

SWAYTHLING

Issue No.109 October 2020

WORLD
TABLE TENNIS
DAY AT HOME

MOMENTOUS MONTHS

DINA'S DYNASTY

MY TIME
MY DESTINY

INTREPID ADVENTURER

SCOTT OF THE PACIFIC

RYAN JENKINS

PRIDE OF WALES

10 YEARS AGO
SINGAPORE'S
FINEST HOUR

INTRICATE RECORDS

DUTY BEFORE
AMBITION

MIND OVER BODY

EVER RELIABLE
Matilda Ekholm
ANNOUNCES RETIREMENT

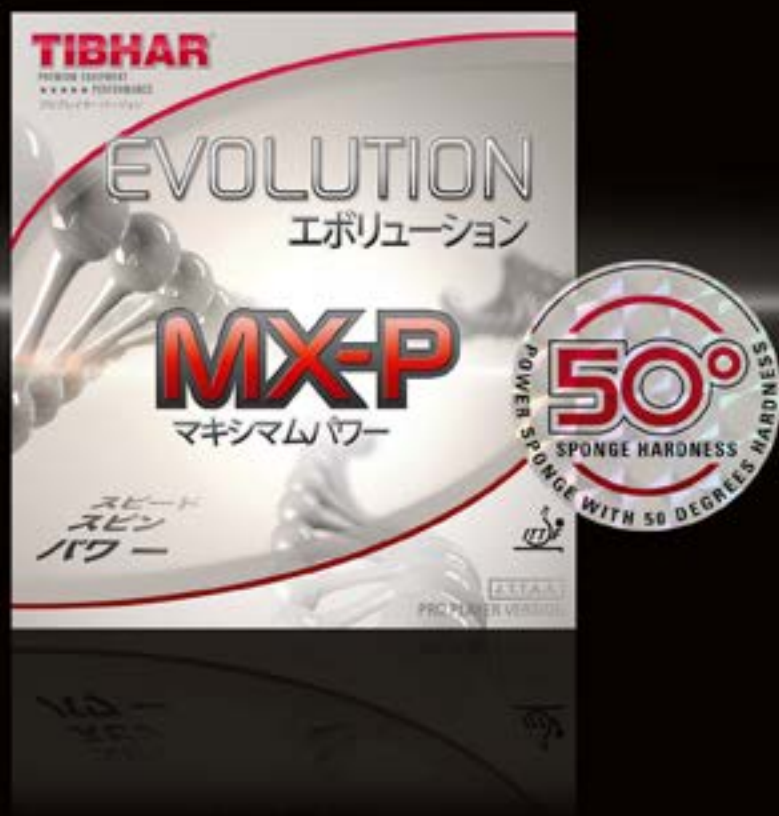
IRON MAN WITH
HEART OF GOLD

PHILIPPE DUMONTEIL
THE MAN FOR ALL SEASONS



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NEXT >>>

Closing date for contributions for the next issue (no.110) is Monday 1st March 2021. Kindly send to: claude.bergeret@fft.email or rcsettu@pt.lu

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Maintaining faith



Believe in yourself, it is essential in any sport if you are to gain success; it does not matter what the level but on the international stage, such an approach is absolutely vital. You may not always win but entering a contest in which you have confidence in your own ability, gives you the best possible chance of victory.

Year by year, the now 26-year-old Dina Meshref has endorsed the theory. She has progressed from being a promising cadet age group player to one who is able to compete at the very highest levels. Playing intelligently, positively and upholding the very best elements of sporting behaviour,

she has set new standards for Egypt, the Arab world and the whole continent of Africa. She has raised the bar.

The effect is that the young lady from Cairo has become a role model. An outgoing personality, her skill undeniable, her attitude and manners always exemplary, she ticks all the boxes.

Now she is setting another example for ensuing generations to follow, one that endorses the fact that a woman from the Arab world can feel comfortable in the way she dresses, maintain their religious beliefs and is able to compete in the most celebrated events that sport has to offer.

True to her Muslim faith, hence forward, Dina Meshref has decided to wear the Hijab.



Jean-Michel Saive back on the road again

Always competitive, trying to reach the highest levels, in the world of table tennis he ascended to the very top. Belgium's Jean-Michel Saive was listed in the number one spot on the world rankings for no less than 515 days.

More recently he hit the heights again, not once but twice. On Thursday 20th and Saturday 22nd August, he cycled to the top of Mont Ventoux, one of the two "sacred mountains", the other being the Col du Galibier, year after year the highest points on the Tour de France.

Pertinently, he completed the task totally unscathed, rather different to Monday 21st May, much closer to sea level; near the stadium of the celebrated football club, Standard Liège, he came to grief. He suffered a cycling mishap not of his own making.

At a set of traffic lights, a young cyclist ahead stopped unexpectedly, there was the faintest of collisions but sufficient to unbalance Jean-Mi and cause him to fall to the ground. Unfortunately, he fell on the edge of the pavement and broke his left wrist. Immediately he was taken to hospital and four days later underwent an operation; now he has a metal plate in the wrist.

Physiotherapy but being right handed the famed forehand top spin and ability to serve, perhaps not quite as in his heyday, gradually became possible; even quicker he was back on the bicycle but Zwift, virtual training and not a road junction in sight. However, some five months after the



Three months after his accident Jean-Michel Saive climbed Mont Ventoux twice



A place of honour for the shirt presented by Eddy Merckx on Thursday 9th May 2019 in Auderghem when Jean-Michel Saive played his last competitive match

accident, golf was still not an option.

True to his character, as soon as physically able, Jean-Michel Saive faced his nemesis. He mounted the trusty bike, climbed the mountain 1,909 metres above sea level and, to a rather more modest extent, followed in the footsteps of a man who is a true legend of sport. In the eyes of those in the know, compatriot Eddy Merckx is the greatest cyclist who ever lived. He won the Tour de France and the Giro d'Italia, each five times, in addition to being anointed world champion and collecting a multitude of other titles that would fill the Grand Place in Brussels.

Now there is a lesson and an example for Jean-Michel Saive, follow Eddy Merckx; next time you reach a set of traffic lights, make sure you are first!



Virtual training on Zwift



At the top of Col du Galibier

First national title for Matthew Syed, 40 years ago



A backhand from Andrew Syed, Matthew Syed is front third from left, Peter Charters on the receiving end

A celebrated journalist, author and broadcaster, English national champion, three times the men's singles winner at the Commonwealth Championships, on duty at the Barcelona 1992 and Sydney 2000 Olympic Games; it is now 40 years since Matthew Syed secured his first national title.

On Saturday 15th March 1980 at the Lea Green Sports Centre in Matlock, Derbyshire, at the time nine years old, he was a member of the Aldryngton Primary School

outfit that won the under 11 boys' title at the English Schools' Table Tennis Association National Team Championships. He lined up alongside Stephen Bourland, Ian Metcalfe, Ian Harris and elder brother, Andrew, a young man whose very promising career was unfortunately cut short in his later teenage years owing to injury.

A first for Matthew Syed; also it was the first time in the age group when separate boys and girls competitions had been

held; previously it had been just one combined event.

It was intended that the perpetual trophy, awarded the previous year when it was a joint happening, should be presented to the boys' team winners and a new trophy would be bestowed on the counterpart girls' team champions.

Sounds simple, in 1979 Market Drayton Junior School had emerged victorious, in 1980 they were represented in the under 11 girls' competition; once again Bob Bayliss, the headmaster, a keen table tennis player and redoubtable golfer, was there to support his pupils. Arriving in the venue he uttered the immortal words "I've forgotten the trophy!"

John Arnold, at the time Chair of the Eng-

lish Schools' Table Tennis Association, duly found a substitute; returning home, the following week the precious trophy was duly posted to Peter Charters, the headmaster of Aldryngton Primary School. In the post the trophy was smashed to pieces, a new one had to be purchased.

The first national trophy for Matthew Syed but it was one on which he never laid hands!

The Hydes connection, again Hull's hoodoo



Alan Hydes with Allan Clarke and Arthur Graham

Eventually, the English football season for 2019-2020 came to an end, in the Championship, the second tier, Leeds United topped the division, Barnsley performed one of the all-time great escapes; they had to win their concluding two matches to have any chance of survival, they did just that!

Alan Hydes, who hails from Barnsley, breathed a sigh of relief. Moreover, he has strong connections with both Yorkshire clubs; in early 1981 a tournament was organised for the Leeds United players, Arthur Graham beat Eddie Gray in the final. At the time, the manager was Allan Clarke who had been integral to the success of the club in their halcyon days

of the early 1970s; following retirement, he assumed the managerial role at Barnsley, before moving back to Leeds.

During that period, Alan Hydes trained at Oakwell, the home of Barnsley Football Club; he was challenged time and again to a game of table tennis. The footballers never achieved their goal; they were never able to beat the England international. The reward for Alan's family was an invitation to the players' lounge.

Coincidentally, Alan's father knew John Charles famous for his transfer to Juventus, unprecedented in the era; like Allan Clarke and George Graham, many generations earlier, he had played for Leeds United.

In 1956 on the last day of the football season, with John Charles in the team, Leeds United beat Hull City, the

outcome, Leeds gained promotion to the top division, Hull finished bottom of the league and were relegated. Fast forward, in 2020 the fact that Barnsley won their last two matches had a similar effect. It meant Hull finished in last place and, as 64 years earlier, were relegated!

The Hydes connection struck; bet he never receives an invitation to Hull City's players' lounge!

Website

The new website for the Swaythling Club was launched on Tuesday 1st September.

Address: www.swaythlingclub.com

Featured items

Swaythling Club News

World News

Publications

Gallery

Membership

List of Members

Official News

Videos

Update physical addresses

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Invitations to World Championships

Invitations to World Championships and other major events will be advised on www.swaythlingclub.com

Korea at 1980 English Junior Open



The Korea Republic in Worthing (back) Han Sangkook, Ahn Byeongjun, Kim Kitaek, Yoon Sangmun, Yoo Gyeong-seok, Ahn Jaehyung, Park Docheon (front – players) Shin Deukhwa, Kim Jeongmi, Ji Namyoung

Deciding that it was an opportunity to have a spring clean and throw out unwanted items, Harvey Webb found a precious box of memorabilia, including photographs and newspaper cuttings dating back to the 1960s. One photograph in particular caught the eye; the visit of the team from the Korea Republic to Worthing in 1980 to compete in the English Junior Open.

Leader of the group was Han Sangkook, who sadly passed away earlier this year on Friday 20th March; notable names in the group included Kim Kaitaek, Ahn Jaehyung and Park Docheon. At the

Seoul 1988 Olympic Games, Kim Kaitaek emerged the men's singles runner up; Ahn Jaehyung partnered Kim Taeksoo to men's doubles bronze. Park Docheon is the current Chair of the Technical and Umpires Committee for the Asian Table Tennis Union.

In 1984, the Koreans returned when the tournament was held in Portsmouth; once again there were notable names in action. Yoo Namkyu, the Seoul gold medallist, won the boys' singles title; Hyun Junghwa, crowned world champion in 1993, emerged the girls' singles winner.



New members, Ashley Robinson and Paul McCreery

Ashley Robinson and Paul McCreery are recent names to be added to the Swaythling Club membership list; both have been on duty for Ireland at recent World Championships as well as the Commonwealth Games.

Ashley Robinson

Email: robo9092008@hotmail.com

Paul McCreery

Email: paulmccreery6@gmail.com



Jane Pinto overwhelmed

Respected worldwide for her efforts to promote the sport of table tennis, on Thursday 9th July, alongside husband Felix, Jane Pinto celebrated her 85th birthday.



Eva Jeler retires

On Monday 31st July, Eva Jeler retired as German National Coach; however, she is not lost to the sport, she has every intention of continuing in different roles.



Jean Devys, landmark birthday

Jean Devys celebrated his 90th birthday on Wednesday 17th June; commencing in 1964 he served in a range of official roles for the French Table Tennis Federation, the European Table Tennis Union and the International Table Tennis Federation.

Dina's Dynasty

Parents were national champions, now follow in their footsteps; more often than not it doesn't happen but if there is one player for whom it has happened, it is Egypt's Dina Meshref.

In fact not only has the 26-year-old exceeded the successes gained by members of her family, she has exceeded those achieved by a whole dynasty! Grandfather, grandmother, father, mother, uncles, aunts and cousins have all achieved.

There can be no family in table tennis and one wonders about sport in general that has claimed so many continental and national titles.

Great aunt, Ines El-Darwish was the very first African Championships women's singles winner. She set the standard; mother, Shereen El-Alfy alongside aunts Shahira El-Alfy and Nihal Meshref all struck gold at the continental event. Likewise, her uncle Ashraf Helmy achieved the same, as did cousins Mahmoud Helmy and Yousra Helmy.

Meanwhile, her great uncle, the late Ahmed El-Darwish competed at the World Championships, as on three occasions did her father, Dr Alaa Meshref; notably the runner up at the inaugural Africa Cup in 1985 in Benin and nowadays a member of the ITTF Executive Committee. Equally, now 21 years old, younger brother, Ahmed, proved a most worthy competitor in his teenage days on the ITTF World Junior Circuit.

A rich history and looking to the future, her cousins, Mona El-Alfy, 12 years old, Ahmed El-Alfy, nine years of age and Ali El-Demerdash, 15 years old are demonstrating talents that the dynasty is set to continue.

Canadian born

However, whatever the achievements of the family both past and present, none can match the successes of Dina Meshref. She is streets ahead of the rest, titles at national and continental level galore; in fact she has won so many, her gold medals exceed the number of family members who played table tennis!

Make no mistake that is some achievement for the young lady who has made Egypt proud but was not born in the country which has one of the longest histories in the world. She was born in the new world; she was born in the Canadian city of Montreal.

"My father was doing postdoctoral research fellowship at McGill University", explained Dina Meshref. "I was two months old when we left."



Canada's loss was Egypt's gain. Dina Meshref has taken the sport of table tennis to new heights, not only in her own country but in the African continent as a whole; however, despite the family dynasty, when she was old enough to play sport, she was not encouraged to play table tennis.

"At the beginning the choice was not table tennis; my mother wanted me to play another sport, when I was seven years old I started to play tennis", explained Dina Meshref. "I played for one year but at the time my father was the Manager of the Al-Ahly Club in Cairo. At the club everyone treated me well. I liked the atmosphere, I wanted to try table tennis, I enjoyed playing; I stopped tennis."

The career had started but the first tournament was not an overwhelming success.

"I played in the national under 12 championships, we played in Suez, I was nine years old, I was so excited to play, I lost in the last 64", recalled Dina Meshref. "I remember it very clearly, it motivated me; I wanted to find ways how I could win."



Alaa Meshref competing at the 1979 United States Open in Long Island, New York

Watershed

Three years later in 2006 she secured the title, it was to prove the first of many; it was a watershed moment but more significant was winning gold in the under 15 girls' singles event at the African Junior and Cadet Championships in Alexandria.

"I was sick, not well, the top two players qualified for the ITTF World Cadet Challenge in Sweden; I won and qualified for Sweden and also received an ITTF Scholarship", explained Dina Meshref. "Also, at the same time the Egypt Junior and Cadet Open was held; I had my first big win, I beat Krisztina Ambrus from Hungary. At the time I really had no idea that it was such a good result."

The scholarship enabled Dina Meshref to practise in China against high level players; equally from her father she received very sound advice. "He told me not to worry about ranking points; that was not a priority", said Dina Meshref. "Always he told me the priority was to gain experience for senior level and that some of the players I was competing against may not



Shahira El-Alfy at the Sydney 2000 Olympic Games

be there in a few years' time."

Wise words, every title possible at continental tournaments has been secured; in fact she is the only player ever to win the women's event at the ITTF-Africa Top 16 Cup! A major feat but arguably her greatest achievement came at the 2015 African Games in Congo Brazzaville.

Notably in her half of the draw, appeared the names of Li Yuheng and Han Xing, both on duty for the host nation but both having honed their skills in China.

"I had a really tough draw, I was stressed. I beat Li Yuheng in the opening round; then I faced the top Nigerian, Offiong Edem, before confronting Han Xing in the semis", reminisced Dina Meshref. "In the final I played my good friend Nadeen El-Dawlatly; that match was less stressful, once you had reached the semi-finals you were guaranteed a place at the Rio 2016 Olympic Games."

Gold in the women's singles, earlier it had been the same in the women's team alongside Nadeen El-Dawlatly, Farah Abdel-Aziz and Yousra Helmy; in the women's doubles the colour was silver in harness with Nadeen El-Dawlatly, in the mixed, bronze alongside Omar Assar. It was very much a test of stamina, the women's singles final concluding the schedule.

"Every member of my family at home in Egypt followed the matches", added Dina Meshref. "Team, doubles, mixed, singles; at the end I was totally exhausted!"

The big stage

Success at Africa's major multi-sport gathering, an achievement in itself but such continental success has also opened doors; most notably to the Women's World Cup and to the Olympic Games.

Impressively, she has competed on seven occasions in the Women's World Cup and has qualified for the 2020 edition. However, two meetings stand out, Singapore in 2011 and Sendai in 2015. Only 17 years old, Singapore was her debut; Sendai was the venue where she wrote history. She became the first player from Africa to reach the main draw in the tournament which first saw the light of day in 1996 in Hong Kong.

"In 2011, I was very excited, the first time to play in the tournament, the best 19 players in the world", explained Dina Meshref. "We started with the Intercontinental Cup; I lost every match, I was really disappointed."

Four years later on her third appearance, life was very different; the Intercontinental Cup resigned to history, Dina Meshref was increasingly comfortable on the big stage. In the match to determine second position in her initial stage group and thus progress to the main draw, she caused a major



Dina only two years old, following the example of her mother, Shereen El-Alfy

upset. She overcame Hong Kong's Doo Hoi Kem.

Defeat at the hands of the host nation's Ai Fukuhara was the first round outcome but the win against Doo Hoi Kem was one of significance; success for an African against a leading name from Asia is not the norm. It was a milestone for both player and continent.

"Sendai in 2015 was great for me, my coach was Zhang Chaoling. He knew the players well in my group; I told him don't worry I really believed I had a chance to make it to the main draw", explained Dina Meshref. "I lost to Li Jiao but I beat Doo Hoi Kem, I was very optimistic and of course when I gained the main draw place, so happy; it was like a dream come true."

Setting new standards; earlier it had been the same closer to home. In 2013 in Mersin, alongside Nadeen El-Dawlatly and Farah Abdel-Aziz, the trio won the first ever medal for Africa in any women's event at the Mediterranean Games. They claimed bronze. Later in 2018, when proceedings were staged in Tarragona, Dina Meshref emerged the women's singles champion; thus she became the first African to win a women's singles medal at the Games.

Most impressive performances, the pinnacle, the Olympic Games; it is no different. She made her inaugural appearance in 2012 in London. She advanced to the second round where Romania's Elizabeta Samara ended adventures.

"It helped that in 2010 I had played in the Singapore Youth Olympic Games; in London I was familiar with the type of atmosphere. At the Olympic Games, people are cheering for you, even though you don't know who they are", reminisced Dina Meshref. "I had to play a preliminary round; I beat Nigeria's Offiong Edem before overcoming Russia's Yana Noskova, a match in which I was down three-one."

Achieving new heights, the outcome is that in Africa she is the player to beat; a situation of which she has now become acclimatised and one to which time and time again she has responded.

"I try not to think about whether I am the best player or not, I'm quite used to the situation; just forget about it. You lose, you lose; you win you win", said Dina Meshref. "I think for me it gives me confidence, it's a plus and maybe in Africa, players think I am at a higher level so they don't have self-belief to play well against me."

Respects religious beliefs

Always Dina Meshref is well prepared and adapts to situations like all good players but arguably she has to adapt more than any other. Playing she follows her Muslim



Innes El-Darwish, the first African women's singles champion, is greeted by Anwar Sadat, President of the Egyptian Table Tennis Federation from 1954 to 1962 and the first President of the African Table Tennis Federation from 1962 to 1974. Later in 1970, he became President of Egypt; he was assassinated by fundamentalist army officers on Tuesday 6th October 1981.



Shereen El-Alfy crowned Egyptian women's singles champion in 1996



A formidable pairing, Dina Meshref and Yusra Helmy

religious beliefs and in the past has worn tracksuit trousers but as and from June 2020 there has been a new look. She has decided to wear the Hijab.

“It’s our culture, in our religion women should really cover and only show their face, they should wear long sleeves; for me wearing the trousers I feel comfortable, it’s my choice”, explained Dina Meshref. “I have a friend, Hedayta Malak; at the Rio 2016 Olympic Games she won bronze in Taekwondo, she covers, only shows her face.”

Comfortable but during Ramadan, a period that lasts approximately one month each year, for those who follow the Muslim religion, during daylight hours there is no eating or drinking.

“Playing during Ramadan is really tough, you play a match, you are so thirsty but you cannot take a drink”, explained Dina Meshref. “During this time, prior to a match I practise as normal but before it is time to eat, I try to keep practices simple; often focusing on service. The problem is when it comes to the time you can eat, you fill your stomach, it makes you slow when moving; eventually you get used to it.”

Adapting, respecting her religious beliefs, also she has been required to combine high level play and education. She attended the Futures American School where all lessons were taught in English before studying at the American University in Cairo where she gained a Bachelor’s Degree in Business and Administration.

Family support

Education or sport, both are demanding; life is not a smooth journey, there are times of joy, there are times of disappointment. Coping with such emotions you need those in whom you can place the greatest trust.

“My parents and my brother have given me endless support; my late grandfather, Wafik Meshref, attended all my training sessions and tournaments from when I was eight years old to 12 or 13 years of age”, reflected Dina Meshref. “My grandmothers, my aunts, my uncles, all have given great moral support; all have been tremendous.”

Equally, Dina Meshref is most respectful for the help she has received from a team of knowledgeable coaches who have taken a genuine interest in her progress.

Local coaches Maged Ashour, Ahmed Ayyad, Tarek Fawzy, Osama Motawea, Youssef Rabie, Mosaad Rohaiem, Mohamed El Sharkawy and Adel Shoman, have all extolled their advice, as from Belarus has Aleksey Yefremov alongside Yu Gang and Zhang Chaoling who learnt their trade in China.



Partnering Omar Assar, a mixed doubles place in Tokyo was secured in Tunis



Dina Meshref was the centre of press attention at the 2017 ITTF Challenge Nigeria Open

Now eyes focus on the delayed Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games where once more Dina Meshref is attempting to set new standards; to some extent that feat has already been achieved. She has qualified for all three possible events, women’s singles, women’s team and alongside Omar Assar, mixed doubles.

Owing to COVID-19, preparation has not been as planned but she has been able to adapt. Dina Meshref is a member of the powerful Al-Ahly Club and when at home in Cairo, practises at the National Training Centre, Yu Gang, well-known to her parents, is her mentor.

Unfortunately, the pandemic forced the closure of the centre for several weeks but she has a table tennis table at home and that’s where the table tennis playing family comes to the rescue. She has no shortage of practice partners!



