



## control6 – Let's "tube"!

"3D-Ping-Pong" is how Konstantin describes a new sport that he plans to introduce to us this evening. He is from New York and works in Berlin as a freelance programmer. He has been a passionate ping-pong player for years, and he was the first to tip us off about *control6*, the hot leisure-phenomenon of the Berlin club scene. "It looks like ping-pong, but you use it like a video game. Every play, every bounce off the sidewalls is complicated and hard to calculate. But still you grasp it very fast on an intuitive level." He is utterly euphoric, and his enthusiasm is contagious.

That same day we plan to make an evening visit to Mädcheninternat, one of the German capital's new, hot clubs, where they have a "tube", the three-dimensional playing field for control6.

Before setting out with Konstantin, we take a look at the homepage to learn more: this piece of sports equipment consists of three ping-pong tables that have been assembled into a tube. The ball is a normal ping-pong ball, but one plays ("tubes") with elongated ping-pong racquets. The inventors are Michael Heim and Chris Zschaber. We send them an e-mail, and a few hours later they meet us in person alongside their invention to introduce us to the game.

A couple somewhere around 30 is "tubing" against two adolescent boys; it seems to be an even match. The ball flies through the "pipes" and usually hits one or more of the boards that serve as the horizontal playing surface. Counter to what we can remember from Physics class and our fuzzy memory of computer games from the 1970s (like Pong™ and other games from Atari™), here the entry and exit angles are not the same, because the ball bounces off a number of the six sides. Players realize where the ball is heading relatively late, and this calls for quick reactions. It also explains the relatively large playing surface.

Chris warns us from the start: "The speed is like in a squash match. You have to run back and forth, and you are really challenged, physically. The kids learn it really quickly. They had real tournaments already on the first day ... It took us two weeks for us to master our own game at the same level. Maybe we are too theoretical. When all the fifteen-year-olds in this city get wind of our experiment, then we'll be facing a serious situation..."

"3D-Ping-Pong" the new hotspot club sport of the Berlin club scene

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Michael explains that the “club sport” is so popular, because it allows for a certain degree of creativity. There are only some rudimentary rules, and if someone wants to play above or under the “tube” then they simply allow it in their match. If someone really wants to slam, then they agree to permit passing among team-mates so they can set up the slam from an ideal position.

But he also mentions another reason: due to the game’s very simple construction, it is visually very similar to something like a computer simulation. Bouncing off the upper or side boards, the ball seems to defy gravity. This aspect of the game seems to make it attractive, because it produces a strong sense of recognition. For this reason, the control6 team is working on a real-virtual hybrid version of the game.

So Konstantin wasn’t so off the mark in comparing it to a computer game. While with virtual games the experience of a programmed “reality” is limited by not engaging all the senses, with control6 a real, physical (sweaty) experience begins the moment you pick up a racket and enter the space of the “fun machine”.

Later that night, after several matches of control6, we were convinced of the addiction factor of the new recreational sport. Konstantin clearly demonstrated that a bit of experience is a real advantage in “tubing” and he urged Chris and Michael to spread their invention throughout the world. Of course, he also wanted a computer version, which was natural for a computer programmer.

However, Chris and Michael are not ready to say whether there will be a true home version for new fans and armchair-athletes anytime soon. They say that they would be interested in a producer for a version of the real control6, but they are pretty busy: “playing the game and developing new rules takes time.” Still, they have promised to go about finding a distributor or a purchaser for their patent soon.

You can bet that both versions, real and digital, will spread fast. The two inventors of control6 are generous enough to provide construction plans for their “pipes” for private use. Soon people far away from Berlin will be saying: “Come on, let’s go tubing!”

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