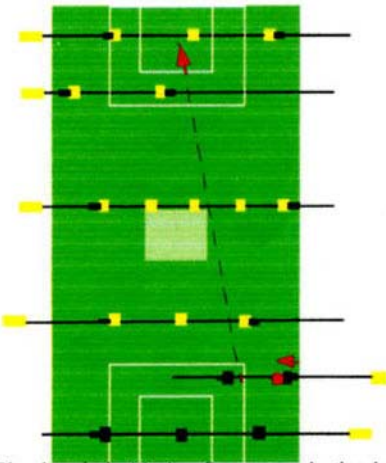
Option 2



Take notice of the release point of the shot. Releasing the push shot approximately one inch before the outer goal line makes this shot the easiest shot in football.

It is your goal as the defender to not allow this to happen. The good news is that if you look at option 1 and option 2, the Three-Row only has to travel a very small distance to block/cover both options.

Option 3

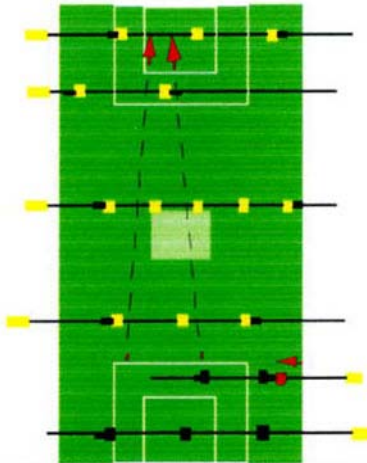


Okay here is the illusion. Once you make the player release the push shot on or past the outer goal line. You have greatly reduced their chance of scoring. When someone sees this hole it is amazing how many times they will attempt to shoot for the hole before realizing it is not so easy to hit after all.

The idea is that the further the ball travels across the table the squarer the shot must become to score.

However the catch is that as the shot starts to square off it ends up hitting the back goalie rod instead of spraying between the men. Too much spray, and the ball ends up hitting the Third man on the Five-Row.

Option 4



Once the defender forces the Three-Row out away from the wall by shooting at option 2 and 3, the following holes in option 4 are open. I must say though that hitting the longer push-kick which must cutback to score is very hard to do. Of course, this same Zone backwards would result in a pullkick tuck shot, which is much easier to hit (just trying to enforce my pull push argument I mentioned earlier)

**The** effectiveness of this Zone lies in the very simple nature of the Zone and the limited movement necessary to cover the holes. The trick to this Zone is making the offensive player decide which hole you will move out of or into when the shot is executed. Most of the time you will find that some players cannot even hit Option 1 because of the finesse required to execute the shot. Other players cannot generate enough lateral speed on the other options. This makes it hard for them to clear pass the Three-Row, and then they start to become timid and scared to shoot the ball fearing a potential stuff into there goal.

Choosing whether to pick the Zone described in the article or completely reversing the Zone is a matter of personal choice. Here are a few reasons for choosing one way over the other;

1. Choose the one that feels most comfortable.
2. Switch around to both Zones in the course of a match especially if you know that the opponent has trouble shooting certain options on one of the Zones.
3. Copy other Pros.

Remember this;

- Push Shots - Easy to spray, but hard to Square
- Pull Shots - Easy to Square, but hard to Spray

**With** this theory in mind it would seem that the whole Zone should be reversed to accommodate the theory, and yes you are right. However, I have seen many great players use the Zone both ways, and for me I am most comfortable with the approach described in the article.

Don't be afraid to experiment with other Zones because if anything this will help you to appreciate and understand why certain Zones work and others don't. Every Zone has a weakness, and it is your job as the defender to minimize the weakness with smart decisions. It is the opponent's job to pray on the weakness, and weaken your zone more.

**There is so much more info to discuss about the two zones, and for that matter all zones, but I wanted to leave the article more technical, less strategic, and give some of the newer players a small taste of what it means to have a Zone.**

**ZONE IT!!**