Dina Meshref formed a successful partnership with Nadeen El-Dawlatly

Dina Meshref – African Queen

African Championships

2018 Mauritius: Winner - WS, WT (Yousra Helmy, Farah Abdel-Aziz), XD (Ahmed Ali Saleh)

Runner Up – WD (Yousra Helmy)

2016 Agadir: Winner - WT (Yousra Helmy, Farah Abdel-Aziz), WD (Yousra Helmy) XD (Omar Assar)

Runner Up – WS

2015 Cairo: Winner – WS, WT (Nadeen El-Dawlatly, Yousra Helmy, Farah Abdel-Aziz), XD (Omar Assar)

2012 Cairo: Winner – WD, WT (Nadeen El-Dawlatly, Farah Abdel-Aziz), WD (Nadeen El-Dawlatly) XD (Omar Assar)

Africa Cup

2011 Rabat: Winner
2015 Yaoundé Winner
2017 Agadir Winner
2019 Lagos Winner

Africa Top 16 Cup

2014 Lagos Winner
2016 Khartoum Winner
2018 Nairobi Winner
2020 Tunisia Winner

Africa Club Cup representing Al-Ahly

2013 Oyo: Winner (Nadeen El-Dawlatly, Sara El-Sokkary, Alia Doaa El-Khatib)

2015 Yaoundé: Winner (Nadeen El-Dawlatly, Yousra Helmy, Aida Rahmo, Fagr Shouman)

2017 Agadir: Winner (Daniela Monteiro Dodean, Yousra Helmy, Amira Yousry)

2019 Lagos: Winner (Elizabeta Samara, Yousra Helmy, Mariam Alhodaby, Marwa Alhodaby)

African Games

2011 Maputo: Winner WT (Nadeen El-Dawlatly, Farah Abdel-Aziz, Sara Abdel-Aziz)

2015 Brazzaville: Winner WS, WT (Nadeen El-Dawlatly, Farah Abdel-Aziz, Yousra Helmy)

2019 Rabat: Winner WS, WT (Farah Abdel-Aziz, Yousra Helmy, Reem El-Eraqi), XD (Omar Assar)

Arab Games

2011 Doha: Winner WS, WT (Nadeen El-Dawlatly, Farah Abdel-Aziz, Sara Abdel-Aziz), WD (Nadeen El-Dawlatly)

Arab Championships

2018 Cairo: Winner WS, WT (Farah Abdel-Aziz, Yousra Helmy), WD (Yousra Helmy)

Mediterranean Games

2013 Mersin: Bronze WT (Nadeen El-Dawlatly, Farah Abdel-Aziz)

2018 Tarragona Winner WS

Olympic Games

2012 London: WS, WT (Nadeen El-Dawlatly, Raghd Magdy)

2016 Rio: WS, WT (Nadeen El-Dawlatly, Yousra Helmy)

Women's World Cup

2011 Singapore 19th place
2014 Linz 17th place
2015 Sendai 9th place
2016 Philadelphia 9th place
2017 Markham 9th place
2018 Chengdu 17th place
2019 Chengdu 9th place

In the blood



Ahmed El-Darwish, Ines El-Darwish and Isaad El-Darwish

Isaad El-Darwish (grandmother)
Member of women's team at Al-Ahly Club

Ahmed El-Darwish (deceased - great uncle)
Member of men's team at Al-Ahly Club
Represented Egypt at World Championships (1963)



Galal Ezz (uncle)

Mediterranean Games: silver MS (1968)
African Games: gold MS (1973); silver MT (1978)
African Championships: gold MS, MT, XD (1964), MD (1974, 1976) silver MD (1964), MT (1974)
Arab Championships: gold MS, MT, MD, XD (1977)



Esmat Ghannam (grandmother)
1988-1992: Board member of Egyptian Table Tennis Federation



Wafik Meshref (deceased - grandfather)
1992-1996 and 2004-2007 President of Egyptian Table Tennis Federation



Ines El-Darwish (great aunt)
African Championships: gold WS (1962), WT (1962, 1964, 1968), WD (1962), XD (1964, 1968); silver WS (1964, 1968), WD (1964), XD (1962); bronze WD (1964)
Arab Championships: gold WS (1966), WT (1966), WD (1966)
Mediterranean Games: silver XD (1968); bronze WS (1968)



Shereen El-Alfy (mother)
 African Championships: gold WT (1990, 1996)
 African Games: silver WT (1987, 1991); bronze WS (1987)
 Arab Championships: gold WS (1996), WT (1988, 1991, 1992, 1996), WD (1992)
 Arab Cup: silver WS (1997)



Shahira El-Alfy (aunt)
 African Championships: gold WS (2000), WT (1990, 1998, 2000); silver WT (1992); bronze WT (1994), WD (1992, 1998).
 African Games: silver WT (1991, 1999); bronze WD (1991, 1999)
 African Under 20 Championships: gold WS (1992, 1994)
 Africa Cup: gold (1999), silver (1998, 2001)
 Arab Championships: gold WT (1994, 1996), WD (1992, 1994, 1996), XD (1992)
 Canada Open: gold JGS (1993); silver WS (1993)
 Olympic Games: appearances WS (2000)



Nihal Meshref (aunt)
 Egypt: ranked no.1 (1985-1994)
 African Championships: gold WT (1990), XD (1990), WD (1994), WT (1992); silver WS (1994); bronze WS (1990, 1992)
 African Games: silver WT (1987, 1991); bronze WS (1987, 1991)
 Arab Championships: gold WS (1988, 1991, 1992, 1994), WT (1988, 1991, 1992, 1994), WD (1988, 1991, 1994), XD (1988, 1991, 1992)
 Arab Cup: gold WS (1990)
 Olympic Games: appearances WS (1988, 1992)



Ashraf Helmy (uncle)
 Egypt: ranked no.1 (1986-1992)
 African Championships: gold MS (1992), MT (1994, 1996, 1998), MD (1998), XD (1990); silver MT (1990, 1994, 1996)
 African Games: silver MT (1987, 1991, 1995, 1999); bronze MS (1991, 1999)
 Arab Championships: gold MS, MD, MT (1992, 1994)
 Arab Games: gold MT (1995, 1999), MD (1995, 1999); silver MS (1995); bronze MS (1999)
 Arab Cup: gold MS, MD (1990)
 Olympic Games: appearances MS (1988, 1992, 2000), MD (2000)

Yusra Helmy (cousin)
 African Championships: gold WT (2015, 2016, 2018), WD (2016); silver WD (2018) bronze XD (2016, 2018)
 Africa Cup: silver WS (2019); bronze WS (2017)
 Africa Top 16 Cup: bronze WS (2020)
 African Games: gold WT (2015, 2019); bronze WD (2019)
 Arab Championships: gold WT (2018)
 Arab Cup: silver WS (2017)
 Olympic Games: appearances WT (2016); qualified for Tokyo 2020



Mahmoud Helmy (cousin)
 African Under 21 and Junior Championships: gold U21MS (2019); silver U21MS (2018)
 African Games: gold MT (2019)
 Arab Under Championships Under 21: gold MT (2018)



Mona El-Alfy (cousin)
 Egypt Junior & Cadet Open: member Hopes Girls' Team (2019)
 Hopes Team National Championships Al-Ahly Club: gold (2019)



Ahmed Meshref (brother)
 Jordan Junior and Cadet Open: bronze JBT (2017)
 Tunisia Junior and Cadet Open: silver JBT (2017)
 World Inter-Universities Championships: bronze (2017)



Ali El-Demerdash (cousin)
 Jordan Junior & Cadet Open: member United Arab Emirates Team
 UAE Cadet National Championships: bronze CBS (2019); silver (2020)



Ahmed El-Alfy (cousin)
 Al-Ahly Club: member (2019)

Day by day in April 1980 I checked the sport pages of the Daily Telegraph, in that era the broadsheet was the main supplier of news for international table tennis; social media was a group of journalists having a beer, or for the more refined sipping a glass of wine with a less than rare vintage.

To my shame I even looked to see if I was reading about the correct tournament but the print was crystal clear, there was no mistake. Round by round in the Swiss city of Bern, England's John Hilton was progressing to cause one of the greatest ever upsets, not only in the sport of table tennis but in the whole world of sport.

In 1964, when the then Cassius Clay beat Sonny Liston, to become heavyweight champion of the world; he won at odds of 7:1. It was a sensation. On Sunday 13th April 1980 in the Eisstadion Allmend, later to be renamed the PostFinance Area; John Hilton put the efforts of the boxing legend into the shadows. He won the men's singles title at the European Championships; odds quoted at 1000:1!

The win was even more remarkable when considering the fact that the 32-year-old from Manchester was not a full-time professional player; he was an insurance salesman.

"I was selling insurance for Britannic; I had a particular area to visit, I went from door to door", recalled John Hilton. "On Mondays, Thursdays and Fridays it was collecting payments; later the Financial Services Act changed everything. Selling insurance, everything had to be done correctly. After I'd finished playing professionally, I took exams, passed and in 1990 for about 10 years I went back to the business."

However, he did have support; at the time Manchester YMCA (Young Men's Christian Association), where he played, was a hotbed of the sport. Prominent English names in the 1960s such as Jeff Ingber, Jack Clayton, Mick Symonds and Derek Schofield, among many others, were club members. In that era, in several English towns and cities, the YMCA or similar was the focal point for table tennis.

"I was quite lucky in the fact that my manager at the insurance company was keen on table tennis and would cover for me, so I could sneak off to attend England training camps at Lilleshall", reminisced John Hilton. "Also, Jack Clayton was my mentor; we'd meet every Monday lunch time. It was fine if I reported back and I'd won but I kept quiet if I'd lost!"

Surprise for journalist

Name any sporting achievement; the success in Bern beats the lot, surely John

Hilton's finest hour. However, when returning to Manchester, a local journalist was in for a shock.

"We arrived back, I was interviewed and asked the question as to whether this was the best win of my life", explained John Hilton. "I replied no, the journalist was quite staggered; I explained that my best win had been in Pyongyang one year earlier at the 1979 World Championships when I had beaten Wang Huiyuan in the first round of the men's singles event. At the time he was China's national champion, their top player!"

The win underlines the quality of John Hilton. In Pyongyang Wang Huiyuan progressed to win mixed doubles bronze partnering Zhang Deying; also, he secured the same reward in the men's doubles in harness with Li Zhenzhi.

"In addition to Wang Huiyan, prior to Bern, I'd had some good wins", added John Hilton. "I'd beaten a North Korean player at the French Open; I remember clearly on home soil in Pyongyang they were outstanding."

Notably one year earlier in 1978 at the European Championships in Duisburg, John Hilton had recorded wins in the men's team event against such notable names as Sweden's Tommy Danielsson and Ulf Thorsell, as well as in opposition to Sarkis Sarkojan and Igor Solopov on duty for the Soviet Union. He had been instrumental in the second place gained by England in the

men's team event, a competition in which Desmond Douglas remained unbeaten; he won all his 19 matches.

Team event

Likewise, two years later in Bern, John Hilton was very much in the thick of the action in the men's team competition; England once again finishing on the podium; this time bronze medallists.

Most notably, in the group stage against Sweden, he beat Ulf Thorsell, Ulf Carlsson and Stellan Bengtsson in a 5-2 team win; later when facing Czechoslovakia in a 5-4 defeat, he lost to Jindrich Pansky but overcame Josef Dvoracek and Milan Orlovski.

Meanwhile, in the third place contest against Hungary, he lost to Istvan Jonyer but accounted for both Tibor Klampar and Gabor Gergely; the win against the Hungarians coming after there had been intense disappointment, a result that gave no indication of what was to follow in the men's singles.

At the semi-final stage England experienced a 5-4 defeat when facing West Germany; John Hilton lost all his three matches. He was beaten by Wilfried Lieck, Peter Stellwag and Engelbert Hüging.

Overall, in the men's team event, John Hilton finished with 11 wins against five defeats; it was a more than satisfactory conclusion for the player who was number three in the team behind Desmond

My time my destiny

In action at the 1980 Norwich Union Masters staged in the Guild Hall, Preston from Wednesday 7th to Friday 9th May



Douglas and Paul Day. Notably throughout, Peter Simpson, the England men's team national coach, stuck to the top three names; the younger members, Graham Sandley and Dougie Johnson were resigned to bench duty.

"After the team event I felt fine; I'd had some good wins", recalled John Hilton. "I think it's the only time I ever lost to Wilfried Lieck; Peter Stellwag and Engelbert Hügling were both very difficult for me, they were good against defensive play."

Journey begins

Play in the team event concluded; in the men's singles John Hilton beat Frenchman Bruno Parietti and Denmark's Bjarne Grimstrup, before avenging the earlier defeat against Wilfried Lieck to reserve a quarter-final place. He faced Hungary's Tibor Kreisz; likewise a player who used a combination racket.

"I used Butterfly Tackiness C, I think 1.7 millimetres thick, it wasn't slow and Joola anti-spin rubber; I didn't have a sponsor", explained John Hilton. "I'd never used any other combination."

It was against Tibor Kreisz that John Hilton's great skill in using the racket came to the fore; those who suffer from the time honoured proverb "a little knowledge is a dangerous thing" will tell you he succeeded because of his racket. Totally incorrect, he succeeded because he knew how to use the racket!

Make absolutely no mistake employing that racket was a work of art. Watch many players who use anti-spin or long pimples on one side of the racket, they just return the ball passively by sticking the surface in the way of the incoming spherical object. They hope for the best; they hope for an unforced error. Whatever side John Hilton used, he used positively, he made things happen, he forced errors.

Moreover, if you had asked any other member of the England team in Bern to have used that racket, it would have finished on the bonfire! My mind boggles at the thought of Desmond Douglas wielding such a weapon!

The skill factor was that he turned the racket in his hand, when he executed a forehand top spin the action looked just the same whether he struck the ball with the faster reversed rubber or the slower anti-spin.

"Against Kreisz I played forehand top spins towards his forehand; sometimes with the anti, sometimes with the Tackiness", explained John Hilton. "The same stroke with whichever side, he could not read the spin; sometimes I hit the ball flat, no spin, it died, it caused him problems."

Willpower

A question of skill against Tibor Kreisz; one round later, at the quarter-final stage facing another Hungarian, the defending champion, Gabor Gergely, it was a question of willpower. John Hilton lost the first two games; he won the third 21-19, secured the fourth and in the decider repeated the third game victory margin.

"I had some bottle, didn't I", smiled John Hilton. "I'd come so far, why not? I was destined to do well; it was my time, I was at my peak, in good shape. I kept changing the play, I defended, I attacked; to do that you must be fit!"

The closest match of the journey to gold; at the semi-final stage life was less

dramatic against Frenchman, Jacques Secretin, the winner in Prague in 1976. John Hilton prevailed in four games and thus reversed the decision of Duisburg in 1978. On that occasion, in the men's team event the Frenchman had prevailed comfortably in straight games.

"I arrived in the hall at 8.30 am, I practised on the match table with Dougie Johnson for 45 minutes, the semi-final was due to start at 10.00 am; it was not until 20 minutes before the match when Jacques arrived", explained John Hilton. "He did not practise, he did nothing, five minutes to go he got ready; was he so confident or did he think he had no chance? He never practised on the match table; to this day I'm still totally baffled."



John Hilton in 1979

Final

Success against the two most recent European champions, later in the day in the final he faced Josef Dvoracek whom he had beaten comfortably in the men's team event; it was a contest in which John Hilton was alert and prepared even before the first service was executed.

The Eisstadion Allmend was an ice rink, the largest in Switzerland and the home of Sportclub Bern; heaters were switched on all the time, otherwise it would have been too cold to play. However, they made a noise and thus it was difficult to hear the contact made by an opponent when striking ball. More significantly, they created a wind; John Hilton was wise to the situation.

"I felt confident, in the final Josef Dvoracek went immediately to the end of the table where he could play facing the wind; playing in that direction it was easier to keep the ball on the table", explained John Hilton. "He won the toss, elected to serve, so immediately I chose the other end so I could play into the wind. He shouted at his coach, he went bonkers. I won the first game and that made a big difference; had I lost that game it could have been very different."

Josef Dvoracek had missed a trick, he should have elected to stay at the same end and have given the service to John Hilton. He had the choice, he made the wrong choice. Note the scores, John Hilton won in three straight games, playing into the wind, he won the first 21-17, the third 21-14; with the wind behind in the second game it was much closer, he succeeded 22-20, the minimal two point margin.

Thus for the only occasion to date, the tournament being first held in 1958 in Budapest, an Englishman was the European champion. Sitting courtside throughout was Peter Simpson, the national coach, his task either the most enviable or the most unenviable depending on your point of view.

"I got on with Peter very well; he couldn't coach me because the way I played was too complicated, twiddling the racket was set in stone. It was very hard for him; his job was to get me a drink and encourage me," said John Hilton. "He kept everyone on their toes; in a team event he wouldn't tell you who he had selected before it was time to submit the names. You were never sure if you were going to play, he made everyone practise hard before a match."

Strengths and limitations

Most certainly there was a good relationship between coach and player, crucial on the international scene; equally vital in Bern was the fact the player knew himself.

"Playing against anyone who had a strong backhand and stood square to the table I



A strong backhand, a major feature

did well; players like Gabor Gergely and Andrzej Grubba", explained John Hilton. "I knew who I could beat, I knew who it was 50:50 against and I knew against whom I had really no chance. Players like Istvan Jonyer, Tibor Klampar, Stellan Bengtsson and Peter Stellwag; they would play one backhand, then step around and play forehands; that style was very difficult for me."

Note in the team event, John Hilton beat both Tibor Klampar and Stellan Bengtsson; at the peak of his career, those wins endorse that fact.

"They had to be good to beat me; the way I played needed confidence, belief in yourself", continued John Hilton. "You had to take risks, controlled risks and because of my style, there were some players who just could not play against me."

Also, he was well aware of his limitations; watch him play. He could start the rally with a forehand top spin or with a forehand kill to win the point outright but you never saw him change from forehand top spin to



John Hilton surprised journalists when he named Wang Huiyuan as his best ever win

forehand kill! Sounds easy, it was not so for the man from Manchester.

A technique peculiar to John Hilton but make no mistake, the use of a racket with very different surfaces was nothing new. It wasn't a sudden revolution; every player in Bern would have had experience competing against such racket coverings.

At the 1977 World Championships staged in Birmingham, China's Huang Liang and Lu Yuansheng, both defensive players, caused havoc using contrasting materials on either side of the racket. Both sides of the racket the same colour, in addition they would stamp a foot when making contact with the ball, so the opponent could neither determine by sight nor sound which side of the racket they had used.

"I was influenced by them, I tried stamping my foot but for me it was really only on the service; Duggie Johnson did it far better!" reflected John Hilton. "For me one of the greater problems was the service. There was no six inch rule, I watched a video recently of Gergely; he virtually served straight from the hand. He served very quickly; then there was Thorsell who was so slow and deliberate. Desmond Douglas always had trouble against Thorsell; he couldn't find a rhythm to his play. Similar to me he liked to play people who served quickly."

Finding a rhythm crucial, for John Hilton time and again, breaking the opponent's rhythm was the key. "If I defend all the time I cannot win, if I attack all the time I cannot win; if I combine the two I have a good chance"; that phrase is as strong in my mind now as when uttered by John Hilton almost four decades ago.

Australian help

Influenced by Huang Liang and Lu Yuan-sheng, guided by Peter Simpson but it is an Australian to whom he is arguably the most indebted.

"I was 22 years old, I decided to emigrate to Australia, I went with Peter Fay, the intention was to travel but he met a girl, got married, I was his best man at the wedding, so the idea of travelling around the country together was over", explained John Hilton. "After three months in Australia I moved to Perth; eventually I played for Western Australia, the level of play was not that high."

John Hilton occupied the number four spot in the state rankings, he was selected to play in Melbourne; regarded as the country's sport city, a meeting with a player who was to prove a lifelong friend, proved one of the most telling moments in his career.

"Melbourne was miles away, I met Paul Pinkewich; my backhand was very bad,



The podium in Bern, the top step for John Hilton, third step for Jacques Secretin



A moment to reflect standing next to Josef Dvoracek at the medal ceremony in Bern

he gave me a sheet of anti-spin rubber he had received from Japan, he told me to try it. My backhand from being my weakness became my strength”, explained John Hilton. “I reached number six in Australia before leaving in 1975 back to England.”

Changes

The change was pivotal in the career of John Hilton but as reported in some publications it was not the prime reason for the International Table Tennis Federation introducing regulations regarding the colours of racket coverings; it was more one of the many drops in the village pond.

In that era, following the 1977 World Championships, players throughout the world were experimenting. Racket coverings were separated from the layer of sponge, what appeared a fast attacking rubber with a different sponge produced a slow effect. Even players went to the extent of baking rackets in the oven! Twiddling a combination racket with different surfaces grew in popularity.

It was not until three years after the Bern win, at the ITTF Congress in Tokyo in 1983 when the law was passed that each side of the racket must be of distinguishably different colours and foot stamping was banned. Moreover, it was five years after John Hilton's success elapsed, when at the ITTF Congress in 1985 in Gothenburg, the law was passed that racket coverings were restricted to red and black on alternate sides.

An eventual change to the rules but there was an immediate change to the John Hilton lifestyle; no longer an insurance salesman tramping the streets of Greater Manchester. He was a professional sportsman, his occupation for most of the decade as gradually he combined playing with coaching.

No time for the dust to settle, an agreement was signed with Joola. Also, Annet Steffien from Sport Kontakt in Germany flew to Manchester; at the Mitre Hotel, John Hilton signed for the Bundesliga club FC Saarbrücken.

He occupied the number two position in the team. Dragutin Surbek, the Croatian hero, was the top name. Peter Engel, now a renowned coach, brothers Georg-Zsolt Böhm and Josef Böhm, who hailed from Cluj a former German area in Romania, alongside Austrian Wolfgang Schöler completed the line-up.

Notably Georg-Zsolt Böhm was to become five times German men's singles champion.

One European title to his name, at Saarbrücken, he was to add one more; in 1982 joining forces with Dragutin Surbek and Peter Engel, the club won 18



The return to London Heathrow on Monday 14th April



Table toppers, John Hilton, the entertainer



Nowadays, President of the Veteran's English Table Tennis Society.

the Europe Cup, later the Nancy Roy Evans Cup.

Ranking

Predictably, John Hilton's status in the sport rose dramatically. In an era before computer rankings were introduced, the order was by committee decision. Tradition was maintained, the champion automatically topped the European list; in England he occupied the number two spot behind Desmond Douglas; when the world rankings were issued for July 1980 he stood in fifth place.

However, at Manchester YMCA, things didn't change!

"The reporter who had interviewed me when I landed in England came to the YMCA", smiled John Hilton. "One of the members, having a laugh, shouted to the reporter: number one on Europe, number two in England but number three here at the YMCA! Actually, he was right; I don't think I was ever higher than number three at the YMCA!"

Now that fact would not bother John Hilton one iota. In fact he enjoys such situations, he revels in the banter and, make no mistake, he has a very sharp wit; that fact was always clearly illustrated in the exhibitions he gave alongside close friends Phil Bowen and Brian Kean. Dressed in all manner of outlandish costumes, some which opened eyes wide, they formed "Table Toppers" and entertained crowds nationwide. They endorsed the fact that it was fun to play table tennis.

Similarly when he played, lose he would not dwell on defeat; in fact it was one of his major strengths. Simply look forward, prepare for the next match. Perhaps in the modern era the same applied to China's Zhang Jike, defeat was like water off a duck's back; just make sure you are ready for the next encounter and win the greatest prizes on earth.

Humble, no airs and graces; John Hilton's amiable character and the manners he showed when playing, win or lose always shake hands with your opponent and officials at the end of a match before returning to your teammates, suits perfectly for his present role as he continues his interest in the sport. He is President of the Veteran's English Table Tennis Society.

It is a position filled with dignity, he is proud to hold the office. Equally the members are proud of their man, always they add two words, European champion; that is John Hilton's greatest honour, his greatest triumph, his legacy in sport.

12th European Championships, Bern, Switzerland

Sat 5th – Sunday 13th April 1980
Men's Team - England

First Stage

England 5-0 Bulgaria

Paul Day beat Djevat Hassanov 21-14, 20-22, 21-17; beat Ivan Stoyanov 21-17, 21-12

Desmond Douglas beat Stefan Stefanov 21-13, 21-10; beat Djevat Hassanov 21-15, 21-17

John Hilton beat Ivan Stoyanov 21-12, 21-14

England 5-2 Sweden

Desmond Douglas beat Ulf Carlsson 16-21, 21-13, 21-14; lost to Stellan Bengtsson 13-21, 21-12, 21-15

Paul Day lost to Stellan Bengtsson 13-21, 21-12, 21-15; beat Ulf Thorsell 25-23, 21-9

John Hilton beat Ulf Thorsell 21-23, 21-10, 21-19; beat Ulf Carlsson 14-21, 21-12, 21-16; beat Stellan Bengtsson 21-19, 13-21, 21-11

England 5-0 Romania

Paul Day beat Simion Crisan 23-21, 21-14; beat Serban Dobosi 21-17, 20-22, 21-17

Desmond Douglas beat Georg-Zsolt Böhm 21-13, 21-17; beat Simion Crisan 21-13, 21-12

John Hilton beat Serban Dobosi 21-9, 21-13

England 4-5 Czechoslovakia

Desmond Douglas lost to Jindrich Pansky 21-16, 21-18, beat Milan Orlovski 21-17, 13-21, 21-19; beat Josef Dvoracek 21-12, 12-21, 21-16

Paul Day lost to Milan Orlovski 23-21, 21-12; lost to Josef Dvoracek 21-15, 21-17; lost to Jindrich Pansky 16-21, 21-16, 22-20

John Hilton beat Josef Dvoracek 21-10, 21-8; lost to Jindrich Pansky 21-16, 21-12, beat Milan Orlovski 24-26, 21-13, 21-7

England 5-0 Soviet Union

John Hilton beat Mironos Kreeris 21-14, 21-18; beat Igor Podnosov 20-22, 21-12, 21-14

Desmond Douglas beat Bagrat Burna-

zian 21-10, 21-13; beat Mironos Kreeris 21-19, 21-14

Paul Day beat Igor Podnosov 21-14, 21-13

Semi-Final

England 4-5 West Germany

Paul Day beat Peter Stellwag 13-21, 21-18, 21-11; lost Engelbert Hüging 21-14, 21-16, lost to Wilfried Lieck 21-16, 21-17

John Hilton lost to Wilfried Lieck 21-14, 23-21; lost to Peter Stellwag 21-15, 12-21, 21-15; lost to Engelbert Hüging 21-12, 21-14

Desmond Douglas beat Engelbert Hüging 21-16, 21-16; beat Wilfried Lieck 21-17, 16-21, 21-15; beat Peter Stellwag 17-21, 21-17, 21-19

Third Place

England 5-3 Hungary

Paul Day lost to Gabor Gergely 21-6, 21-13; lost to Tibor Klampar 23-21, 20-22, 21-11

Desmond Douglas beat Istvan Jonyer 21-13, 21-13; beat Gabor Gergely 19-21, 21-5, 21-12; beat Tibor Klampar 19-21, 21-13, 21-16

John Hilton beat Tibor Klampar 22-20, 21-13; lost to Istvan Jonyer 21-10, 18-21, 21-16; beat Gabor Gergely 21-17, 18-21, 21-12

Men's Singles – John Hilton

Round One: beat Bruno Parietti (France) 21-13, 21-19, 21-15

Round Two: beat Bjarne Grimstrup (Denmark) 21-17, 21-9, 21-13

Round Three: beat Wilfried Lieck (West Germany) 14-21, 21-14, 21-13, 21-9

Round Four: beat Tibor Kreis (Hungary) 18-21, 21-13, 21-18, 21-18

Quarter-Final: beat Gabor Gergely (Hungary) 18-21, 18-21, 21-19, 21-16, 21-19

Semi-Final: beat Jacques Secretin (France) 21-12, 21-14, 16-21, 21-13

Final: beat Josef Dvoracek (Czechoslovakia) 21-17, 22-20, 21-14

Intrepid adventurer, Scott of the Pacific

Scott of the Antarctic, the celebrated explorer ventured bravely into uncharted territories, unsure of what lay ahead, eventually reaching the South Pole; expeditions of discovery, a century later another intrepid adventurer sailed the oceans of the southern hemisphere, venturing into the unknown, wondering what to expect.

Catch of the day in 2011 in Niue



Just one major difference, Scott of the Pacific lived to tell the tale.

2002-2008

Semi-professional and professional table tennis player; represented Australia at junior, under 20 and senior level; played for clubs in Germany, Austria and China.

Currently, Scott Houston has a rather less buccaneering role; since September 2017 he has been the Chief Executive Officer for Table Tennis Australia but from January 2009 to December 2011, the work location was rather more daring, he was the ITTF-Oceania Development Officer.

In the three-year role he travelled to 21 out of the 24 countries and territories in Oceania, an achievement of which he is quite rightly most proud. However there is one venture that stands out.



Tokelau

“Without doubt, travelling to Tokelau in 2010 was the most memorable experience.

Tokelau is a dependent territory of New Zealand, located halfway between Hawaii and New Zealand. There are three atolls that make up the territory and the population is only 1,500 people”, recalled Scott Houston. “Tokelau is too small to have an airport and the only way to travel there is to first fly to Samoa and then take a boat. The journey was 54 hours each way, including two nights 20

at sea, which was difficult, I suffer terribly from sea sickness!”

The dilemma faced by Scott Houston underlines the vast distances in the South Pacific, from Auckland in New Zealand’s

North Island, the nearest land mass to Tokelau is some 2,100 miles; it is about the same distance as London to Cairo!

“Vast distances, small populations, travelling is not easy and it is expensive”,



Tokelau in 2010

explained Scott Houston. "Australia and New Zealand are the exceptions; in addition all Oceania countries and territories have difficulties with accessing enough quality equipment."

Distance a major challenge, there was one more which surely no other Development Officer in any part of the world has been required to experience; a shortage of equipment was normal but none at all was quite unique!

"Tokelau did not have a national association at the time, so I had to borrow tables from the Samoa Table Tennis Association and take them on the boat too", smiled Scott Houston. "I stayed there for two weeks; we ran training sessions every day and held competitions as well."

At the conclusion of the visit an agreement was reached to form the Tokelau Table Tennis Association; at the ITTF Annual General Meeting in 2011 in Rotterdam, Tokelau was accepted officially as a member of the International Table Tennis Federation.

"I am proud of this as table tennis was the first ever sport to visit Tokelau for development purposes", stressed Scott Houston. "The other sports offered on the island were rugby for the men, netball for women and a Pacific version of cricket for men and women."

National associations established

A major achievement, moreover a reward for venturing beyond the call of duty; additionally in similar remote destinations, national associations were established in Norfolk Island in 2009 as well as in Wallis and Futuna in 2011.

"This meant that all 24 countries and territories in Oceania are affiliated to the International Table Tennis Federation", explained Scott Houston. "To this day, table tennis is the only sport with a presence in every Oceania country or territory".

Furthermore during Scott Houston's tenure of office, a total of 37 courses in 21 Oceania countries and territories were conducted; the overall effect was that throughout the continent, whatever the size of the land area or population, table tennis was active. Over 10,500 players emerged, skill levels rose, in excess of 500 coaches were certified; most importantly a new group of administrators and officials appeared on the scene.

Significantly, in two of the three years with Scott Houston at the helm, Oceania was the leading continent worldwide in terms of the ITTF Development Programme; number one on the rankings.

Oceania Cup

However, the role fulfilled as ITTF-Oceania Development Officer was not only focused

on grass roots progress; elite level was also added to the equation. Scott Houston played a major role in the organisation of the Liebherr 2011 ITTF-Oceania Cup.

He assisted in creating and implementing television contracts, engaging a public relations company to increase exposure, as well as managing an army of volunteers. Importantly, he was directly involved in securing major sponsors including Adidas, Double Happiness and Table Tennis World, an Australian company owned by Paul Pinkewitch.

Staged in Adelaide, the host nation's William Henzell won the men's singles title, the counterpart women's singles event was secured by New Zealand's Karen Li; success for notable names in Oceania but the important factor was the tournament's overall success.

Great credit to Scott Houston, the event provided a net media value of A\$1.5 million; it was a major breakthrough in the quality of events in Oceania at the time.

Notably his entrepreneurial skills did not end with the 2011 event; he played a lead role in negotiating and securing contracts with 13 partners and sponsors as well as four television networks. The efforts made, which generated in excess of A\$185,000, assisted immensely with the development of table tennis in Oceania.

Facing bankruptcy

Business acumen; that certainly put Scott

Houston in good stead for his present position which he assumed in 2017 as the Chief Executive Officer of Table Tennis Australia.

"When I started, Table Tennis Australia was A\$649,000 in debt and six weeks away from bankruptcy; the sharks were circling and I remember getting calls from liquidation companies asking me what our 'Plan B' was", reminisced Scott Houston. "To overcome the financial crisis, I developed a business plan that completely changed the operating model of the organisation. It focused on operating exclusively within existing funding, generating new and sustainable commercial revenue sources and eliminating discretionary expenditure."

Life was somewhat different to table tennis in Tokelau; there the burden was carrying table tennis tables, now the burden was the almighty dollar. Nevertheless, just as in the remote Pacific island he found answers; it was the same in the metropolitan conglomeration of Adelaide.

"To solve the immediate cash flow problem, all required funds were raised over a six-week period through obtaining loans, prepayments, donations and negotiating payment plans", sighed Scott Houston. "All loans were repaid, all prepayments were absorbed and all payment plans were adhered to through a new operating model."

A detailed and carefully monitored strategy, Table Tennis Australia became debt free in less than two and half years; most



Partnering Chamara Fernando, the 2008 Oceania men's doubles champion

significantly ten months ahead of schedule. Impressively no government bailout or loan was provided; the financial crisis was solved solely through internal means.

“Pleasingly, we are now operating to the highest possible standard”, added Scott Houston. “Together with a new Board, we’ve implemented many best practice initiatives from a financial, governance, strategic, operational and administrative perspective.”

Total revenue has been raised by 70 per cent over a two-year period, from A\$1.3 million to A\$2.2 million; A\$483,000 delivered in operating profit, A\$304,000 in net profit over a two-year period.

Higher profile

Improved presentation and a higher profile for national events has resulted in increased profitability, in 2019, more than A\$130,000 profit was generated across all national events, with a 49 per cent return on investment achieved. Notably, more than A\$1 million in current and future government funding has been gained and more than A\$200,000 in current and future peak body funding over a two-year period has been secured.

Most significantly the foundations are progressively more solid. Participation levels have increased by more than 60 per cent over a two-year period, with record participation numbers being delivered in both 2018 (104,000 participants) and 2019 (168,000 participants).

Meanwhile for the period 2019 to 2022 a Strategic Plan was initiated.

“In its first year substantial tangible outcomes have been generated across the pillars of unification, participation, profile, performance and our people”, explained Scott Houston. “Also, we have qualified maximum quota places for the 2020 Olympic Games and we anticipate sending our largest ever team to the 2020 Paralympic Games.”

Overall, the result is that the organisation’s governance rating with Sport Australia has improved by 24 per cent, from 65 per cent in 2018 to a record high of 89 per cent in 2019.

Cricket ambitions

A busy role in administration but like all others, life started playing sport.

“As a youngster I played many sports ranging from cricket, soccer, basketball and Australian Rules Football to indoor cricket”, reflected Scott Houston. “My dream growing up was to play cricket for Australia; I still play the occasional cricket game for my club and enjoy it. I got to a reasonable amateur level and my highest score is 134.”



Australian Olympic Games Qualification Tournament in 2008

Most creditable, for those not knowledgeable in the sport of cricket, scoring 50 runs is a most worthy landmark; over 100 and that is very special.

Table tennis began very tentatively, playing once a week at lunch time at school in year five, 10 years old at the time, he played in a school competition a couple of years later, nothing remarkable. Cricket remained the priority until 1998 when 14 years of age he didn’t have a sport to play in the winter. He called his local club, Southern Table Tennis Association in South Australia and enquired about playing. He was advised to go for a trial at their Friday night junior competition.

“I recall my late mother saying when we were driving there on the first night that I could play if I enjoyed it but not if any travel was involved”, smiled Scott Houston. “This was on the basis that I was already training and playing cricket multiple times per week which included a lot of travel. Ironically, fast forward 22 years and table tennis has taken me to more than 50 countries and enabled me to see the world.”

Aspiring young coach

The first night proved a success, Scott Houston enjoyed the experience; he quickly became involved in weekly pennant competitions. After one year he asked the head coach at the club, Maurice Quinn, what options were available for more coaching.

“He advised there was a young coach who had just moved from Melbourne to Adelaide and he recommended I undertake coaching with him”, continued Scott Houston. “That coach was Steve Dainton, who was 21 years old at the time and had just finished working as a Scholarship Coach for Table Tennis Australia.”

Nowadays Steve Dainton is the Chief Executive Officer for International Table Tennis Federation.

“Under Steve’s guidance, I quickly improved and grew to love the sport; it is something that has never left me. I continued to be coached by Steve until he took on the role of Oceania Development Officer, after which I changed to John Matovinovic, who coached countless Australian and multiple Oceania Champions”, continued Scott Houston. “John’s strength was not as a technical coach, but rather teaching all his players how to teach themselves so they don’t need to rely on a coach in competition.”

Significantly and with others involved in teaching there was more to John Matovinovic than just the technicalities of sport.

“He was also big on teaching his players about life skills and actively encouraged his players to continue studying in addition to playing”, added Scott Houston. “I thrived on this mantra and it’s something that has stuck with me to this day, without doubt in my formative years, John had the biggest influence on my life and I am grateful for this.”



Northern Mariana Islands in 2009

National team

Compared with many others, Scott Houston started to play table tennis rather later than most but extra hours of training, fitness work, psychology sessions and surrounding himself with knowledgeable and well-meaning people meant he made rapid progress. In 2001, he was selected for the Australian junior team at the Asian Junior Championships in Hong Kong. Now that may be strange as Australia is not in Asia! However, at the time, under an associate membership agreement, Australia was allowed to participate.

Overall in under 18, under 20 and under 21 events – boys' team, boys' doubles, mixed doubles - he won five national titles, whilst twice being junior boys' singles runner up. Later he was part of the Australian under 20 team that won the 2002 Oceania Championships; claiming gold by overcoming New Zealand in the final.

At senior level, he played for the South Australian men's team from 2002 to 2008, during which time he spent one season at Leutzscher Fuchse in Leipzig, Germany; two seasons at Turnerschaft Sparkasse Innsbruck in Austria and one season representing Chengdu in the lower divisions of the Chinese League.

"I made two men's doubles and two mixed doubles finals at the National Championships but was never able to win a national title at senior level", explained Scott Houston. "The problem I faced was that arguably the greatest Australian player of all time, William Henzell, was always my opponent in the final. My highest achievement at senior level was representing Australia at the 2008 Oceania Championships, where I became men's doubles champion partnering my good friend Chamara Fernando."

Success in 2008 but it was at the end of that year when Scott Houston assumed the role of Oceania Development Officer and thus training had to be curtailed.

"I still kept playing in South Australia though. In fact, I played 18 consecutive seasons from 2001 to 2018 in the first division of the South Australian State League. I won six Best Player Awards, I played in three premierships and enjoyed an 85 per cent win record overall", continued Scott Houston. "Also I played in the Australian Veteran Championships from 2014 to 2017 in the over 30 years category. I won four consecutive over 30 men's doubles titles, one over 30 mixed doubles title and made the final of the over 30 men's singles on one occasion."

Continuing to play at a very good level but in 2019 that had to stop, the demands of Table Tennis Australia and raising a young family consuming his time; another



William Henzell, more than once the stumbling block for Scott Houston

phase in his career and not a boat in sight, although he does hope to resume playing again in the future.

Now he explores different avenues but how he must miss Tokelau, two days on a boat in the exotic blue waters of the South Pacific, sheer paradise; who would ever change that for the bustling city of Adelaide?

Family

Born in Adelaide, South Australia on Thursday 10th May 1984, the city in which he still resides, he is married to Becky, he has two sons, Billy five years old, Henry one year old.



Qualifications

2008 – Bachelor of Business (International Business), University of South Australia

2012 – Level Three Coach Accreditation, Table Tennis Australia

2013 – Master of Business Administration, University of South Australia

2016 – Qualified as graduate and member of Australian Institute of Company Directors

Positions

2009-2011: Oceania Development Officer at ITTF-Oceania

2012-2013: Executive Director at the Career Development Association of Australia

2014-2017: Regional Cricket Manager at the South Australian Cricket Association

2017-Present: Chief Executive Officer of Table Tennis Australia



A decade has passed but for those present in Moscow's Olympic Indoor Arena on Sunday 30th May at the Liebherr 2010 World Team Championships, it could be yesterday; the memory is vivid, the occasion momentous.

Singapore beat China to hold aloft the Corbillon Cup.

Defeat for China is headline news; such is their stature in the sport, the fact pays

10 years ago, Singapore's finest hour

great credit to the outstanding skills their players display time and time again. It was only the second time in 35 years when China had not emerged women's team champions; on the first it took two nations to unite to beat them!

In 1991 in Chiba, after having won eight in a row, they experienced defeat in the final when facing Unified Korea. In 2010 Singapore followed suit; China was seeking number nine.

Was that just coincidence, was it destiny? Did the gods of sport shine on Singapore? Now, do we look forward to

2030 for the next time China must settle for silver?

Evidence

The evidence prior to Moscow was that Singapore had emerged the main rivals to China but was that not more theory than practice? Was there such a phenomenon as a main rival to the hot favourites? Was reality not a battle for second place?

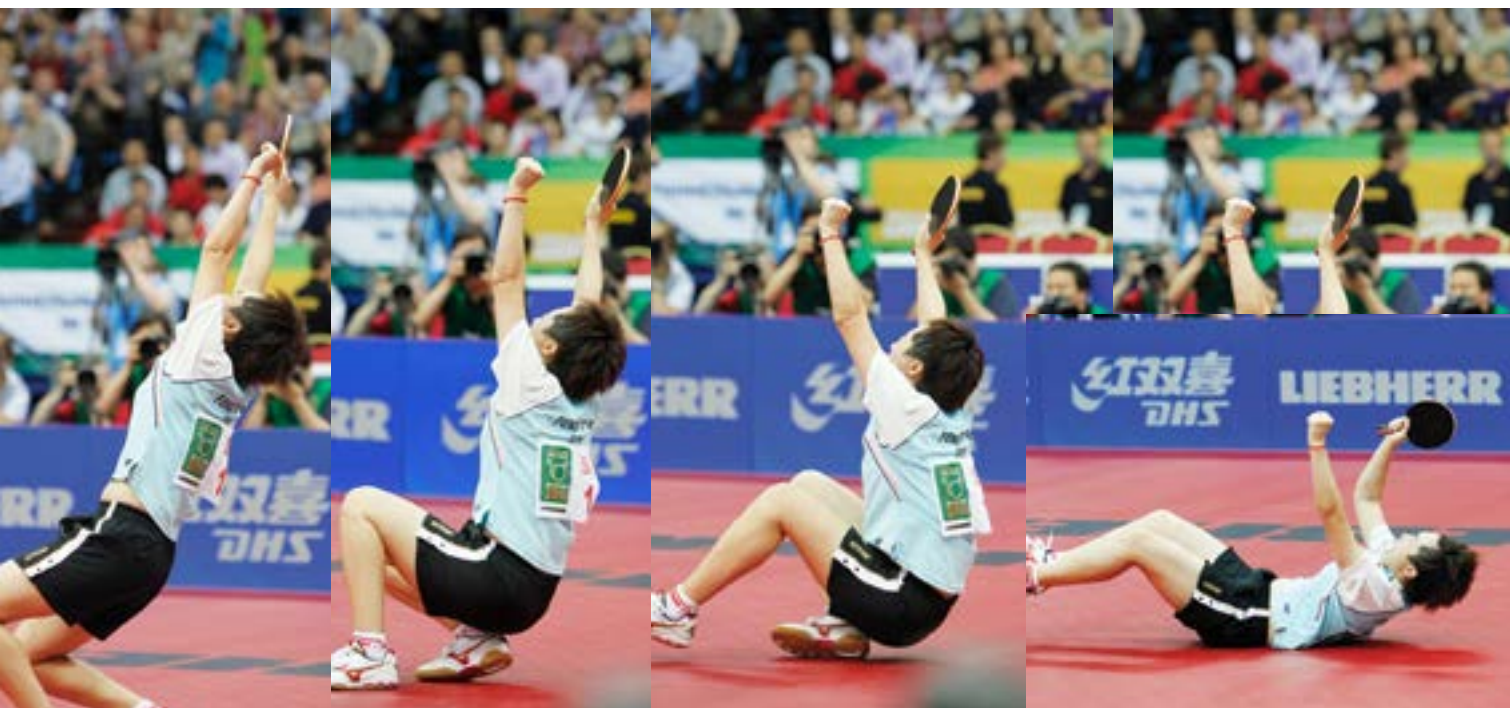
Consistent, in 2008 at the Evergrande Real Estate World Team Championships in Guangzhou and later in the year at the Beijing Olympic Games, Singapore had finished in the silver medal position. At the press conference in Beijing, Liu Guodong, the Singaporean women's team national coach at the time, had stated that the goal was runners up spot and had not considered China as they were in a league of their own.

Moreover, were the chances of a podium finish in Moscow diminished? In 2008 the favoured selection was always Feng Tianwei, Li Jiawei and Wang Yuegu; Sun Beibei and Yu Mengyu were very much waiting in the wings.

"Li Jiawei was slowly recovering after giving birth to her baby, in 2008 her strength had been outstanding",



Dr. Er Lee Bee Wah delighted, at the time President of the Singapore Table Tennis Association



explained Feng Tianwei. In Moscow, Li Jiawei only played in the group stage, notably remaining unbeaten; from the quarter-finals onwards Sun Beibei joined Feng Tianwei and Wang Yuegu.

More than in 2008, in order to gain a podium finish in Russia's capital city, Feng Tianwei had to seize the initiative, play the captain's role but the signs were not promising; there was nothing to suggest she could overcome China's elite.

On the 2010 ITTF World Tour in February in Qatar, she had been beaten in the third round of the women's singles event by

Romania's Daniela Monteiro Dodean; the following week in Kuwait, she had experienced defeat one round earlier, losing to China's Cao Zhen.

The results were not disastrous but perhaps not quite to par. It was quite similar the following month; on the ITTF World Tour in Berlin, she reached the semi-final stage losing to a further Chinese player in the guise of Feng Yalan, whilst at the Asian Cup in Guangzhou, she beat Korea Republic's Seok Hajung, to reserve third place. The significant result was that in straight games at the semi-final stage, she had lost to Ding Ning.

"I was not optimistic about how I might perform at the World Championships; I just played one match at a time", reflected Feng Tianwei.

Big stage

Guided by Zhou Shushen, the national coach, most impressively, Singapore reached the final, surrendering just one individual match; that being in the group phase when opposing the Czech Republic, Wang Yuegu lost to Iveta Vacenovska. Ding Ning, Liu Shiwen and Guo Yan waited in the title decider.

"Before the final, I felt very relaxed, there was no pressure", explained Feng Tianwei. "I was in a good state at the time, I felt I could express myself on the big stage, I was looking forward to the final."

However, as play began with Feng Tianwei facing Ding Ning; prospects did not look bright for Singapore. Ding Ning won the opening two games in style 11-8, 11-3; Feng Tianwei recovered to secure the third 11-8, before winning next two, 11-9, 11-9.

"The match against Ding Ning was dramatic; in the first two games, I was behind by a large score and then came back", reminisced Feng Tianwei. "Ding Ning became a little



Officials join players on the open top bus victory parade



The Corbillon Cup is held high
26

anxious; she wanted to win the match as soon as possible, she was relatively young.”

At the time Ding Ning was 19 years old but in the previous four matches on the international scene, she had always beaten Feng Tianwei. The perfect start for Singapore but it had been the same two years earlier in Guangzhou; Li Jiawei had overcome Guo Yue in the opening match but that had proved the sum total of Singaporean success.

Two years later it was very different; in the second match of the fixture Wang Yuegu accounted for Liu Shiwen, 18 years old at the time, in four games. One wonders, was coach, Shi Zhihao, looking ahead to the London 2012 Olympic Games with the selection of two teenagers? Li Xiaoxia, not fully fit and Guo Yue were both resigned to the bench; it was somewhat unusual that China selected three players who had never competed in World Championships final.

Anxious moments for China, Guo Yan recovered from an opening game deficit to beat Sun Beibei, before Feng Tianwei enjoyed her moment of a lifetime. Facing Liu Shiwen, she led by two games to one, she lost the fourth by the minimal two points; had the chance gone? Not so, the fifth game was secured, Feng Tianwei kept her nerve. She delivered a sensational victory.

“After Wang Yuegu won, all of us were quite excited; at that time, I didn’t think I could win, I just tried my best”, said Feng Tianwei. “Against Liu Shiwen in the last game, I obviously felt that she was under a lot of pressure; I didn’t know if I could win in the end, I just wanted to handle every point well, after winning the last point it felt like a dream.”

The dream had come true, Feng Tianwei had gone through the whole tournament unbeaten; she had led by example.

“Every member of the team was very important, I couldn’t win by myself, Wang Yuegu was outstanding; she recorded vital wins in every match; that was really important”, stressed Feng Tianwei. “Everyone was born in China and went to another association to play; we prepared well for every match.”

Success and then it was celebration time. “On the same evening we boarded the plane and rushed back to Singapore”, concluded Feng Tianwei. “The next day we were back in Singapore, a bus parade followed.”

Opportunities had been presented, those opportunities had been seized, in the final the Singaporean trio had raised their level that vital three or four per cent; enough to be crowned world champions, enough to write history, enough to enjoy their finest hour.



Team effort - Li Jiawei, Feng Tianwei, Zhou Shushen, Sun Beibei, Wang Yuegu, Yu Mengyu

Group Stage

Sat 5th – Sun 13th April 1980

SINGAPORE 3-0 SPAIN

Feng Tianwei v Shen Yanfei 14-12, 13-11, 11-9

Li Jiawei v Sara Ramirez 11-6, 11-5, 11-2

Wang Yuegu v Zhu Fang 11-7, 11-7, 11-3

SINGAPORE 3-1 CZECH REPUBLIC

Feng Tianwei v Dana Cechova 11-3, 11-5, 13-11

Wang Yuegu v Iveta Vacenovska 7-11, 6-11, 9-11

Li Jiawei v Katerina Penkavova 11-7, 11-6, 11-9

Feng Tianwei v Iveta Vacenovska 8-11, 11-8, 11-4, 11-3

SINGAPORE 3-0 NETHERLANDS

Feng Tianwei v Li Jie 11-4, 11-7, 11-9

Li Jiawei v Elena Timina 11-8, 11-8, 11-8

Wang Yuegu v Li Jiao 11-4, 11-5, 11-9

SINGAPORE 3-0 GERMANY

Feng Tianwei v Kristin Silbereisen 11-6, 11-9, 11-9

Sun Beibei v Sabine Winter 11-7, 11-5, 11-7

Wang Yuegu v Wu Jiaduo 17-15, 11-6, 13-11

SINGAPORE 3-0 UNITED STATES

Yu Mengyu v Ariel Hsing 11-9, 11-9, 11-2

Sun Beibei v Lily Zhang 11-9, 11-8, 11-8

Li Jiawei v Natalie Sun 9-11, 11-2, 8-11, 11-9, 11-4

Quarter-Final

SINGAPORE 3-0 HUNGARY

Wang Yuegu v Krisztina Toth 11-7, 11-6, 11-8

Feng Tianwei v Petra Lovas 11-7, 11-7, 9-11, 11-4

Sun Beibei v Georgina Pota 11-1, 13-11, 7-11, 14-12

Semi-Final

SINGAPORE 3-0 GERMANY

Feng Tianwei v Wu Jiaduo 17-15, 11-5, 11-7

Wang Yuegu v Kristin Silbereisen 11-5, 6-11, 11-3, 8-11, 13-11

Sun Beibei v Sabine Winter 11-7, 11-1, 11-4

Final

SINGAPORE 3-1 CHINA

Feng Tianwei v Ding Ning 8-11, 3-11, 11-8, 11-9, 11-9

Wang Yuegu v Liu Shiwen 11-7, 11-8, 2-11, 12-10

Sun Beibei v Guo Yan 11-6, 6-11, 4-11, 6-11

Feng Tianwei v Liu Shiwen 11-7, 14-16, 11-7, 9-11, 11-7

An enforced absence owing to COVID-19, training sessions for the British Para Team Performance Squad recommenced in August at their centres in Cardiff and Sheffield.

However, there was one most significant absentee; silver medallist at the Gold Coast 2018 Commonwealth Games, in action at the London 2012 and Rio 2016 Paralympic Games, Kim Daybell, a class 10 athlete, put duty before athletic ambitions. He continued his work in the frontline battle against the pandemic.

Commencing studies at Leeds University in 2010, taking one year out for the Rio 2016 Paralympic Games, the now 28-year-old graduated in 2018, immediately taking a position as a junior doctor at a North London hospital.

Having completed his two years general postgraduate medical training programme, Kim was due to start a different type of training on Monday 23rd March; preparation in the table tennis hall for the Tokyo 2020 Paralympic Games. Instead, now a Senior House Doctor, the hospital asked if he would be a member of a full-time rota in the NHS (National Health Service) fight against the coronavirus outbreak.

The young man, who hails from Sheffield and was born with Poland syndrome never hesitated (on the right side of his body he has underdeveloped chest muscles and short webbed fingers, when two years old experiencing a toe transplant to act as fingers). Table tennis had to take a back seat.

It has been a life changing experience. Kim has discovered qualities that he never knew existed, it has given him an incentive to work in countries where epidemics are rife. Equally it has strengthened his desire to qualify for the Tokyo Paralympic Games.

Whether or not he appears in the Japanese capital city is uncertain, one fact has been confirmed beyond doubt, he has established himself as an outstanding ambassador for the NHS and for Paralympic sport.

Most notably, his story has gone global! He was one of four athletes from around the world selected by Olympic and Paralympic worldwide partner P&G (Proctor and Gamble) to feature in a new digital

video series "The Measure of Greatness" launched on social media.

"For them to reach out to me was quite humbling; I've never really been that much in the public eye and it is very nice to be recognised by them. I've seen the video and I think it looks fantastic - they have put across a really nice message", said Kim Daybell. "Looking at the other athletes who have been involved they have done some amazing things through lockdown raising awareness and support; I am honoured to be counted amongst people who have

the risky position I'm in. I think it is going to take time but I'm working closely with the coaches and the English Institute of Sport staff at British Para Table Tennis to decide on a time to come back to training in a safe manner.

I'm hoping that in the next few weeks I might be back in the sports hall again. It is a question of picking the right time and making sure it is safe for everyone that I am working with; I'm really looking forward to it.

I've missed table tennis a huge amount.

Obviously I didn't think about it a lot when we were in the midst of the pandemic. From March through to May there wasn't much time to miss it but I managed to get back on a table and play for a short period of time a couple of weeks ago and it just reminded me how much I have missed playing. I'm looking forward to that next step now things have settled down. I think it is time to look forward now and for everybody to get back to some kind of normality and look for some of the things we enjoy in life again.

I guess even more than the sport I have missed the team - that squad has been an amazing part of my life and I think not being around them day-to-day and week-to-week has shown me how much I rely on them and how much they support me. Yes, it will be really good to get back on the table but even more to get back in and amongst the players, coaches and support staff who mean a huge amount to me.

Every single member of the team has been amazing. I've had some nice supportive videos on Twitter from my team mates and I speak to a lot of them on a personal

level day-to-day. The coaches and staff are always messaging me to make sure I am alright and wanting to offer their support where they can; that has been a really big thing for me. Most people in my position working in the National Health Service don't have that whole different support structure and it made this time much easier for me. They were always available to talk to, no pressure was put on me and they were brilliant.

Work in the hospital is slowly getting back to its normal routine after weeks of caring exclusively for coronavirus patients but in addition to managing the backlog of patients with other health problems, the

Duty before ambition



done those sorts of things. I am glad to be a part of it and to have that platform to sell that story and hopefully raise awareness and inspire people somewhere down the line."

Missing the sport, missing the team

In late July, Kim Daybell spoke to Francesca Bullock, the Press Officer for the British Para Team.

"I honestly don't know when I will be able to return to training. It is going to be a long process for all the athletes but especially for me because of the job I'm doing and

hospital is also alert to the possibility of a second wave of the pandemic.

There are very few COVID patients now and hardly any in intensive care anymore which is obviously really good. We don't have that stress of the unknown anymore but there is a bit of an odd feeling around the hospital as everyone is just quite tired and a bit drained from everything. After you have been through something like that there is always this period of a bit of a down time and you are not sure what to do with yourself. But as always there is plenty of work to do, so we are just getting through that and it is good to get back to some sort of normality.

I think now there is a bit of time to look back and reflect on what has happened, it seems a lot more surreal than it felt at the time. When it was happening you didn't have much choice - you just had to get on with things and there was so much to keep you busy. Now looking back it was a really strange time and something we have never seen before in this country. That is becoming more apparent looking back on it - all our practices changed, the whole hospital was restructured, it was a very odd time.

I think the hardest thing for me was having to bridge that gap between relatives and patients. With COVID being so virulent people couldn't come in and see their loved ones when they were really unwell. Making the daily phone calls to update them and being the person to interact and act as the go-between, especially when you are having to deliver bad news, was obviously really tough.

Normally as a doctor you can take a little step back from that emotional side of things and the relatives can come in and they can talk to the patient and take on that emotional burden when they are going through a difficult time. But with them not being able to come in you had to do that

and have that extra compassion and be a bit more emotionally involved with the patients. That was the hardest thing for me as a junior doctor. Higher up the chain the senior doctors and consultants had to make some terrible decisions and I'm sure that was very difficult for them. I was lucky that I wasn't in the position to have to make those calls.

I settled into it surprisingly quickly and I think everyone did. I think if you had said before lockdown "it is going to be a global pandemic and you are going to be on the frontline" it all sounded a lot more scary; actually once it started everyone just looked at each other, put their heads down and got the job done. It shows the resil-

ience of the NHS and the people who work for it. I was pleased that I dealt with it quite well and took it in my stride. When you have proved to yourself that you can come through something like that you know you are able to overcome any challenge.

The outpouring of support was fantastic from everybody; you could feel that people really appreciated their healthcare workers at that time and hopefully they will continue to do that. People realised just how important the healthcare service is, the support was amazing - local businesses bringing in food and just generally the feeling out in the street. When you spoke to people on the phone they were always really grateful for what



The medal podium at the 2018 Czech Para Open; gold for Kim Daybell, silver for Ivan Karabec (left), bronze for (right) Manuel Echaveguren

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZciNNbgXSIA>



Kim Daybell, Ross Wilson and Josh Stacey, a successful venture at the Gold Coast 2018 Commonwealth Games

you were doing and that helped you keep in perspective what you were doing and why you were doing it.

I think the NHS is like any workforce and any office in that people are trying to get through their careers and climb the ladder; all that seemed a bit meaningless compared to what we were trying to do, so it definitely brought people closer together.

I've always thought I'd like to spend some time in a developing country and offer my skills there. My parents are opticians and they used to quite regularly go out to Africa and places like that and try and provide some structure and healthcare to the people out there who don't have any; I've always thought that would be a good thing to do. This has just hit home how your knowledge and experience as a doctor can make a massive difference to people. I think over time as I become a bit more qualified and my skills become a bit more important I will definitely try to do that.

Even in a developed country like the United Kingdom we were brought to our knees by COVID and I can only imagine what it is doing to some of the other countries who don't have the same infrastructure.

I'm not someone who is normally in the public eye but it has shown me the power that you can have; if you are in a position to get a message out to people and inspire



Kim Daybell, successful



Kim Daybell at the Rio 2016 Paralympic Games



Kim Daybell, team player

people you should definitely try to do that. It can be difficult because I feel that everyone I am working alongside - the nurses, all the other doctors and everyone working in the hospital - were heroes in their own right. They all deserve their stories to be told because there are some really amazing ones out there. I am lucky enough that through my sport and the support, I have the platform to do so. It was quite strange but it showed me that if you have got the means to get the story out there and raise awareness it is a really powerful tool. I'm glad I was able to do that.

I think it has made me want it even more; one of the things the pandemic has made me realise is that life is short and while I am healthy and in a position to do what I am doing now it has made me want to do it even more. As soon as the Paralympics were taken away this year I think I realised how much it means to me. It has given me some extra drive to hopefully be competing next year. I think for a lot of athletes it will have done the same, because the Olympics and Paralympics have been the rock that most sports have been built

around and you wouldn't think that anything could ever damage that or change that. COVID has shown that is not true so we should definitely cherish those times that we have and strive towards them.

Tokyo is only a year away but for me it feels a long way off. A lot of nations have been out of lockdown and been training for a while now but for me personally I feel like I have lost a lot of ground. My attention has been completely focused elsewhere, so getting back into training and getting back to the level I was before does seem a very daunting task because it is the longest time I have ever spent out of the training hall.

I've kept myself physically fit during lockdown so I'm ready to get back on the table but the instability of what is happening around the world is also affecting me mentally a little bit.

There is still talk of a second wave or things getting worse in the winter. I will still be on standby to go back to what I was doing before. So there are a lot of bridges to cross and still some difficult times ahead to get through but it is a question of taking it one day at a time.

The next thing for me is just getting back on the table and playing table tennis again; getting myself in the right space to start training hard and hopefully I'll be in Tokyo next year and be able to compete."



Per Hällström at the 2019 ITTF World Tour Swedish Open

Intricate records, attention to detail

A proud tradition in the sport of table tennis, the first ever international being in 1927 against Hungary; when the Liebherr 2019 European Team Championships concluded in Nantes on Sunday 8th September, Swedish players had competed in 2,147 matches in men's team fixtures.

It is just one of the million and one facts that Per Hällström can advise about Swedish players and those beyond Nordic shores; his attention to detail sets the standard.

There are very few gaps in his records that relate the results gained by every Swedish player who donned the nation's colours in an international tournament, the only gaps are that for some tournaments in the far flung reaches of the world he may not have the actual score in each game but he'll be able tell you the margin of victory, whether it was 2-0, 2-1, 3-1 or whatever.

The level of knowledge is an education and that is the background of the now retired 69-year-old who hails from Lund in the south of Sweden, not too far

distant from Malmö, across the Øresund from Copenhagen. Secondary education complete, in 1971 he commenced studies at Lund University, graduating in 1976, the year a teaching career began, the subjects mathematics and physics. Later at three different schools, for an overall period of 18 years, he was the principal.

Start of career

Table tennis for Per Hällström started in 1956, at the time the family lived in Mellerud on the western side of Sweden, some 80 miles north of Gothenburg; his coach was Birgitta Tegner Larsson. The leading Swedish player of the era, she won the women's singles title at the Swedish National Championships on five occasions; commencing in 1957 she secured three in a row, then in 1962 and 1963 succeeded once again. Notably in 1958 she clinched the women's doubles title at the Scandinavian Open (now the Swedish Open) partnering Agnes Simon.

In 1964 the family moved to Halmstad, the city that hosted the Liebherr 2018 World Team Championships, some 80

miles distant from Lund. Per Hällström played left wing for the local football team, in addition to handball and of course table tennis.

"I started to play for Halmstad BTK, the club where Jörgen Persson started his career", explained Per Hallstrom.

He made an impact and is the possessor of a very unique record, in 1971 in Nagoya, Stellan Bengtsson became the first Swede to win the men's singles title at a World Championships but prior to that date he had experienced problems when facing Per Hällström, not once, not twice but three times!

"I beat Stellan Bengtsson three times!" smiled Per Hällström. "In 1964, at the age of 12 or 13, I beat him playing table tennis; then I beat him playing football for Alet and handball for Drott; he played for clubs in Falkenberg. Well, I have to admit, Stellan has also beaten me at table tennis!"

Now by any standards that is not a bad record to have on your curriculum vitae!



At the 2018 World Veteran Championships, Jörgen Persson, Erik Lindh, Per Hällström and Stellan Bengtsson

Reserved character

A player of pedigree but most importantly a man who has gained the respect of all; he does not seek the limelight, he is reserved, content to be in the background, quietly assessing play as a tournament progresses and then producing a gem of information that is a godsend for the journalist.

Equally, he is astute, a well-reasoned response will always be forthcoming, hasty replies are anathema; panic is the very antithesis of his nature. Thus when administration is the order of proceedings, the contribution of Per Hällström, which started when he joined the board of the local table tennis club, has proved invaluable.

Assisting the local club, it was the start of various administrative roles. Soon after in the late 1970s, he was approached by the late Tommy Andersson to write about table tennis in the area and then for the Swedish magazine; true to his character, always helpful wishing to see the sport progress, Per Hällström agreed. By the start of the 1980s writing about table

tennis had become a significant part of his life.

Increasingly involved in administration, Per Hällström joined the organising committee for the 1983 European Youth Championships staged in Malmö. Two years later, invited by Loa Andersson from the Swedish Table Tennis Association, he was a member of the tournament committee for the 1985 World Championships in Gothenburg; it was at this stage of his career that the detailed record keeping of Swedish players began.

Soon after in Gothenburg at the 1990 European Championships and at the 1993 World Championships, Per Hällström was a member of the media committee, notably at the latter organising a very innovative table tennis match.

He arranged for a table tennis table to be brought into the media centre for two very special guests to play a few rallies against each other. Juan Antonio Samaranch, the President of the International Olympic Committee versus Ichiro Ogimura,

the world champion in 1954 and 1956, at the time President of the International Table Tennis Federation. The match was televised but unfortunately no-one saved the tape.

A range of roles, in the 1990s Per Hällström compiled the programme for the Swedish Championships, as well as in 1994 for the Swedish Open. In that year he was the Tournament Director for the Swedish Open, a role he fulfilled later in 1997, 1999 and 2003; since 1980 he has been present at every Swedish Open, a tournament he first attended in 1970 in Halmstad.

Furthermore that gathering had a special relevance. It was the first time when Zhuang Zedong, the world champion on three consecutive editions of the tournament commencing in 1961 in Beijing, appeared following the Cultural Revolution. He was beaten by Stellan Bengtsson at the quarter-final stage; Bengtsson duly overcame Hungary's Istvan Jonyer to reach the final where he lost to colleague, Hans Alsér.



Per Hällström with Xi Enting at the 1983 Swedish Open

Top class coach

Another intriguing fact in the repertoire of Per Hällström is that he is rather more than just a statistician; he is a most knowledgeable coach. There is undeniable evidence.

At the World Championships in 1991 in Chiba, Jörgen Persson won the men's singles title and partnering Erik Lindh, men's doubles bronze; the coach was Stellan Bengtsson. At the Las Vegas 2018 World Veteran Championships, all three were present but Stellan Bengtsson was replaced; he was resigned to the tiered seating; the role of spectator.

Per Hällström assumed the role of coach; the outcome in the 50 to 54 years age category, Jörgen Persson won the men's singles title and partnered Erik Lindh to men's doubles gold! "No more compari-

sons!" smiled Per Hällström.

A step ahead of Stellan Bengtsson, yet another intriguing fact and that is Per Hällström, a mine of information, a gold mine.

Special memories

.....I met Jörgen Persson when he was just nine years old, playing for Halmstad BTK, the same club I played for when my parents moved from Mellerud to Halmstad in 1964.

.....Just two months after we moved to Halmstad, Halmstad BTK arranged the Swedish Closed Championships; I collected autographs from all the Swedish table tennis stars, Tage Flisberg, Hans Alsér, Kjell Johansson, Björne Mellström and so on. I still have them in my possession.

..... I made Jörgen Persson's website

for around 13 years.

.....I produced all the statistics for Jens Fellke's books about Jan-Ove Waldner and Jörgen Persson.

.....Together with Thomas Buza, General Secretary at the Swedish Table Tennis Association, I made the souvenir programme for the Liebherr 2018 World Team Championships in Halmstad.

.....Most of all, I am proud of the experiences enjoyed through travel and participation in many great championships all over the world; all the interesting people I met through table tennis.

Did you know that?

For many years the Swedish Open was called "the small World Championships".

Eight World champions have won the men's singles title at the Swedish Open: Zhuang Zedong (1959), Stellan Bengtsson (1975, 1979), Guo Yuehua (1976), Jiang Jialiang (1981), Jan-Ove Waldner (1983), Jörgen Persson (1996), Wang Liqin (1999, 2001, 2003), Ma Long (2011).

Nine World champions have won the women's singles at the Swedish Open: Angelica Rozeanu (1954, 1955), Pak Yung Sun (1976), Tong Ling (1978), Cao Yanhua (1980), He Zhili (1985), Deng Yaping (1991, 1996), Wang Nan (1994), Zhang Yining (2000, 2003), Li Xiaoxia (2007).

Wang Liqin first played in the Swedish Open in 1993 when he was 15 years old; he lost all three matches in his group. He was beaten by Poland's Lucjan Blasczyk (21-12, 22-20), Japan's Hidefumi Masuda (18-21, 21-15, 21-18) and Denmark's Martin Monrad (21-15, 22-20).

Ding Ning, three times World Champion, has never won the Swedish Open women's singles title.

Men - most international appearances for Sweden: Jan-Ove Waldner 278 (1980-2006), Jörgen Persson 243 (1983-2012), Kjell Johansson 238 (1961-77), Stellan Bengtsson 214 (1970-84), Hans Alsér 202 (1958-71).

Women - most international appearances for Sweden: Marie Svensson 202 (1983-2001), Ann-Christin Hellman 161 (1970-82), Åsa Svensson 159 (1987-2002).

Only one Swedish player has won the four titles - team, singles, doubles and mixed doubles - at the European Youth Championships; moreover, it happened in the same year. It was not Kjell Johansson, not Stellan Bengtsson, Jan-Ove Waldner nor Jörgen Persson. It was Eva Johansson (Fredenlund) in 1965. She is also the only Swedish female player who has won the junior singles title.



Per Hällström with Wang Liqin at the 2003 ITTF World Tour Swedish Open



A pensive Per Hällström

Safir International

Per Hällström has been the press officer at the Swedish Junior and Cadet Open for over 15 years; the tournament is part of the Safir International, noted for its elite level events.

Men's singles World champions who have won the Safir Elite class: Stellan Bengtsson, Jan-Ove Waldner and Jörgen Persson.

In 1987 Yoo Namkyu won the Safir Elite class and the year after he won Olympic gold. In February 1992 Jan-Ove Waldner won Safir and half a year later he won Olympic gold. The recipe, if you want to win Olympic gold; then win the Safir Elite class first.

Stellan Bengtsson became World Cham-

pion in 1971 but had to wait until 1979 before winning Safir for the first time.

In 2003, the year he became World champion, Werner Schlager was beaten in an early round by Pär Gerell.

Neither the World champion in 1993, Jean-Philippe Gatien nor his opponent in the final, Jean-Michel Saive, ever won the Safir International. Gatien reached the quarter-final of the Safir Masters in 2001.

Three times European champion but despite some 30 attempts, Mikael Appelgren never won the men's singles Safir Elite class; his best was in 1982 when losing in the final to Jan-Ove Waldner. Later in the year in Budapest he won the men's singles title at the European Championships.

Women's team and mixed doubles gold medallist at the 1983 World Championships, Ni Xialian won the women's singles title at the Safir International in 1994 and 1998.

Jan-Ove Waldner and Jörgen Persson have met twice at Safir; honours even. In 1984 Waldner beat Persson in the final; the following year the decision was reversed. Later the same order was repeated in the World Championships final; Waldner beat Persson in 1989 in Dortmund, in 1991 in Chiba, Persson extracted revenge.

Ulf Bengtsson reached the semi-final at the Safir International in 1984; then a few months later was crowned European champion in Moscow. Like Peter Karlsson, the 2000 European champion in Bremen, he never donned the Safir crown.

There are seven Swedish players who have won gold at a World Championships in men's team, men's singles or men's doubles but have never won the Safir Elite class. They are Hans Alsér, Kjell Johansson, Bo Persson, Ingemar Wikström, Mikael Appelgren, Peter Karlsson and Thomas von Scheele.

Members of Swedish gold medal winning teams at World Championships, Anders Johansson, Erik Lindh and Fredrik Håkansson, in addition to Ulf "Tickan" Carlsson, the men's doubles winner in 1985 in Gothenburg, have all won the Safir Elite class.

In 1987 Teng Yi was a member of China's successful men's team at the World Championships; also he reached the men's singles semi-final. However, in the same year he only reached the penultimate round at Safir.

Wang Tao, twice a member of China's gold medal winning men's team at World Championships, succeeding in 1995 and 1997, was present in 1992 at Safir. He departed in the semi-final round.

Sweden's leading female players Ann-Christin Hellman, Europe Top 12 winner in 1975 and 1976, alongside Marie Svensson and Li Fen, the respective European champions in 1994 and 2013, have all won at Safir.

In 2018 Truls Moregard became the first Swedish player to win the junior boys' singles title at a Swedish ITTF World Junior Circuit tournament. In 2019 he retained the title; also he won the Elite class at Safir, before beating Mattias Falck in the semi-finals and Kristian Karlsson in the final to win the men's singles title at the Swedish National Championships. He accomplished the feat within a period of 11 days, Friday 21st to Tuesday 3rd March.

Just 1 step short



Alfred Liebster (Austria) – 1928



Ivan Andreadis (Czechoslovakia) – 1951

Ever since the first men's world rankings were issued in 1928, until the lists in April 2020 were published and COVID-19 caused a halt to international play, the ultimate goal has been the top spot.

Considering all forms, whether by committee decision or computer program, deemed official or unofficial but publicised; for 16 players, it has been just one step short, so near yet so far. Second place achieved but the coveted top position never realised.

The national associations are those the player represented at the time, the dates are when second place was gained.



Kjell Johansson (Sweden) – Early 1974



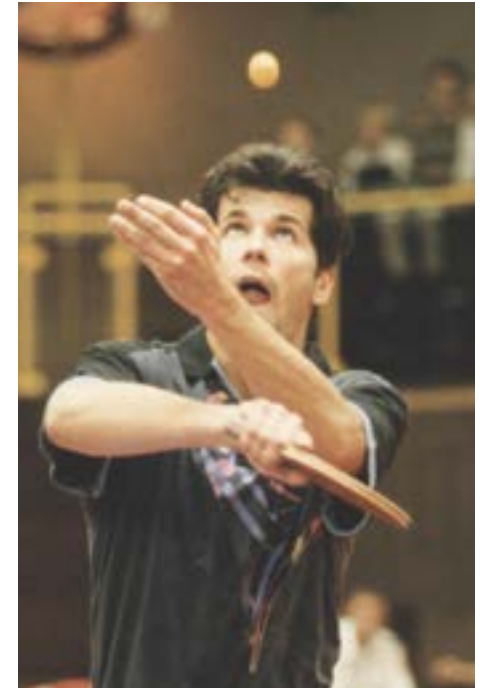
Dragutin Surbek (Yugoslavia) – December 1974



Chen Longcan (China) - May 1985, June 1986



Mikael Appelgren (Sweden) - August 1990



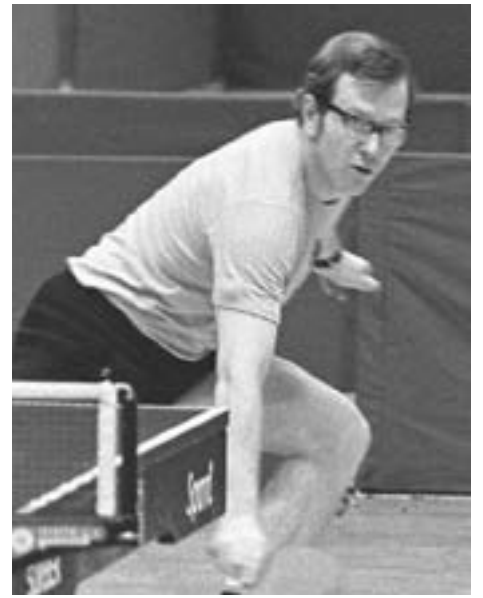
Zoran Primorac (Croatia) - February 1998, March 1998, May 1998, June 1998, August 1998



Zarko Dolinar (Yugoslavia) – 1955



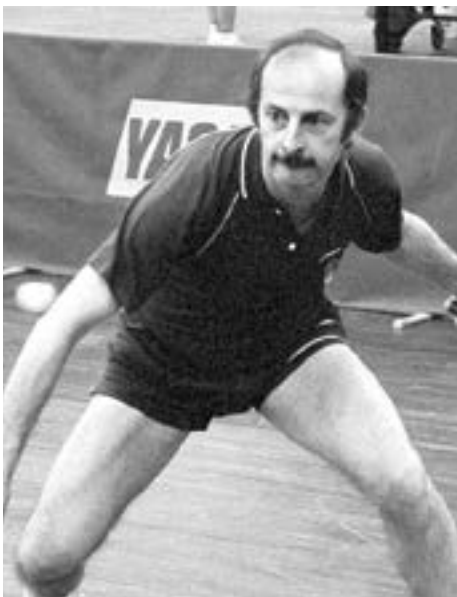
Li Furong (China) – 1961, May 1964, Late 1964, May 1965, Late 1965, Early 1967



Eberhard Schöler (West Germany) – 1969



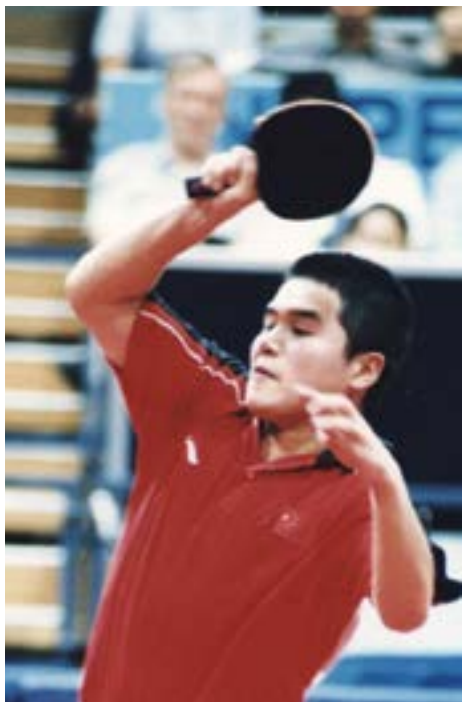
Antun Stipancic (Yugoslavia) – June 1975



Jacques Secretin (France) – September 1976



Xie Saike (China) - February 1985



Liu Guozheng (China) - July 2001, August 2001, September 2001, October 2001



Ryu Seungmin (Korea Republic) - September 2004



Lin Gaoyuan (China) - May 2019, June 2019, July 2019



Momentous months

A good age to make progress, it's open to discussion but if there is a critical period in a player's career, with very few child prodigy logic defying exceptions, it is those years when junior days have been left behind and the big wide world has to be faced. They are the years when talent must be more than matched with downright hard work.

Bridging the gap, for some who have enjoyed glittering success in teenage years, they fall into the crevasse, for others they make the traverse but it can take time; there is no hard and fast rule.

One player who completed the bridge crossing by the time the month of March 2020 had concluded was Slovenia's 22 year old Darko Jorgic. He stands firmly on the senior bank; at any tournament, whatever the level, now he is a player with whom to be reckoned.

The results gained in the five month period commencing in Linz on Tuesday 12th November, endorse that fact. At the ITTF World Tour 2019 Platinum bet-at-home.com Austrian Open, he staked his claim. Safely through the qualification stage, in the opening round he beat Korea Republic's Jang Woojin, the no.12 seed, before losing to the champion elect, China's top

seeded Fan Zhendong.

"At the Austria Open I calculated the number of ranking points I needed to have at the end of the tournament in order to qualify for the Europe Top 16", explained Darko Jorgic. "I played a very good tournament, I came through the qualification and was hoping for a good first round draw; when I saw that I had to play against Jang Woojin, I was very happy because a few months earlier I had lost against him 3-4 in Hong Kong in the first round. I knew I had a good chance, I played my game

and won."

It was for Darko Jorgic his best performance to date on the ITTF World Tour. Three months earlier in August, he had reached the same round at the 2019 ITTF World Tour Asarel Bulgaria Open in Panagyurishte. Coincidentally, following a very similar pattern; a main draw place booked, it had been unexpected success against Korea Republic, defeat at Chinese hands. He beat Lee Sangsu, the no.5 seed, before a rapidly improving Zhao Zihao ended adventures.



In the opening round in Austria, Jang Woojin suffered at the hands of Darko Jorgic

Special moment

Fine performances in Panagyurishte, the previous year it had been the same in Tarragona, likewise a tournament that could be considered a milestone in his career. At the 2018 Mediterranean Games, alongside Bojan Tokic and Deni Kozul, he had won men's team gold before later emerging the men's singles winner.

"It was a special moment for me to win a title and to be part of a team representing the Slovenian Olympic Committee", explained Darko Jorgic.

Crucial to Slovenian success, turning the clock back one year more, at the 2017 European Team Championships in Luxembourg, it had been a similar scenario but in a much more dramatic fashion. Alongside Deni Kozul, Bojan Tokic and Jan Zibrat, a totally unexpected bronze medal had been secured. Moreover, they were the only outfit to extract a single individual match from Germany, the champions elect. Thanks to wins from Bojan Tokic against Ruwen Filus and, in the opening engagement of the fixture, more significantly from Darko Jorgic in opposition to Dimitrij Ovtcharov, they stretched the top seeds, the full five match distance.

"It was just an amazing feeling to be part of this historical moment for Slovenian table tennis; this was something unreal", explained Darko Jorgic. "Tokic played his best table tennis; I won three very important matches against Lubomir Pistej, Pär Gerell and Robert Gardos as well as against Dima in the semi-final. It was a great performance from all of us."

Major difference

Most worthy results, they marched Darko Jorgic a considerable distance across the graduation bridge; but there is a difference. The performance in Linz stands out ahead of Luxembourg, Tarragona and Panagyurishte, not only because it was a platinum level tournament, the highest on the ITTF World Tour but because of what happened next. Quite simply, there was no lull, the good form continued, notable names were put to the sword.

The following month, during the first week of December, Darko Jorgic was on duty at the 2019 ITTF Challenge Plus Benemax-Virgo North American Open in Markham, a city in the Greater Toronto Area. He reached the men's singles semi-final stage. Impressively he ousted Eugene Wang, the host nation's leading player in the quarter-finals, prior to losing to China's Xiang Peng, a young man in form. Less than a week earlier, the then 16-year-old had been crowned world junior champion in Korat, Thailand.

"In December in Canada I saw that I still had to win some matches to qualify for

Europe Top 16. My goal was to be part of that tournament; I was fighting for a place", stressed Darko Jorgic. "I played really well, I was pleased how I played in the semi-final against Xiang Peng but I couldn't receive his serves well enough and then he was able to play aggressively; China is so strong in the sport, they have so many good players, he is yet another."

Olympic Place

Fine performances in Linz and Markham, a break for the Christmas festivities, then in late January it was back to action in Gondomar, Portugal; the 2020 ITTF World Team Qualification Tournament. Nine places on offer for the men's team event at the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games but Slovenia did not start as favourites to gain one of the precious berths.

They were the no.11 seeds, they needed to upset the order of merit; they needed a special performance. Lining up alongside Deni Kozul and Bojan Tokic throughout,

Darko Jorgic provided that special performance. He remained unbeaten as a 3-1 win was posted against Iran, the no.20 seeds, before against the odds the same margin of victory was recorded in opposition to India, the no.5 seeds.

"This was our dream, to qualify as a team for Tokyo", reflected Darko Jorgic. "We had one of the best draws we could get but also our team spirit was just amazing. I played really well, Bojan was also hot and motivated to be in the team that could reach Tokyo."

Time for celebration but there was no time; four days after the momentous success in Gondomar, Darko Jorgic commenced play in the qualification stage of the men's singles event at the 2020 ITTF World Tour Platinum German Open in Magdeburg. Again he performed most creditably; he qualified for the main draw courtesy of success against Sweden's Anton Källberg, prior to experiencing an opening round defeat at the hands of Japan's Jun Mizutani, the no.13 seed.



Peter Krivec (physiotherapist), Bojan Tokic, Deni Kozul, Darko Jorgic, Peter Hribar and Andreja Ojstersek Urh savour the moment in Gondomar



Supporting Darko Jorgic in the vital contest against India

Best ever

Good form in Magdeburg, the following week in Montreux, Darko Jorgic enjoyed the very best form of his life!

On debut, at the CCB 2020 Europe Top 16, he reached the final. He recorded wins against Vladimir Samsonov of Belarus, Slovakia's Wang Yang and Croatia's Tomislav Pucar, before losing to Germany's Timo Boll, a contest in which he won the opening game, prior to losing the second by the very narrowest of margins.

"This Top 16, I can say this is the best result so far for me; I cannot explain how happy I was", smiled Darko Jorgic. "A lot of people cheered for me; that's why my energy was on high level. I played my best tournament but also I was calm; I had chances in the final against Timo to lead two-nil but we all know Timo is Timo."

A podium place in Montreux but nine days later it was start again from the very beginning, the qualification tournament at the 2020 ITTF World Tour Hungarian Open in Budapest. Just as in Austria and Germany, Darko Jorgic booked his place in the main draw where Sweden's Kristian Karlsson, the no.11 seed, ended adventures.

Similar to Magdeburg, a first round exit against a most worthy opponent but once again safely through the preliminary phase, a fact that underlined his high level of consistency and contributed to his progress. He had played a high number of matches against quality opposition and had emerged successful.

"Sure playing in the qualification events helped a great deal", explained Darko Jorgic. "In January I didn't feel I was playing my best table tennis; I had some bad weeks, hard practice and definitely all those matches helped."

Common factor

Four tournaments in rapid succession, there was one more before COVID-19 brought international sport to an abrupt halt; a tournament that ended for Darko Jorgic with a bitter, sweet taste. At the 2020 ITTF World Tour Platinum Qatar Open in Doha, in the qualification phase, he suffered at the hands of Japan's Yukiya Uda by the very narrowest of seven game margins. However, it was not before he had raised the eyebrows. In his opening match he accounted for China's Zhou Qihao.

"In Qatar my draw was very difficult", said Darko Jorgic. "First yes, I won against Zhou Qihao I played really well; then against Yukiya Uda it was 3-3 in games and 9-6 for me; I didn't manage to make most of the advantage, no place in the main draw."

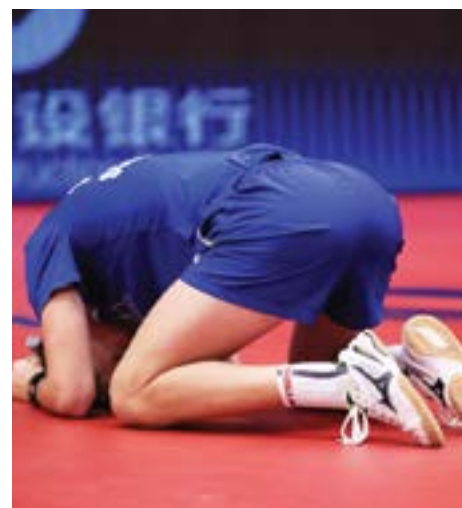
One tournament after another follow-
40



Slovenia celebrates, Olympic Games place booked



Darko Jorgic totally focused in Montreux



Darko Jorgic on his knees at the CCB Europe Top 16 after winning a momentous fifth game against Wang Yang to book a semi-final place



Runners up spot for Darko Jorgic in Montreux, Timo Boll once again the champion, third place for Robert Gardos

ing the Christmas break and one fact emerged; the only players against whom he experienced defeat – Jun Mizutani, Timo Boll, Kristian Karlsson, Yukiya Uda – were left handers!

“I think I can say that technically I have improved, I am more stable overall, more stable mentally, more stable at important moments”, sighed Darko Jorgic. “True left handers are my nightmare; in the future I will practise just against left handers and hope that this nightmare finishes!”

Defeat against left handers but en route to qualification in Austria he beat Brazil’s Gustavo Tsuboi, in Germany Korea Republic’s Cho Daeseong and in Hungary Denmark’s Anders Lind; by any stretch of the imagination they are most creditable left handers. Perhaps the nightmare is just a temporary bad dream.

Coaches

Five months of outstanding success, five months of progress; a number that is most relevant in his career.

“I was five years old in kindergarten when I started to play with the son of a coach; he invited to come to practise, have some fun and to run a little”, reminisced Darko Jorgic. “After a few weeks the coach asked if I wanted to play a little more; so from that date to this I have been playing table tennis!”

The boy in question was Natan, the coach and father Joze Urh.

“I have had three coaches, it’s a family”, explained Darko Jorgic. “Joze Urh and his wife Andreja Ojstersek Urh, her sister Vesna Ojstersek; all three are professional coaches. Andreja is my coach in the national team, Vesna is the national coach for girls; Jose comes to Germany to help Slovenian players.”

It is the support, advice and knowledge provided by that family which has enabled Darko Jorgic to avoid the many pitfalls and steer a clear path to become an increasingly potent force at senior level. He has been and still is in safe hands.

“Andreja now looks after Darko at tournaments”, explained Jose Urh. “She’s my wife; she is one of the very best coaches when it comes to tactics.”

It was a very young age to start but it is where Darko Jorgic differs from many others; a quite considerable number of players who began playing at his age excelled in early and pre-teenage years but did not enjoy success in post cadet days. There are of course notable exceptions but since cadet events were first staged at the European Youth Championships in 1966 in Szombathely, a very high percentage of players who gained the highest honours

in that age group, never advanced to a higher level.

One ponders the reasons. Did they start too early? Did success come too easily too soon? Did coaches want to bathe in reflected glory? Could they win on talent alone? At junior and cadet level you can arguably win if you possess outstanding natural skill but to succeed at senior level, you must add downright hard work to the equation.



Darko Jorgic beats Sharath Kamal Achanta, Slovenia bound for Tokyo

Teenage success

Darko Jorgic enjoyed teenage success; success gained through dint of effort. He was never the so-called “boy wonder” who extolled flashes of brilliance that left those in the tiered seating open mouthed in adulation. Perhaps that fact put him in good stead as he progressed to senior level; he knew from a very young age that if he wanted to achieve a place on the podium, he had to work hard, downright hard.

At the European Youth Championships he enjoyed success, creditable results, better than most but not breathtaking.

In 2013 in Ostrava, he clinched cadet boys’ team silver alongside Aljaz Smaljcelj, Erik Paulin and Tilen Cvetko, before securing the same colour medal in the cadet boys’ doubles in partnership with Germany’s Nils Hohmeier. Later in 2015 he partnered current teammate Deni Kozul to junior boys’ doubles gold in Bratislava, before in 2016 in Zagreb adding to the medal count. He secured junior mixed doubles bronze with compatriot Tamara Pavcnik, prior to later in the tournament gaining the same colour in the junior boys’ singles.

“The European Youth Championship in Zagreb was the only time I won a singles medal at the tournament; I had many chances in the past but I never reached the goal what I wanted”, recalled Darko Jorgic. “In Zagreb I was one of the favourites to win but my head in semi-final against Andreas Levenko went some-

where out of the window and I lost 4-0.”

Bronze in Zagreb, the success coming one year after at the 2015 Europe Youth Top 10 in Buzau he had finished in second place behind Germany’s Denis Klein.

“At this Youth Top 10 in Buzau I played many matches, all against strong players, I was fighting in all the matches, losing some matches, winning others”, reflected Darko Jorgic. “The last match was vital, if I won I finished second, if I lost, it was fifth place; I won.”

Top spot

Second place in Buzau; it was thanks to success in that vital match against Can Akkuzu. However, in teenage days Darko Jorgic was no stranger to first position.

“On the ITTF World Junior Circuit I won in Slovenia, Egypt, Hungary, Italy, Qatar and Serbia; in addition I was the runner up in the Czech Republic”, explained Darko Jorgic. “I can safely say that the wins were important for me because at this time in my career I was fighting to gain the number one spot on the junior world rankings.”

He achieved the goal; in May and June 2016, he topped the order.

Podium places, it was similar at the European Under 21 Championships, he reached the men’s singles semi-finals in 2017 in Sochi and the following year in Minsk, before in 2019 in Gondomar emerging the men’s doubles winner in harness with Peter Hribar.

“In Sochi, the first year of the tournament, I lost in the semi-final against the winner Tomislav Pucar”, explained Darko Jorgic. “We played one of the best matches, I had a lot of chances to win this match but unfortunately I lost. The following year in Minsk I was fighting against players of my generation and I didn’t show my best performance. In the end it was important to win the medal and to be a member of best four players.”

Progress to the later rounds, every success was a step across the bridge to the senior shore for the young man who started his club career with NTK Hrastnik in Slovenia and currently represents 1.FC Saarbrücken – Tischtennis in the powerful German Bundesliga. In the 2019-2020 season, he lined up alongside Patrick Franziska, Shang Kun and Tomas Polansky.

Joze Urh is present most of the time in Saarbrücken where he can monitor Slovenian progress. The team coach is Slobodan Grujic who has a clear understanding of the problems a player encounters after junior days. He won the junior boys’ singles title at the 1991 European Youth Championships in Granada.

Backhand

Worthy advisers; all have allowed Darko Jorgic to develop his style of play. Make no mistake the forehand is most effective but the major strength is the backhand; it is somewhat a style that is witnessing a resurgence.

In the 1960s we watched the mighty backhands of players from what was then the Soviet Union, notably Stanislav Gomozkov; in more recent times but technically different in execution, was that not the major asset of China's Zhang Jike?

Now we see the stroke a major strength for Brazil's Hugo Calderano and does not Darko Jorgic follow recent Slovenian tradition? For the best part of this century, the nation's leading light, Bojan Tokic, now 39 years old, is lethal from the backhand.

"When I was first year junior I started to practise backhand and to improve my skills from that side", explained Darko Jorgic. "I would say it is both natural and also coached."

Whatever, one fact is certain; that backhand is causing celebrated names a host of problems. It is one of many factors that is taking the Slovenian to new heights; once an aspiring cadet, then a promising junior, now Darko Jorgic has every right to claim the most celebrated status of all, a player of true world class.

Long term plan

by Andreja Ojstersek Urh

Darko was good as a cadet but our target was that within a period of 15 to 20 months he should be at the same level as our best player, Bojan Tokic. We believed he had the ability; the task was to establish the right path and set a long term plan.

We made changes to our youth programme; in 2017 at the European Team Championships in Luxembourg, it showed our policy was working. We won bronze with Bojan Tokic being supported by two young players, Darko in his first year out of juniors, Deni Kozul just one year older.

One year later in 2018 we arranged for Darko to join Saarbrücken; they have a very good group of players. Everyday there is training, there is a good feeling in the club, everything is right and of course there are tough matches in the Bundesliga

The results this year show we are on the right track. In Slovenia, we have only some 800 registered players, we are only a small association and we have qualified for the Olympic Games! For us that is fantastic!

A surprise but the biggest surprise of all was Darko at the Europe Top 16 Cup; everything came together, he exploded!



Often Darko Jorgic favours a backhand service



The backhand is the undoubted strength of Darko Jorgic



Well done young man, Andreja Ojstersek Urh congratulates Darko Jorgic

It was incredible because during his career so far Darko has always gone slowly, step at a time; never causing really big surprises.

The policy has been to teach him to become a good senior; you see a player who has an outstanding result and then there is a drop in fortunes, a let-down. I really don't like those sort of players.

You must always remember that table tennis

continually changes, so as a coach you must be ready to make changes; you must always be thinking three years ahead. It has been our policy with Darko.

A major goal is for him is to reach the top ten on the world rankings. He has become more secure in his play, more mature, more confident; we believe he can do it.

Most importantly, now he believes!



Watershed weeks

2019 ITTF World Tour Platinum, bet-at-home.com Austrian Open

Linz, Tue 12th – Sun 17th Nov

Qualification

Round One: bye

Round Two: beat Yang Heng-Wei (Chinese Taipei) 11-5, 11-8, 11-8, 11-6

Round Three: beat Mihai Bobocica (Italy) 9-11, 11-7, 11-5, 11-5, 11-6

Round Four: beat Gustavo Tsuboi (Brazil) 8-11, 11-8, 11-9, 8-11, 11-4, 2-11, 11-7

Main Draw

Round One: beat Jang Woojin (Korea Republic) 11-5, 9-11, 8-11, 11-9, 14-12, 15-13

Round Two: lost to Fan Zhendong (China) 11-5, 11-8, 13-11, 11-6

2019 ITTF Challenge Plus, Benemax-Virgo North American Open

Markham, Wed 4th – Sun 8th Dec

Main Draw

Round One: beat Gavin Rumgay (Scotland) 11-3, 11-1, 11-5, 11-4

Round Two: beat Tamas Lakatos (Hungary) 11-6, 11-9, 11-5, 11-7

Round Three: beat Jules Rolland (France) 11-4, 11-5, 11-7, 11-6

Quarter-Final: beat Eugene Wang (Canada) 11-6, 5-11, 3-11, 11-7, 14-12, 11-9

Semi-Final: lost to Xiang Peng (China) 11-8, 11-8, 2-11, 11-7, 10-12, 11-5

2020 ITTF World Team Qualification Tournament

Gondomar, Wed 22nd – Sun 26th Jan

Round One: bye

Round Two: Slovenia 3-1 Iran

Doubles: partnering Deni Kozul beat Nima Alamian / Hamidreza Taherkhani 10-12, 11-4, 8-11, 11-9, 11-8

Singles: beat Nima Alamian 11-6, 9-11, 11-9, 11-4

Round Three: Slovenia 3-1 India

Singles: beat Sathiyam Gnanasekaran 11-9, 12-10, 11-3

Singles: beat Sharath Kamal Achanta 10-12, 11-7, 12-10, 11-8

2020 ITTF World Tour Platinum, German Open

Magdeburg, Tue 28th Jan – Sun 2nd Feb

Qualification

Round One: beat Cho Daeseong (Korea Republic) 6-11, 11-5, 11-4, 11-7, 13-11

Round Two: beat Lubomir Pistej (Slovakia) 7-11, 11-6, 5-11, 11-9, 13-11, 8-11, 11-8

Round Three: beat Anton Källberg (Sweden) 8-11, 11-6, 5-11, 7-11, 11-6, 11-4, 12-10

Main Draw

Round One: lost to Jun Mizutani (Japan) 11-9, 11-8, 13-11, 11-9

CCB 2020 Europe Top 16 Cup

Montreux, Sat 8th – Sun 9th Feb

Main Draw

Round One: beat Vladimir Samsonov (Belarus) 8-11, 11-4, 11-9, 11-7, 12-10

Quarter-Final: beat Wang Yang (Slovakia) 11-7, 11-8, 12-10, 6-11, 22-20

Semi-Final: beat Tomislav Pucar (Croatia) 4-11, 11-1, 13-11, 15-13, 11-8

Final: lost to Timo Boll (Germany) 8-11, 12-10, 11-5, 11-7, 11-9

2020 ITTF World Tour, Hungarian Open

Budapest, Tue 18th – Sun 23rd Feb

Qualification

Round One: beat Yang Heng-Wei (Chinese Taipei) 11-8, 11-8, 11-5, 11-7

Round Two: beat Anders Lind (Denmark) 7-11, 11-4, 12-14, 11-3, 13-11, 11-3

Round Three: beat Adam Szudi (Hungary) 10-12, 11-6, 11-7, 10-12, 11-3, 11-8

Main Draw

Round One: lost to Kristian Karlsson (Sweden) 13-15, 13-11, 9-11, 11-8, 11-1, 11-9

2020 ITTF World Tour Platinum, Qatar Open

Doha, Tue 3rd – Sun 8th Mar

Qualification

Round One: beat Zhou Qihao (China) 14-12, 7-11, 11-5, 4-11, 11-7, 11-4

Round Two: lost to Yukiya Uda (Japan) 11-7, 8-11, 11-8, 5-11, 9-11, 11-8, 11-9

CAN SHE BEAT RUTH ?

Miss T. Pritzi, finalist in World's Championships at Baden last year. She and Ruth Aarons were disqualified for stonewall play after 1 hour 45 minutes.

Score was 1-1, and the Austrian girl was leading 19-16 in the third game.



The question posed before the 1938 World Championships in London

Mind over matter, persistence personified

Endless patience, unlimited willpower, boundless determination plus no shortage of ability; those are very much major factors that combine to produce a successful defensive player. None possessed those attributes more than one of the very few who succeeded at international level both before and after World War Two.

Early in 2020 we marked one hundred years since the birth of Austria's Gertrude Pritzi, always known as Trude. Born on Tuesday 20th January 1920, her career began at the Badner AC Table Tennis Club, before in 1936 moving to Post SV Wien and in 1945 to Austria Wien. Most significantly, commencing in 1936 in Prague, concluding in 1955 in Utrecht, she played in 13 consecutive World Championships.

A certain charisma, smiling, a kindly nature; that was away from the table.

Hand her the precious racket and to some extent the persona changed. Noted for her movement, fleet of foot and well balanced, the long backspin strokes, whether near the table or at distance, typified her technical skills. All were major features of her play but it was her powers of concentration, her anticipation that made her one of the most formidable players of her era.

Always upholding the highest principles of sport, perhaps she wasn't the most stylish player who ever lived but for mental toughness, it is difficult to name better; few became embroiled in more matches when the "time limit" rule was invoked than Trude Pritzi. Perhaps unwarranted she gained the name "queen of the push"; it was as though she was not mentally attuned to attacking endeavours.

It is reputed that even the great Victor Barna was unable to teach the young lady

with long arms and legs the skills of a forehand drive. "I probably used the wrong posture, the wrong body balance, the wrong grip or whatever", is the comment attributed to Trude Pritzi.

Teenage debut

Dedicated, Trude Pritzi made her World Championships debut in 1936 in Prague when only 16 years old; the performance rather more satisfactory than dazzling. Fourth place in the women's team event, defeat in the women's singles last 32 was her lot; she did not compete in the women's doubles nor mixed doubles.

One year later, in Baden, it was the same women's team outcome but very different in the women's singles; she reached the final. She beat a young Romanian named Angelica Adelstein, better known under her married name of Angelica Rozeanu; commencing in 1950 in Budapest she won the women's singles title at the World Championships on six consecutive occasions. Next Trude Pritzi accounted for Czechoslovakia's Marie Kettnerova, the winner on consecutive occasions in 1933 in Paris and 1935 in London, before ending the hopes of Germany's Hilde Bussmann to reach the final. Ruth Aarons of the United States awaited.

A dour affair, both players were disqualified; neither prepared to execute an attacking stroke. The title was declared vacant; it was not until 64 years later that the decision was rescinded; in 2001 the International Table Tennis Federation declared the players joint champions. Neither lived to hear the news; only 48 years old Trude Pritzi passed away on Thursday 28th October 1968; Ruth Aarons five days before her 62nd birthday on Friday 6th June 1980.

Following the contest, the International Table Tennis Federation decided the net should be lowered from six and three quarter inches to six inches and a time limit of 20 minutes be imposed on each game. In addition a ban was placed on finger spin services.

Different story

A bitter experience in Baden, one year later in north London, in the Wembley arena it was a different story.

She secured women's team bronze, partnering Zita Lemo and with compatriot Alfred Liebster, the same colour mixed doubles medal. However, in the women's singles it was gold. In the opening round she beat Marie Kettnerova before ousting England's Lillian Hutchings, Clara Waldworth from Wales and Margaret Osborne also from England to reserve her place in the semi-finals.

The good form continued, just as in the

opening round she ended the hopes of Czechoslovakia she did the same to claim the title. In the penultimate round she accounted for Vera Votrubcova prior to securing the title at the final expense of Vlasta Depetrisova.

Success and resounding success; the title secured without the loss of a single game and strangely by overcoming players from only two countries, England and Wales being part of Great Britain.

Greater concerns

A major sporting achievement; but there were much greater concerns, the very future of the country was at stake.

On Friday 11th March Kurt von Schuschnigg, the Austrian Chancellor was bullied into resigning, as members of his country's Nazi party gained cabinet positions. One day later, German troops marched into Austria, Kurt von Schuschnigg was imprisoned. On Sunday 13th March, Adolf Hitler proclaimed Anschluss; Austria was annexed and until the end of World War Two was a federal state of Germany, the Third Reich. In 1945 Kurt von Schuschnigg was released from prison.

Thus at the 1939 World Championships in Cairo, Trude Pritzi represented Germany, she was listed as the country's leading player, thus gaining the distinction of having achieved the top ranked position in two countries without moving home.

More pertinently she departed with the full gambit of medals.

In the women's team and women's doubles events, it was gold partnering Hilde Bussmann. In the team final they recorded a three-nil win against Czechoslovakia; Trude Pritzi beat Marie Kettnerova, Hilde Bussmann accounted for Vera Votrubcova, before the pair allied to secure the doubles.

Later, in the women's doubles, after recording a semi-final success against Vera Votrubcova and Vlasta Depetrisova, the duo combined to overcome the Romanian combination of Angelica Adelstein and Sari Kolosvary to claim gold.

Titles for Trude Pritzi and Hilde Bussmann; other than for the men's doubles success gained by Steffen Fetzner and Jörg Roskopf in 1989 in Dortmund, it remains to this day the only occasion when Germany has struck gold at a World Championships.

Gold in women's team and women's doubles; in the mixed doubles it was bronze in partnership with the host nation's Mansour Helmy, the pair experiencing a semi-final defeat at the hands of Bohumil Vana and Vera Votrubcova.



The 1951 English Open: Sheila Smith (England), Sharon Koahnke (United States), Rosalind Rowe (England), Trude Pritzi (Austria), Peggy Franks (England), Signhild Tegner (Sweden), Linda Wertl (Austria), Pamela Mortimer (England)



The gold medal won by Trude Pritzi at the 1938 World Championships in London

Soon after in the women's singles, in her third consecutive final, the colour was silver. After accounting for Egypt's Lina Costantinidis, followed by success against Marie Kettnerova, she was beaten in the final by Vlasta Depetrisova; she experienced a full distance defeat having been ahead two games to one and 19-18 in the fourth. She was that close to a successful title defence.

Return to Austrian colours

An enforced break owing to hostilities, in 1947 the World Championships returned, Paris being the destination. Earning her living as a postal worker, once again Trude Pritzi was in action, once again in

Austrian colours and, as in pre-war years, once again enjoying success.

She emerged a women's singles bronze medallist, losing at the semi-final stage to England's Elizabeth Blackburn, having earlier secured women's doubles gold at the expense of the United States. Partnering Hungary's Gizi Farkas, at the semi-final stage they accounted for Leah Thail and Davida Hawthorn, before claiming the title by overcoming Mae Clouther and Reba Monness.

Success in Paris, it was to prove her last World Championships title but further medals did accrue. In 1949 in Stockholm, she reached the semi-final stage of the



Trude Pritzi at the 1937 World Championships in Baden bei Wien



The 1937 final, Ruth Aarons versus Trude Pritzi



Trude Pritzi with Richard Bergmann and Bohumil Vana



The racket used by Trude Pritzi in 1947



Trude Pritzi in 1943

women's singles event, a feat she emulated two years later on home soil in Vienna where, in addition, she claimed women's team silver.

On Swedish soil Gizi Farkas ended progress, a contest that for those present lived long in the memory. It was a battle, a war of attrition. Best of five games, Trude Pritzi won the first 21-12, the second 21-13; simply the Hungarian could not penetrate the Austrian's defensive abilities. A total change of tactics, attacking strokes minimal, just push the ball back over the net. In the next three games the "time limit" rule decided the outcome.

High tension, Gizi Farkas won the third 8-1; in the fourth when the clock chimed "time" matters were level at 3-all. One point to decide, one point away from being in the final; it didn't happen, the point went in favour of the Hungarian. It was parity. In the deciding fifth game, when the 20 minutes had been played, Gizi Farkas led 3-0; each point on average almost seven minutes!

A place in the final hard earned, Gizi Farkas beat Czechoslovakia's Kveta Hruskova to win the title for a third consecutive time.



The caption explains, Trude Pritzi the 1938 world champion



Trude Pritzi in 1968

Similar scenario

Beaten in a contest that involved the "time limit" rule, after claiming women's team silver alongside Linda Werthl and Trude Wutzl, it was the same in 1951 in Vienna. Once again in the penultimate round she lost to the champion elect, she suffered against Angelica Rozeanu each game lasting 20 minutes. The first went in favour of the Romanian 17-14, the second 14-13, the third 5-4; the record reads three straight games but the contest was rather closer than the overall outcome indicated.

Silver and bronze for her efforts in Vienna, one year later in 1952 in Bombay the cupboard was bare; disappointed but resolve undiminished, in 1953 in Bucharest she won the last of her 14 World Championships medals; third place in the women's team event alongside Friederike Lauber and Linde Werthl.

It was to prove her penultimate appearance at a World Championships; the following year in Utrecht was her swansong. However, she was not lost to the sport of table tennis; from 1950 in the Heitzmann Hall in Vienna, she organised a room where she could teach table tennis.

Four gold, three silver and seven bronze; a career during which owing to hostilities in Europe there was six years with no international play, one wonders if had there been no such interruption just what the record of Trude Pritzi might have read. In those years, in her early twenties she was surely in the prime of her life, could the World Championships medal numbers have been doubled?

One of the outstanding careers of sport, Trude Pritzi was inducted into the International Table Tennis Federation's Hall of Fame in 2011 and the European Table Tennis Union's Hall of Fame in 2015.

World Championships - Medals

1937 Baden	WS: Winner		
1938 Wembley	WS: Winner	XD: Semi-Final (Alfred Liebster)	WT: Third Place (Zita Lemo)
1939 Cairo	WS: Runner Up	WD: Winner (Hilde Bussmann)	XD: Semi-Final (Mansour Helmy)
		WT: Winner (Hilde Bussman)	
1947 Paris	WS: Semi-Final	WD: Winner (Gizi Farkas)	
1949 Stockholm	WS: Semi-Final		
1951 Vienna	WS: Semi-Final	WT: Runner Up (Linde Werthl, Trude Wutzl)	
1953 Bucharest	WT: Third Place (Friederike Lauber, Linde Werthl)		

International Open Tournament Titles

Austria	WS: 1935, 1937, 1949, 1951 WD: 1935 (Corinne Migneco), 1947 (Gizi Farkas), 1949 (Reba Mouness), 1951 (Linde Werthl) XD: 1953 (Vilim Harangozo)
Belgium	WS: 1950 WD: 1951 Belgium (Linde Werthl)
Czechoslovakia	WS: 1938, 1946, 1947, 1948, 1949 WD: 1937 (Vera Votrubcova), 1947 (Miartusova), XD: 1947 (Otto Eckl), 1948 (Otto Eckl)
England	WS: 1951
Germany	WS: 1937, 1938, 1939 WD: 1935 (Hilde Busmann)
Hungary:	WD: 1947 (Gizi Farkas)
Ireland	WS: 1949
Switzerland	WS: 1950, 1956 WD: 1950 (Peter) XD: 1950 (Meyer deStadelhofen)
Wales	WS: 1949
Yugoslavia	WS: 1950 XD: 1953 (Vilim Harangozo)

National Titles – Austria

1938	Vienna	WS		
1946	Vienna	WS	WD (Otto Graszl)	XD (Otto Eckl)
1947	Vienna	WS	WD (Otto Graszl)	XD (Otto Eckl)
1948	Innsbruck	WS	WD (Otto Graszl)	XD (Otto Eckl)
1949	Graz	WS		XD (Henry Bednar)
1951	Salzburg	WS		XD (Otto Eckl)
1952	Vienna	WS		XD (Otto Eckl)
1953	Bregenz	WS		
1954	Klagenfurt		WD (Fritzi Lauber)	
1955	Vienna	WS	WD (Fritzi Lauber)	

National Titles – Germany

1938	Breslau	WS		
1939	Frankfurt/Main	WS		
1940	Baden (Vienna)	WS	WD (Otto Graszl)	XD (Otto Eckl)
1941	Dresden	WS	WD (Otto Graszl)	XD (Herbert Verlangen)
1942	Dresden	WS	WD (Otto Graszl)	XD (Herbert Verlangen)
1943	Breslau	WS		XD (Herbert Verlangen)
1944	Breslau	WS		XD (Herbert Verlangen)

National Team Titles – Germany

1938	WT (Representing Ostmark)
1938	WT (Representing Ostmark)
1939	WT (Representing Postsportverein Vienna)

First Recorded and Highest World Ranking: No.1 (February 1938)

Most Recent World Ranking: No.14 (November 1955).

Iron man with heart of gold

Players who are extremely fit, there have been many over the years, no shortage from east to west, north to south; on numerous occasions China, Japan and in particular the Korean Peninsula have provided those of high athletic ability, dynamic, exciting to watch.

The fittest of all, looking back over the decades, the supreme athlete does not come from any of the sport's most celebrated gold medal winning nations; he hails from a country where the prize is simply to be able to compete in a continental or world title tournament.

No-one compares with Mario Genovese, the leading player for some 30 years from the small Mediterranean island of Malta.

Incredibly, the now 58-year-old has completed over 50 Half Marathons; some 30 Marathons, 22 Triathlons, five Iron Man events, two Diamond Man competitions plus on three occasions a Quadrathlon Trek with a difference, a venture aptly labelled "Sweating for Charity".

Impressive but even more impressive is when the source of inspiration is considered. In 1991 Mario Genovese became aware that the Dar Tal Providenza, a Special Care Home in the village of Siggiewi was desperately in need of funds. The establishment is located in the south of the island; it is an institution for severely handicapped children and those abandoned by their parents.

"I asked if I could help but was told that to raise money I would have to do something next to impossible, being that the global recession was hitting hard due to the effects of the Gulf War", reflected Mario Genovese. "So, I said I would try, I would try to do something of an impossible feat!"

Iron Man, perhaps Superman or Super Mario would be a better description. He completed a very special Multi Trek event.

"This was a cross trek that consisted of 11 to 13 changes between swimming, kayaking, cycling and running", explained Mario Genovese. "The difference was it was completed in excruciating temperatures in August, approximately 42 degrees. It included very rough terrain and open seas, in addition I had to climb with bicycle on my shoulder up the Victoria lines cliff face from Bahar ic Caghaq to Naxxar."

Started in Gozo

The quest started in Gozo, a small island situated off the northwest coast of Malta; by ferry a travelling time of some 30 minutes, for Mario Genovese no such luxury.



Mario Genovese at the Volkswagen 2005 World Championships in Shanghai

Most of the time off road, he spent three days in Gozo. He prepared with a team of helpers, running and cycling, in addition to swimming and kayaking; the kayak being the mode of transport back to the main island.

On returning to Malta, he continued the four disciplines, running between Golden Bay and the rugged terrain of Lahrax Mellieha, swimming around the entire length and breadth of the splendidly situated St. Paul's Bay, before eventually reaching journey's end.

"The long run for the last part seemed never ending", smiled Mario Genovese. "My last event started at 5.15 am in the morning from Marsalforn in the north of Gozo and finished in St Venera at 11.15 pm. It was where the Malta volleyball marathon was being held, there were hundreds of supporters cheering!"

Incredibly, Mario Genovese completed the same exacting mission in both 1992 and 1993, always increasing the difficulty of the challenge every year; he set himself a target to reach US\$35,000; he exceeded the goal, the total sum was over US\$50,000!

Fund raising

Furthermore, the fund raising continues to this day. At the HiTT Academy opened in 2012 in the country's capital city of Valletta, a dedicated centre with a synthetic floor and 10 tables; under the direction of Mario Genovese, a whole range of activities are staged. It is table tennis for all; many of the players now enjoying success nationally started their careers at the centre.

Most significantly, between 2017 and 2019, by compiling a wide ranging programme, a total of €5,681.38 was raised for the Malta Community Chest Fund. The extensive schedule included marathons,

promotional events and tournaments; fun games were arranged, donations encouraged and special guests invited. Most notably, the President of Malta attended.

The organisation assists children, amongst others, with particular needs. Chair of the Fund is George Vella, the current President; in 2019 he succeeded Marie Louise Coleiro Preca, the person responsible for launching the initiative as a foundation in 2015.

"My wife Alexandra enjoys doing voluntary work, we enjoy doing these types of philanthropic activities together, she's not a table tennis player but we do have a table at home; due to the coronavirus outbreak, she's been trying it out", smiled Mario Genovese. "Alexandra is always supportive of all the endeavours and always a huge source of encouragement."

Essential support from home and also from members of the centre, for whom there is an additional factor, education.

"I think also such activities have a very positive effect on our young players that are involved", stressed Mario Genovese. "Knowing they are raising funds to help others of the same age, I think it makes them understand that not everyone is so lucky to be healthy and be able to have all the basic needs, in turn the HiTT players work harder; it instills a solid altruistic character."

Global focus

Also, as a member of the Mdina Lions Club, a global organisation that supports charitable endeavours, in recent times Mario Genovese has raised funds for those in need and for special charities. Most creditably, his efforts are not just focused on the Mediterranean island.

"We recently raised some funds to help with countering the unnoticed coronavirus pandemic victims", added Mario Genovese. "In fact very recently we have helped various persons amongst whom was a desperate individual from Ghana. He was stuck without any funds in Malta; we assisted him in getting back home to his family in faraway Africa."

Additionally, Mario Genovese initiated help for the Pozega Table Tennis Club in Serbia; bereft of funds, facing closure, help was afforded by the HiTT Academy. Three years later their women's team gained promotion to the national league's first division.

"This was a huge satisfaction as I saw the club grow from strength to strength after heading for disaster", explained Mario Genovese. "We continue our collaboration with the club which operates under the name Stonotenisi Pozega HiTT."

Coaching

Helping others, it motivates Mario Genovese. It is the very essence of coaching; for him coaching, seeing young players improve, gives him the greatest level of satisfaction. Moreover, he has a thirst for knowledge, always wanting to move forward; as with triathlons or whatever, he will not stand still.

“It’s in my blood, as a coach you are always learning, you can learn from the most basic players and from any sport”, said Mario Genovese. “You see a player working hard, the player becomes the junior champion, the national champion then an international. Malta is small, the player moves to another country, gets recognised because his or her abilities are valid and plays in a national league; that for me is very rewarding.”

Furthermore, his coaching activities are not just focused on Malta; he is one of the coaches involved in the “Aim for the Stars” project, organised by the Asian Table Tennis Union under the guidance of Glenn Tepper, the initiator of the ITTF Development Programme.

“It’s a good concept, it creates a bigger base, it’s a good opportunity for me”, explained Mario Genovese. “It’s good to work with Glenn; he’s a good organiser and very forward looking. I like people with a proactive outlook.”

An innovative programme of which Mario Genovese is a vital member, likewise, he is a most appreciated contributor to another far seeing group.

“I am very proud to be part of the United Table Tennis Coaching Team, this is the brainchild of Eli Baraty, an excellent innovative coach and friend of mine from England; we have worked together a few times”, enthused Mario Genovese. “The programme also incorporates some great coaches, Julien Girard from France, Afonso Vilela and David Diniz from Portugal.”

A major aspect, with the theme involving coaches from different countries and different backgrounds, is the exchange of ideas that instantly becomes available; players learn, so do coaches. Equally the concept fits the character of Mario Genovese. He has an international outlook, the mentality is not parochial; to him the important factor is the sport of table tennis and it’s technical development.

Significantly, developing his ideas even further, Mario Genovese has instigated on-line programs, which during the coronavirus pandemic proved invaluable. All have been well received but are not just seen as needed only during the days of lockdown; they are long term projects, on-going initiatives that are highly requested by many entities and individuals alike.

In this respect Mario Genovese is also part of several of the best table tennis camps available. He has organised more than 70 international camps worldwide. He is a member of the coaching team for TT4U Camps Holland alongside Jochem de Hoop and for B75 Camps Denmark. Additionally clubs in India, Greece and Serbia are involved, as well as from further afield are the national teams of Bangladesh, Maldives, Nepal and Sri Lanka; more clubs are anticipated in the foreseeable future.



Distance no object

Marathon: Running	42.195 km (26 mi)
Triathlon: Swimming	1.5 km (0.9 mi)
Cycling	40 km (24.9 mi)
Running	10 km (6.2 mi)
Iron Man: Swimming	3.8 km (2.36 mi)
Cycling	180 km (111.8 mi)
Running	42.195 km (26 mi)
Diamond Man: Swimming	4 km (2.49 mi)
Kayaking	20 km (12.43 mi)
Cycling	230 km (143 mi)
Running	55 km (34.18 mi)
Quadrathlon Trek: Swimming	4 km (2.49 mi)
Cycling	120 km (74.57 mi)
Kayaking	20 km (12.43 mi)
Running	42.195 km (26 mi)



The Pozega team with Mario Genovese

Interchangeable Training System

Key to the whole process is Mario’s very own training initiative “Interchangeable Training System”, (an x replacing s, so as to signify change of direction) known better as ITX training, a régime devised since the start of the HiTT Academy and tested over the span of four years. The theory is founded on synchronising the power of the brain and connecting it directly to table tennis techniques, whilst mastering tempo and directional changes.

“ITX is based on the synergy between our Ideomotor system, better known as our automotive brain responses; simulating performance through fast tempo changes to simulate pressured and stressful match moments”, explained Mario Genovese. “The system brings you as close as possible to the same sensations and emotions that you would encounter during some of the most important match situations. The system also maximises training quality due to the fact that both players are constantly engaged and not having only one side being engaged.”

Detailed, the programme is based on eight levels with each level having various routines from technical to irregular situations, gradually more complex to activate. The first level is a random change of direction from backhand to forehand or vice versa, involving each player.

“The basic concept is the ability to train your response time as efficiently as possible, not only to the response of your opponent but at the demands of a third party or your coach”, continued Mario Genovese. “Thus both parties are left with an amazing state of alertness, faster recovery and stress handling.”



Giving on-line coaching lessons during lockdown

Theory into practice

Such is the principle; in November 2019 at the Anshul Garg Academy in New Delhi, Mario Genovese had the opportunity to put theory into practice. He had tested his ideas at various training camps around Europe involving players who had competed on the international stage. At the South East Asia camp, organised under the auspices of "Aim for the Stars", where he was the head coach, the opportunity was afforded to trial the scheme with players of a higher performance level.

"We had a very good hall, synthetic floor; in addition to India we had players from Bangladesh, Maldives and Sri Lanka", explained Mario Genovese. "They all responded well; the Indian players in particular were of a high level, we were able to use level six practices. Players enjoyed the exercises immensely; they found that after practising regularly it improved their recovery time and their ability to anticipate. Brain alertness was increased, motivation remained very high."

Paying attention to the mental aspect of sport; it is part of his background. In addition to being accomplished in the sport of squash, as well as a member of the national championships winning yachting team in three consecutive years commencing in 1989, he is a black belt third degree in Hsing I-Chuan, a martial art similar to Tai-Chai.

"It means, mind, body, spirit, boxing", explained Mario Genovese. "It's a big asset, it helps mentally for table tennis and for endurance events; you must have determination, table tennis is a very demanding sport. To this day I still like martial arts".

Starting point

Nowadays a high level respected international coach but like all others, life in the sport started as a player. Born in Valletta, the career began at the Salesians Youth Centre in Sliema when 11 years old.

"I used to play at home with my father on the kitchen table; Salesians was very much a social centre", reminisced Mario Genovese. "I played and I felt fine, one of the brothers at the centre helped me, he pushed me, he guided me, I stayed for longer hours than everyone else; in fact sometimes I was still there until 1.00 am in the morning. The brother finally decided it was time for me to move to a better club."

Highly motivated, in 1979 that desire increased even more; he competed in his first European Youth Championships and later attended a European training camp at the renowned Falkenberg club in Sweden, the home of Stellan Bengtsson, crowned world champion in 1971.

"I returned to Malta, I couldn't sit still, I wanted to venture abroad", explained Mario Genovese. "With very little money, I hitchhiked my way to Norway; I arrived wearing summer Malta clothing, it was freezing; to add salt to the wound on the Naples train I had my bag stolen. The only thing I had was my racket! But that was my ticket!"

During the same year, he competed in his first World Championships in Pyongyang.

"Undoubtedly, Pyongyang made a very big impression; the high level of discipline struck me, my eyes were wide open", recalled Mario Genovese. "Malta had excellent relations with North Korea; we were invited to practise with the second team but it didn't happen, their level was far too high."

It was for the aspiring 17-year-old an experience never to be forgotten, one which is as strong in his memory today as now over four decades ago.

"We visited training camps, the approach was biometric, very old school, one coach, one player, I'd never seen anything like it; they gave me a small present which I still treasure to this very day, a box of very high quality celluloid table tennis balls, they were very good, a very good bounce", added Mario Genovese. "Also, at the World Championships, I was pleased how I played, I won three of my matches; I expected to lose them all, that gave me even more motivation!"



Coaching at St Nicholas College in Dingli



Mario Genovese with Gabriel and Isaac Gtixti, the respective under 21 men's singles winner and runner up at the recent national championships

Professional player

Brimful of enthusiasm, Mario Genovese returned home, before in 1980 venturing to play at the Fokus BTK Club in Norway. He stayed for one month prior to travelling to Sweden where he played at Jarna BTK. A busy schedule, the year 1981 was even busier. He returned to Sweden; in addition he spent time in London practising and playing for Stiga Deptford Rams as well as at Larkhall and St. Brides. Moreover, he spent two and a half months training in Japan.

A busy time, the year 1982 was little different but proved pivotal.

"I went back to Sweden against my father's wishes, being the only son; I was practising eight to ten hours a day, I played in a tournament that also included Danes and Swedes, I won the men's singles", added Mario Genovese. "A Danish coach saw me play and asked me if I could get to Copenhagen to meet up with a manager friend of his; I had no money, I hitched a lift and was dropped off some 20 kilometres from Copenhagen. In half a metre of snow on the highway I struggled to get a lift with no success, finally a police car stopped and gave me a ride to the Maltese Embassy in Copenhagen!"

The manager in question was Ole Rasmussen from BTK 61 Roskilde; he very much took the young Mario under his wing.

"He became like my second father, I owe him so much gratitude, he guided me; I practised hard day and night and proved myself with some good wins in Danish and Swedish competitions, winning tournaments. In early November I was offered a proper contract as a professional player", explained Mario Genovese. "It was a big change; there was practice happening two to three times a day and I practised with the best."

Faith rewarded

Moreover, the faith entrusted by Ole Rasmussen was rewarded.

“I stayed there for three years; in 1982, my first year, we won the division two title”, added Mario Genovese. “I also remember travelling every Wednesday afternoon from Roskilde to Lund; including a ferry crossing, I made some four transport changes in order to practise with some very good Swedish players. The travelling time was six hours, just to train 90 minutes but was worth doing every week.”



Playing in the Swedish League in 1980 for BTK Jarna

Impressed by the efforts of the young man from Malta, in 1983, in addition to playing for BTK 61 Roskilde, Mario Genovese was given the opportunity to coach the Sjaellands junior team, which comprised some of Denmark’s best players.

“I was just 21 years old; there was a language problem as I didn’t speak Danish”, continued Mario Genovese. “It was only a small barrier. Everything worked out well using body language, facial expressions and very little Danish; that became the first introduction to coaching.”

Most worthwhile visits to Europe; the result Mario Genovese became firmly established as Malta’s leading player. He participated in international events throughout Europe and beyond, very much making his presence felt. Notably, he played in the Small Nations Games in Luxembourg in 1995 losing only one match. Also he competed in the Mediterranean Top 12 and made no less than 20 appearances in the World Championships.

“Probably my best individual performance at a World Championships was in 1985 in Gothenburg; because it was in Sweden it was like playing at home”, recalled Mario Genovese. “It was against Yugoslavia’s Stefan Kovac, a very aggressive player and ranked two in his country at the time. He was within the best 100 on the world rankings; because I came from a small country the whole crowd was supporting me. I led two games to nil and I was 10-5 up in the third, remember in those days games were to 21 points, before losing in five games. I lost but I played well, in the team event I had a more than a 60 per

cent winning average.”

Later at the Mediterranean Top 12 staged in Malta in 1992, again Mario Genovese came so near yet so far.

“I led two games to nil in my opening match against Olivier Marmurek of France before losing 22-20 in the fifth. At the time he was number two in France and the top seed at the tournament, it was one of my best matches”, recalled Mario Genovese. “I think it did a great deal of good for table tennis; in Malta people kept reflecting on this match as I was playing on home soil. Marmurek went on to win the event, he beat Massimo Costantini in the final.”

Widely travelled but throughout his career one fact remained constant; always Mario Genovese returned for the national championships; an event where he is a million miles ahead of his contemporaries. Encountering different generations from the likes of witty pimple rubber players to the faster players of today, he has won the men’s singles title on a staggering 21 occasions; the most recent being in 2012. In addition, he has 18 men’s doubles, 17 mixed doubles and 19 men’s team titles to his credit.

Now that is 75 titles! It has earned him a place in the Guinness Book of Records.



Mario Genovese with daughters Sascha and Therese alongside wife Alexandra

Family

Nationally and internationally, the performances underline the quality of Mario Genovese, who has to balance his time between table tennis and business interests, notably he is the owner of a fashion retail company in Malta.

A family man and the family tradition continues; elder daughter Therese, 24 years old, during the 2018-2019 season played for Sparvågen BTK in Sweden, the home of living legend, Mikael Appelgren. She is completing her business degree in Växjö Lineus University. Younger daughter Sascha, 21 years old, played for Orosó TTM in Spain, she is finishing a degree in Psychology at the University of Malta; her interest is sports psychology.

Following in their father’s footsteps, no doubt; a marathon, a triathlon, a quad-rathlon? Maybe discretion will prove the better part of valour?

Ever reliable, Matilda Ekholm announces retirement

Seven times the winner of the women's singles title at the national championships, three times the runner up; from 2007 to 2020 that is the record of Sweden's Matilda Ekholm. Most pertinently, the achievement sums up the character and value of the now 38 year old, who earlier this year announced her retirement.

The results underline consistency and reliability; those are the hallmarks of a player on whom you can always place your trust, a player at the heart of the team, one to give a star name support, one to give a younger player a sense of security.

Star name; Matilda Ekholm has just claim to that status herself. She was born in Vikingstad. Arguably she is the most celebrated person to emerge from the small town in southern central Sweden, a population of just over 2,000 inhabitants; significantly, it is where when only seven years old she first played table tennis.



Matilda Ekholm at the 2019 European Team Championships

“I think the biggest difference between a top 50 player and a top 200 player is how concentrated they actually are in training”

There were only two sports you could play there with a coach so I did both, they were table tennis and soccer; I turned out to be better at table tennis so that became my priority when I had to choose”, explained Matilda Ekholm. “My brother, David, also played table tennis, we were both inspired by the success of the Swedish players of the late 80s era.”

Gradually a most distinctive style of play was developed; one totally suited to Matilda Ekholm. Controlled top spin play from both backhand and forehand was the method. The technique proved successful; at the Swedish Youth Championships, in 1997, she reached her first final at a national tournament, she concluded play the runner up in the cadet girls' singles event, losing to Nina Vakkila.

“It's 100 per cent natural for me; it always felt more natural for me to hit the ball at a later stage and also I was never fast enough to keep up with the tempo closer to the table, so I had to find my own solution”, explained Matilda Ekholm. “My style was also formed by always practising with boys during my teenage years and early 2000s. My game is uncomfortable for many women as they aren't used to that style.”

Practising against male counterparts reaped dividends. At the 2000 Swedish Youth Championships she won her first title, she struck gold in the junior girls' singles event. One year later the under 20 crown was donned, before in 2007 she ac-

counted for Marie Olsson to reserve the top step of the women's singles podium for the first time at the National Championships.

Major wins

A first in 2007, two years earlier in 2005, on what was then known as the ITTF Pro Tour, now the ITTF World Tour, she recorded her first major win on the international scene. At the Swedish Open in Gothenburg, she beat Hong Kong's Jiang Huajun in the opening round.

“She had short pimples on the backhand and that was something I always liked to play against because those players are usually not comfortable with my spinning top spins”, recalled Matilda Ekholm. “So I tried to use that and then I think she got nervous and I had nothing to lose.”

Beating Jiang Huajun by playing to the backhand added to the measure of the win; at the time, amongst female players she was rated as having the strongest backhand in the world! Equally you can add to the status of the success by considering the results Jiang Huajun achieved against Zhang Yining, in many eyes the greatest female player of all time. In world ranking tournaments, she won four of their five meetings!

Undoubtedly, a most creditable performance and there was another. In 2012 she won the women's singles title in Rabat at the ITTF World Tour Morocco Open, overcoming Spain's Sara Ramirez in the final.

A milestone, to date Matilda Ekholm is the only player born in a Nordic country to have won an ITTF World Tour or ITTF Challenge Series women's singles title.

On Sunday 15th March in Oman, the last international tournament before the world went into lockdown; since the concept started in 1996, a total of 351 ITTF World Tour tournaments had been staged plus, commencing in 2017, no less than 37 independent Challenge Series events.

Matilda Ekholm may not lay claim to be one in a million but one in 388 is no mean achievement!



Matilda Ekholm is known for her serving skills

Major Achievements

Olympic Games

Round Three (Last 32): 2016 WS Rio de Janeiro

World Championships

Round Four (Last 16): 2015 WS Suzhou

World Team Championships

17th Place: 2018 WT Halmstad

ITTF World Tour

Winner: 2012 WS Morocco, 2017 WD India (Georgina Pota)

Runner Up: 2013 WS Croatia, 2017 WS India, 2017 WD Hungary & Czech Republic (Georgina Pota)

Semi-Final: 2010 WS Morocco, 2013 WS Spain, 2016 WS Czech Republic

ITTF Challenge Series

Winner: 2017 WD Slovenia (Georgina Pota)

Runner Up: 2018 WD Croatia (Georgina Pota)

European Championships

Runner Up: 2016 XD Budapest (Mattias Falck)

Semi-Final: 2013 WD Schwechat (Galia Dvorak), 2018 WD Alicante (Georgina Pota)

International Tournaments

Winner: 2017 WS Lausanne

National Titles

U17GS: 2000

U17GD: 1999 (Sandra Johansson)

U20WS: 2001


U20WD: 2003 (Caroline Wersall)

WS: 2007, 2009, 2011, 2012, 2017, 2018, 2020

WD: 2010, 2011 (Malin Pettersson), 2012 (Linda Bergström),

2014 (Daniela Moskovits), 2018 (Ellen Holmsten), 2020 (Christina Källberg)

XD: 2014, 2017, 2019 (Mattias Falck)



Matilda Ekholm remained unbeaten during the initial stage of the women's event at the Liebherr 2018 World Team Championships



2018 World Team Cha

Team player

The facts reflect the status Matilda Ekholm achieved; she stands alone but when standing alongside colleagues she is very much a major cog in a team, there is no hint of insularity.

Significantly, in the first stage of the women's event at the Liebherr 2018 World Team Championships in Halmstad, she remained unbeaten; the most notable wins being against Singapore, in a 3-2 defeat she accounted for both Yu Mengyu and Feng Tianwei.

"The home crowd certainly helped a lot", recalled Matilda Ekholm. "I was also in maybe my best shape ever physically; also we had great preparation before the tournament."

Undoubtedly in Halmstad, Matilda Ekholm proved herself Sweden's most valuable player; they ended the tournament in 17th spot in the women's team competition. In another discipline where the team ethic is strong, she has also more than displayed her worth; she has proved the perfect women's doubles partner for a fast attacking right hander who prefers to play close to the table.

At the European Championships in 2013 she partnered Spain's Galia Dvorak to bronze, before repeating the feat five years later in Alicante when, in harness with Hungary's Georgina Pota, the duo reserved the third step of the podium. Georgina Pota is a player with whom she has enjoyed success after success. Notably in June 2017 they reached second spot on the women's doubles world rankings, the year in which they won on the ITTF World Tour in India and at the Challenge Series tournament in Slovenia.

"Gina and I play great together because we are both good doubles players; we practise together as well as playing many matches; Gina is extremely clever and uses her wrist in ways I could only imagine", stressed Matilda Ekholm "This makes her a very strategic player; she plays the ball in the direction that is suitable for me. I'm a good doubles player because I have a good serve and as a lefty I'm comfortable receiving. The combination of our styles makes us hard to beat."

Women's doubles success at the European Championships; in 2016 in Budapest it was similar in the mixed doubles; partnering Mattias Falck, the player with whom she has won the national title three times, the duo secured silver. Just as with Galia Dvorak and Georgina Pota, her controlled top spin play makes her the architect of the combination.

"We are both good doubles players but also a good match, among other things Mattias is good at smashing and I'm good

at preparing openings to allow him to smash", explained Matilda Ekholm. "At the Europeans when we won silver we didn't lose a single game until the final."

Progress on all fronts but the improvement has been step by step, nothing meteoric; the women's world rankings underline that fact. In May 2003 she stood at no.301, in February 2005 at no.202; in March 2008 she broke the top 100 barrier, named at no.98. Nine years later in March 2017 she advanced to no.20, the highest of her career; the journey giving her a thorough understanding of what is required to climb the ladder.

"I think the biggest difference between a top 50 player and a top 200 player is how concentrated they actually are in training", explained Matilda Ekholm. "Many players practise many hours but their mind is somewhere else; you need to be focused all the time when you try to improve something, you have to know why the improvement is needed. If you have no more focus by the end of the training I think it's better to rest and get a fresh mind."

Adapting

Furthermore, in order to reach a higher level, a player must be able to adapt; the change in the composition of the ball from celluloid to plastic was not beneficial to the style of Matilda Ekholm.

"My style benefits from more spin, the plastic ball has less. Just like everyone else from the older generation, in order to keep up with the top players I had to make some adjustments", said Matilda Ekholm. "It takes a lot of training and my body is getting a lot more tired nowadays!"

Matilda Ekholm has spent hours upon hours in the training hall; from her generation in Sweden, she is the one who gained the best results but it has been a demanding experience, like many others she had to combine achieving in sport with education. Was that one major reason why the most impressive results came in later years, not mid teenage times?

"Nowadays, I think anyone who comes from a country where you have to go to school on a regular schedule, you will fall behind in terms of training hours compared to some countries that are more flexible in this matter", stressed Matilda Ekholm. "You don't have time to waste on training without focus. You need to practise with quality and a plan, accepting younger players who may have trained more,



A young Matilda with mother Ingalill

will reach a high level quicker than you. However, with patience and persistence it is possible with the right kind of support."

Thus it may well be the situation that the current crop of players wearing the blue and yellow of Sweden will secure their best results in three or more years' time.

"I think we have an interesting women's team right now; they are all young, they train really hard and they have all got the mindset you need to become top players", said Matilda Ekholm "Stina Källberg is playing better and better and she has good competition with Filippa Bergand, they are pushing each other. Also Linda Bergström is improving steadily with every year."



Matilda Ekholm (far right) when four years old, (second from left) is brother David

Just as it has been for Matilda Ekholm; the future is a gradual incline, there are no magic wands.

“They just need patience and to keep training with clear goals and intentions; we will see how far they can reach”, added Matilda Ekholm. “With that being said, table tennis is as we all know is an extremely competitive sport and there are skilled players from all over the world nowadays. I hope I can support them somehow to keep pursuing their dreams.”

Bitter disappointment

Success for Matilda Ekholm has been gained through patience but that patience has been tested to the limit. There has been bitter disappointment; events that would have ended the career of many but in the case of Matilda Ekholm strengthened her resolve.

She qualified for both the Beijing 2008 and London 2012 Olympic Games but on both occasions the entry was not endorsed by the Swedish National Olympic Committee.

“In 2008 it was hard for me because I was 26; my National Olympic Committee told me I was too old to be a future prospect”, said Matilda Ekholm. “At that time, I still felt like I was at the beginning of my career, so it was especially hard. I was really bummed out and lost both my self-esteem and confidence.”

Support was needed, help from those who believed in her; it came from her coaches Sören Ahlen and Pernilla Andersson.

“My coaches made me believe I could come back. In 2012, I was both surprised and angry as I was ranked among the best 18 of the players qualified for the Olympics and had been constantly improving since 2008”, continued Matilda Ekholm. “The support I received from my federation and the table tennis community was mind-blowing; I was even invited by the ITTF to come see the Games. Getting that support was crucial for me to continue holding my head up high.”

Eventually, at the third time of asking, the Swedish National Olympic Committee approved her entry for Rio de Janeiro; there was no player present in the Brazilian city in any discipline who deserved the place more than Matilda Ekholm, at last the privilege was bestowed

“Playing at Rio 2016 was great but maybe most of all it was proof that I had done a great job not giving up”, stressed Matilda Ekholm. “It made me feel very proud of myself.”

Winning and losing

The challenge was met and answered but certain challenges have proved beyond

her reach, as with every player there have been adversaries over the years that have caused her problems; two names stand out.

“Chen Meng, I’ve played her a few times and I think I never won more than six points in any game! She is just a perfect player”, smiled Matilda Ekholm. “There are more players who have destroyed me throughout the years but she is the first one who comes to mind. I also lost to Mima Ito when she was 12 years old which is funny now but wasn’t at the time!”

Winning and losing, it’s all part of sport but throughout her trials and tribulations, always Matilda Ekholm has displayed the utmost dignity; qualities for future generations to follow.

“I hope I can be a role model but it’s not something I think about; I try to be the best I can be as a player and as a person. Sometimes people send me messages saying they, or their kids, look up to me and that is always very humbling”, explained Matilda Ekholm. “My own biggest role models were always my parents and they still are; they taught me to be kind first and foremost, results within sports or anything else was always secondary.”

Now the curtain closes, the move is to New York to join her partner, Melinda, Swedish by birth but now an American citizen; in addition she will complete a sports science degree at Halmstad University, a flexible programme that takes into account full time work.

Without doubt, to leave the playing arena was a big wrench. “Almost each and every person in my life I have met is through table tennis, I’m so grateful to all of them”, stressed Matilda Ekholm. “This sport has given me so many opportunities to see the world and learn about other cultures. I cannot imagine what my life would have been had I not become a professional player. However, I started to feel that there are other ways for me to contribute to the sport than as a player.”

Now a different life awaits but it is a satisfied Matilda Ekholm who departs the scene.

“I think I have had a good career reaching further than I could ever have imagined when I started playing as a kid; it’s only natural that the sport is evolving and that’s not something I am against per se”, concluded Matilda Ekholm. “I have so often felt that the men’s game is more important than the women’s; in recent years this situation has become much better and for that I am happy. I hope and believe the young female players of today don’t have to feel as inferior like me and my friends did. There is still more to do in this area and I hope in the future I can contribute with something in this process. We need more education!”

There is no doubt Matilda Ekholm has a contribution to make; whatever that may be, it will be highly valued and should it involve coaching, in addition to her knowledge she has one major factor in her favour; it is that of patience, a significant feature throughout her splendid career.



Matilda Ekholm and Georgina Pota, the women’s doubles winners at the 2016 ITTF World Tour Czech Open, the runners up were Russia’s Maria Dolgikh and Polina Mikhailova



Ryan Jenkins, Pride of Wales

Selected as a cadet, then junior, followed by senior and now veteran; born on Monday 20th November 1978, he has the full house. Charles Philip Arthur George, the heir to the British throne, is the Prince of Wales; Ryan Jenkins is the Pride of Wales.

He made his debut on the international
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scene when only 13 years old at the 1992 Schools' International Championships in the Scottish city of Perth; two years later in 1994, when only 15 years of age, he gained both his first junior and first senior selection. He was named in the junior team for the European Youth Championships in Paris, as well as in the men's

outfit for the Senior Home Nations north of the border in Elgin, a tournament, like the Schools' International, that principally involves England, Ireland, Scotland and Wales.

A quite meteoric rise but then he had to wait almost a quarter of a century for his



Ryan Jenkins at the 1997 ITTF World Tour English Open



Record holder of titles at British Grand Prix tournaments

next milestone; eligible to play in the year when you celebrate your 40th birthday, at the 2018 Veteran Home Countries Six Nations, staged in Cardiff in early September, he announced his arrival in the mature age group.

Moreover, he proclaimed his arrival in style. In the 40 to 49 years age category, he joined forces with Ryan Owen, Lee Thomas and Neil Wright to gain men's team gold. Later, he partnered Ryan Owen to men's doubles success and then claimed the men's singles title in a match between two players who once were listed in top spot in their country's junior boys' rankings. He accounted for England's Andrew Wilkinson.

Male voice choirs and rugby

The thirst for success and loyalty to the principality continues as strong as ever for the not so young man born in the Rhondda, a region of South Wales known as the "Valleys". Once, a major centre for coal mining, to this day the reputation for male voice choirs and sport, especially rugby union, continues. It is from that part of the world emanates such celebrated names as Cliff Morgan, Phil Bennett, JPR Williams and the late "Merve the Swerve" alias Mervyn Davies.

Notable names, inducted into the sport's hall of fame but none can match the longevity of Ryan Jenkins; in fact when it comes to veteran rugby which starts at 35 years of age, they amend the rules! No such sanctions in table tennis; must be the sport for real men!

Sporting excellence and immense tradition, it is where the career of Ryan Jenkins began.

"I started playing when seven years old at Ystrad Rhondda Boys' and Girls' Club which was the traditional set route for play-

ers from the Welsh Valleys; I remember my first practice session well and my additional sessions with a local coach, Dave Sellick, who was a defender", recalled Ryan Jenkins. "From my early sessions I was able to learn how to play the two main styles of the game at an early age."

An introduction to the sport, as in the whole of the United Kingdom, once the spark is lit, the competitive step is the local league.

"The Aberdare League, chaired by the famous Eddie Thomas, was the next stage for myself to develop my game; there were late nights competing in places such as Merthyr, Pontypridd, Hirwaun and Treherbert against some fierce competitors", continued Ryan Jenkins. "After winning the Glamorgan men's title as a 14 year old, I

was then invited to the Welsh squad where I was coached by national team coaches Alan Griffiths, George Evans and Bob Bishop."

Good company

Clearly a teenager with great promise, the next rung on the ladder was to compete in the British League.

"I made the move to train and compete for BFL Grove where I was surrounded by talented players such as Alan Cooke, Desmond Douglas, Evgenij Brainin, Chris Oldfield, Lisa Lomas, Tong Feiming and Elena Timina to name just a few", added Ryan Jenkins. "Later there was also a stint in the British League to add to my time with BFL Grove, when I competed for Drumchapel, located in Glasgow and



Charlotte Carey gained a top 100 place on the world rankings in July 2018



Josh Stacey, bronze medallist at the Gold Coast 2018 Commonwealth Games

Ormesby in Middlesbrough.”

In good company when playing in the United Kingdom, it was the very same when he took the brave decision to venture abroad.

“At 16 years old in 1996, I moved to Denmark for two years where I met the likes of Alan Bentsen, Martin Monrad, Finn Tugwell and a young Michael Maze; the two years enhanced my standard and I enjoyed success in my first year in the Danish first league with Olstykke BTK and Esbjerg”, explained Ryan Jenkins. “Then a fantastic opportunity to join the European champions, Borussia Düsseldorf, came about where my daily training group included Jörg Rosskopf, Vladimir Samsonov, Koji Matsushita plus Danish friends Monrad and Maze.”

Just as in Denmark, Ryan Jenkins stayed two years at Borussia Düsseldorf being present from 1999 to 2001 under the guidance of Mario Amizic. Benefitting from the experience, later he played in the Swiss National League for Meyrin in Geneva and Wadenswil in Zurich, as well as in Belgium for PW Diest. Also he spent time in Sweden; he represented Tibble in Stockholm and Watra in Gothenburg.

Commonwealth tournaments

Continually improving his skills, gaining experience; the man from the Rhondda has proved himself one of the most prominent players this century at Common-



Anna Hursey, the bright hope

wealth tournaments.

At the 2004 Commonwealth Championships, staged at the Kuala Lumpur Badminton Stadium in Malaysia, he partnered Adam Robertson to men's doubles gold; the success coming after, with Adam Robertson and younger brother Stephen completing the line-up, men's team bronze had been secured.

The third step of the podium in Kuala Lumpur; it was the same when the tournament was twice staged in Glasgow. In 1997 it was his lot in the men's doubles

partnering Steve Ward. Over a decade later it was the same again in 2009 in harness with Adam Robertson, as well as in the men's team when alongside Adam Robertson and Stephen Jenkins, Stephen Gertsen completed the squad.

Notable successes but arguably the most notable was excruciating disappointment at the time but now, as the years have passed a most significant achievement.

At the 2002 Commonwealth Games in Manchester, the first time when table tennis had been included in the multi-sport quadrennial gathering; Ryan Jenkins and Adam Robertson lost to England's Andrew Baggaley and Gareth Herbert in the men's doubles final, a contest that witnessed a dramatic deciding fifth game (11-9, 11-13, 8-11, 11-9, 17-15).

“It was live on a Saturday afternoon so I knew loads of friends and family were watching back home; I remember playing the Welsh anthem in my mind thinking how much it would mean to us, as there were very few golds won by Wales at those Games”, recalled Ryan Jenkins. “It turned so quickly against us; we were unseeded so it was a great achievement when I look back.”

Record holder

So near, yet so far but Ryan Jenkins is no stranger to the top step of the podium. At Grand Prix tournaments staged in the United Kingdom, he has been crowned men's singles champion on no less than 54 occasions; it is a record that no other player can match. Additionally, in the top category, seven times he has received the award for the greatest number of titles in a season.

Furthermore, he won the men's singles event at the Senior Home Nations Cham-



Steve Eades organising the medals for the 2019 ITTF World Veteran tournament in Cardiff

pionships in both 1999 in Sheffield and 2004 at Crystal Palace, beating Scotland's Euan Walker and England's Paul Drinkhall respectively, to claim gold.

It is a tournament in which Ryan Jenkins has excelled; overall he has been six times a men's singles finalist. He had to settle for silver in 1997 in Perth losing to Bradley Billington, in 2010 in Lisburn Liam Pitchford ended aspirations, in 2014 in Basildon Darius Knight proved the nemesis. Defeats at the hands of three Englishmen, on the one other occasion, colleague Adam Robertson, ended golden hopes in 2012 in Largs.

Also domestically, commencing in 1997, he has been crowned Welsh national men's singles champion 12 times, having earlier clinched the cadet boys' singles top prize in 1993, the year in which he won the first of his four junior titles. Meanwhile in 1994, he struck under 21 men's singles gold, an event he was to win in each of the ensuing six years.

National coach

Titles abundant but nowadays the major role is that of national coach; one which he fulfils with the same enthusiasm as a player. Whatever the task, so long as it is table tennis; Ryan Jenkins is a happy man. "I love table tennis, it's in my blood; I can't get enough of it!"

It is a position he has now held for over a decade; he succeeded Alan Griffiths in 2009 following the Commonwealth Championships in Glasgow. Brother Stephen, Simon Oyler and Josh Morgan are the three coaches under his charge.

Moreover, there has been most creditable success, Anna Hursey, born in 2006, clinched gold at the 2017 European Mini Championships in Schiltigheim. Later in July 2018 she reached no.13 on the Under 15 Girls' World Rankings, standing just one

place lower in April 2020, when COVID-19 caused a halt to proceedings and lockdown.

Furthermore, when only 11 years old she was the youngest athlete on duty at the Gold Coast 2018 Commonwealth Games; a tournament in which compatriot Josh Stacey won bronze in the men's singles class 6-10 para event.

Similarly in July 2018, Charlotte Carey progressed to no.98 on the Women's World Rankings, having alongside Chloe Thomas and Megan Phillips gained bronze in the women's team event at the 2015 Commonwealth Championships in India. Furthermore, partnering England's Tin-Tin Ho and Maria Tsaptinos, she was on duty for Great Britain in January 2020 at the World Team Qualification tournament in Gondomar. Pertinently the coach selected was Ryan Jenkins.

Looking ahead, Charlotte Carey will lead Wales at the delayed Hana Bank 2020 World Team Championships in Busan; Anna Hursey and Laura Whitton will complete the line-up.

Ambitions

Coaching the priority but Ryan Jenkins still harbours playing ambitions.

"I aim to compete at the European Veteran Championships which will be held in the capital of Wales, Cardiff, in 2022. The World Veteran title is also an interest and a potential goal for the future to add to my goals of coaching at the top of the game", explained Ryan Jenkins. "I also intend to be a very active member of the Swaythling Club here in Wales supporting the many veteran events that will take place over the new few years."

The enthusiasm is as strong as ever, a fact appreciated by Steve Eades, the Swaythling Club representative for Wales.

Major Achievements

World Championships

Appearances: 12 overall, debut in 1995 in Tianjin

Commonwealth Games

2002 Manchester: silver - MD (Adam Robertson)

Commonwealth Championships

1997 Glasgow: bronze - MD (Steve Ward)
2004 Kuala Lumpur: gold - MD (Adam Robertson); bronze - MT (Stephen Jenkins, Adam Robertson)
2009 Glasgow: bronze - MD (Adam Robertson); bronze - MT (Stephen Gertsen, Stephen Jenkins, Adam Robertson)

Senior Home Nations Championships

1997 Perth: silver MS
1999 Sheffield: gold - MS
2004 Crystal Palace: gold - MS
2010 Lisburn: silver - MS
2012 Largs: silver - MS
2014 Basildon: silver - MS

British Grand Prix

Overall 54 men's singles titles, seven times most wins in a season

National Titles

MS: 1997, 1998, 1999, 2000, 2001, 2004, 2005, 2008, 2009, 2011, 2012, 2016
U21 MS: 1994, 1995, 1996, 1997, 1998, 1999, 2000
JBS: 1993, 1994, 1995, 1996
CBS: 1993

Veteran Titles

2018 Home Countries Six Nations, Cardiff: 40-49 Years - gold MT (Ryan Owen, Lee Thomas, Neil Wright); gold MS; gold MD (Ryan Owen)
2019 ITTF World Veteran Tour, Wales: 40-49 Years - gold MS; Champion of Champions - gold MS

"The passion for Welsh table tennis has always been there as a player and a head coach; in both capacities he has led the Table Tennis Association of Wales to many significant results", stressed Steve Eades. "However, I think Ryan's biggest strength is that of someone who relates to all types of table tennis players, all ages, from beginner to elite player. We in Wales are so fortunate to have this true legend within our game."

A whole list of national honours and to date, having succeeded at the 2019 ITTF World Veteran Tour tournament in Cardiff, he has never lost a men's singles match at a veteran's tournament. However, having completed the full set of representing his country in every conceivable age group; in order to achieve the same in terms of national titles, he has one missing.

He has yet to win the Welsh veteran men's singles title. Surely it's just a matter of time?



The team which presented the winning bid to host the 2021 European Veteran Championships (to be held in 2022) - Steve Eades, Ryan Jenkins, Owen Rodgers and Mike Watts



Philippe Dumonteil

the man for all seasons

An entry of 5,700 players, a long waiting list, add some 1,000 and more supporters in the guise of wives, husbands, brothers, sisters, uncles and aunts; for the man at the helm of proceedings, a prodigious task awaited.

Now add the fact that through no fault of his own the event had to be postponed, in mid-March it was the headache of all headaches for the Tournament Director, Frenchman Philippe Dumonteil. Surely no official in such a position has ever faced a dilemma of that magnitude.

The 20th World Veteran Championships scheduled for Monday 8th to Sunday 14th June could not be held; the global spread of COVID-19 had caused lockdown in France.

“In January 2020 we signed the insurance contract, including the case of a pandemic but we were waiting for the signature of the insurance company; the virus had started to appear in China but in France nobody was thinking that it would assume such big dimensions”, explained Philippe Dumonteil. “In February, the weeks were flying by and we were still waiting for the signed insurance contract.”

Nervous moments but on Saturday 14th March, the signed contract was received; on Monday 16th March, lockdown was imposed in France! There was a sigh of relief and perhaps being Bordeaux, a glass of rare vintage wine trickled smoothly down the throat?

“Inside the organising committee we started discussions about cancellation or postponement; of the 15 members, with only one exception, everyone was in favour of postponement”, continued Philippe Dumonteil. “We had not made all the

preparations and precautions for nothing!”

Soon after, major gatherings in most European countries were banned; there was simply no choice.

“We made contact with the city of Bordeaux, the hotels and all involved parties in order to find suitable dates; then we contacted the Swaythling Club International and the International Table Tennis Federation”, added Philippe Dumonteil. “The participants were worried but we needed time to solve all the problems.”

Eventually a new date was found: Monday 26th April to Sunday 2nd May 2021.

Earlier problems

A change of plan and was it a blessing in disguise for Philippe Dumonteil?

He had been advised that in Bordeaux a meeting between certain African heads of state and Emmanuel Macron, the French President, was scheduled to be held on Saturday 6th June, the day on which many would arrive for the original tournament date.

“It forced us to change all the strategies concerning the arrivals of the participants, accreditation places and time; some areas we were using became forbidden”, sighed Philippe Dumonteil. “The airport in Bordeaux would have been closed; people would have arrived in Toulouse or other cities by plane and then would have been required to travel by bus. Everything settled down; then the COVID-19 arrived!”

Simply it has been challenge after challenge, one hurdle to negotiate after another. Another was the number of participants; originally 4,000 entries was the planned

capacity, it was raised to 5,700. The logistics were tested, solutions found.

Bègles resident

Answers determined in most trying circumstances, for which the experience of Philippe Dumonteil proved extremely valuable.

Now 62 years old, born in Bègles, a suburb of Bordeaux in which he lives to this day; he became joint president of the local table tennis club in 1993. He is married with two daughters and two granddaughters. Notably, for some 40 years he was responsible for the business aspect at the Vinci group, being in charge of projects as an aeronautic engineer.

Significantly, he continues to play table tennis, having started when in his teenage years in 1970; later he represented Bègles in the Aquitaine League and became a qualified coach.

“I played a little bit of football when I was young”, explained Philippe Dumonteil. “At table tennis I have played against nearly all the players of the region; this has given me an important network, useful in the organisation of the World Veteran Championships.”

Equally, Philippe Dumonteil has made a notable contribution to table tennis in the region. In 1993 he assumed a support role for the regional technical manager, Eric Fournié, his tasks to put in place the teaching and education of the young players.

A worthy project but it is nothing compared with organising the World Veteran Championships; the tournament that in terms of numbers exceeds all others.

Triumvirate

The idea to stage the event was the brainchild of Vincent Labarbe an information technology programmer, President of the Landes Table Tennis Committee and member of the Board of Directors of the Aquitaine League. Alongside Benoit Glorieux, a research chemist and former General Secretary of the Aquitaine League, they joined forces with Philippe Dumonteil, to form the triumvirate. Unanimously, Philippe Dumonteil was voted the person responsible to sign the official documents.

“My two colleagues nominated me for at least two reasons: I would be retired in 2019”, explained Philippe Dumonteil. “In addition I have a network of colleagues and business experience.”

Undoubtedly it is on the shoulders of Philippe Dumonteil that the buck stops, on what is somewhat a journey into unexplored territories. Philippe Dumonteil has never been a Competition Manager or an Event Manager at a major international

tournament. At first sight that may appear a major disadvantage but in reality it is quite the opposite.

“The job as Event Manager of the World Veteran Championships looks like my previous job; for the World Veteran Championships there is a budget of €2,400,000, working alongside 10 members of the Management Committee”, explained Philip Dumonteil. “It is like a small company, I was working in a department of Airbus concerning aeronautic projects, involving between 30 and 40 persons; a yearly turnover of €3,000,000. Management of a project equals management of people, management of staff; this is what I did in my job. It is the same for the World Veteran Championships. So I am not retired. I have still to work for at least one year! Luckily my wife is still working also for one year!”

Retirement, a time to take things easy; in fact it would appear that life for Philip Dumonteil is busier than ever and there are no complaints.

“The chance to do something new, the World Veteran Championships has never been organised in France; I like to take risks but knowing all the parameters”, said Philip Dumonteil.

Teamwork

Taking measured risks, overcoming obstacles, also he has clearly motivated his colleagues and gained their respect.

“We have a wonderful team; all the work done until now and the work which will be done in the forthcoming months and weeks, is the result of team work”, stressed Philip Dumonteil. “Everybody has been and I am sure will be most competent and efficient; my warm thanks to all my colleagues in the local organising committee.”

A strong team is in place; most definitely we can look forward to 2021 with confidence and assurance.

“Everyone should have the greatest confidence on our efforts; everything possible is being put in place with the help of the French authorities, the French Table Tennis Federation, the Swaythling Club International and the city of Bordeaux to make sure everything is safe and secure”, stressed Philip Dumonteil. “We will follow cautiously any regulations required by the French authorities at the time of the tournament; we will do our utmost in order that the competition itself will be a success.”

Rest assured a most memorable event that is more than just a table tennis tournament awaits, one that combines competition and conviviality; Bordeaux is ready, raise your glass!



Members meet in March 2020 to discuss alternatives



Inspection visit in 2017, Philippe Dumonteil, Ebby Schöler, Diane Schöler, Claude Bergeret, Robert Geneste and Hans Westling



The mayor's reception in 2019



A meeting with the Swaythling Club International



World Table Tennis Day at home; amazing response



Enjoying the day in Barquisimeto, Venezuela

Organised under the auspices of the ITTF Foundation, on Monday 6th April, owing to the restrictions caused by COVID-19, it was World Table Tennis Day at home. Nevertheless, 171 countries and regions celebrated in some form or another; notably of that number, 31 national associations took part for the very first time.



Table Tennis United

A donation campaign, Table Tennis United was formed to help the global table tennis community with COVID-19 related issues; the campaign is set up to assist players, coaches, umpires, national associations, teams and field projects.

Support both financially and in kind is offered to meet emergency needs which include the provision of materials and products on site such as masks, disinfectants, protective suits and hygiene needs. In addition support is provided for medical treatment.

The International Table Tennis Federation is one of the ten largest sports communities in the world, overall a maximum 226 members; thus giving and helping each other is the order of the day. All members of the community are welcome to apply for support; in addition donations are most appreciated. Make no mistake; every single contribution helps the campaign #TableTennisUnited.

Notably by Saturday 1st August a total of 55 donors had contributed more than US\$254,000; no less than 29 initiatives had been supported, overall 42 applications for help had been received.



Concentration in Comoros



A splendid setting in Belihuloya, Sri Lanka



An alert opponent in Santa Cruz, Bolivia



Hopes age group players in Baucau, East Timor



Santa Cruz de la Sierra, the most populous city in Bolivia, responded



Plenty of innovation in Santa Cruz



Taking precautions in Canakkale, Turkey



Family fun in Athens, Greece

Links

<https://www.tabletennisunited.org/>

<https://www.tabletennisunited.org/who-we-support>

<https://www.tabletennisunited.org/help-now>



Agnes Simon, World and European champion

Gold medallist at both the World Championships and European Championships, following a short illness, Agnes Simon passed away on the morning of Wednesday 19th August. She was 85 years old.

Born Agnes Almasi in the Hungarian capital city of Budapest on Wednesday 21st June 1935, always known to her friends

as Agi, she has the unique distinction of representing three national associations at the very highest level.

At the World Championships, on duty for her native Hungary, alongside Zsuzsa Fantusz, Gizi Farkas and Eva Koczian, she secured women's team bronze in Bucharest in 1953, before the following



year claiming silver in London, when Ilona Kerekes replaced Zsuzsa Fantusz in the line-up.

One step higher, four years later in Stockholm, the city to which Agnes alongside her husband and coach Bela Simon had fled following the 1956 Hungarian Revolution, it was the highest step. She partnered colleague Livia Mossoczy to women's doubles gold.

Immediately following the conclusion of events at the 1957 World Championships, the couple moved to the Netherlands; notably at the 1959 World Championships, Agnes reached the quarter-finals of the women's singles and partnering Leah Neuberger of the United States, the same round in the women's doubles.

A short period in the Netherlands, in 1960 they moved to Duisburg in West Germany where she joined DSC (formerly DTC) Kaiserberg, the club with which she became synonymous. She led the club to the German Team Championships title 18 times, the German Cup 15 times, in addition to the European Cup in 1966 as well as the Nancy Evans Cup in both 1971 and 1981. Incredibly she was still active in the Bundesliga when 60 years old!

Internationally, in German colours, she claimed three titles at the European Championships.

In 1968 in Lyon, she secured the women's team top prize, lining up alongside Edith Buchholz, Jutta Krüger and Wiebke Hendriksen but her greatest success was six years earlier in 1962 in Berlin. Once again alongside Edith Buchholz but with Inge Harst and Uschi Matthias completing the squad, team gold was achieved. Later she claimed the top step of the women's singles podium. Additionally she was the mixed doubles runner up partnering Ebby Schöler, gaining the same women's doubles finish alongside Inge Harst; the latter, an achievement she was to repeat in 1970 in Moscow when joining forces with Diane Schöler, the player she had beaten in the 1962 women's singles final.

"She was a great table tennis player and also a great personality. In matches, she fought to win but always in a fair manner. We experienced this as her partner in doubles and mixed doubles, as her team mate and also as an opponent. We will never forget this; her backhand stroke was absolutely unique. She rarely pushed but mainly used a kind of a drive which we have never seen from anybody else. Difficult to return because she had sponge with pimples on the backhand; she placed the ball always to give the opponent a problem to return, even when she was counter attacking. Her footwork to hit the ball and then move backwards to wait for the return was remarkable." Ebby and Diane Schöler

Success on the World and European

stage; furthermore, she won the German Open three times in a row: 1960 for the Netherlands, 1961 and 1962 for Germany. Likewise when representing the Netherlands, she won the women's singles title at the English Open in 1958 and 1960.

Overall between 1962 and 1976 she made 93 international appearances for Germany.



World Championships (representing Hungary)

1953 Bucharest WT third place
(Zsuzsa Fantusz, Gizi Farkas, Eva Koczian)

1954 Wembley WT runner up
(Gizi Farkas, Ilona Kerekes, Eva Koczian)

1957 Stockholm WD winner
(Livia Mossoczy)

European Championships

(representing West Germany)

1962 Berlin WS winner

1962 Berlin WD runner up
(Inge Harst)

1962 Berlin XD runner up
(Eberhard Schöler)

1962 Berlin WT winner

(Inge Harst, Edith Buchholz, Uschi Matthias)

1966 London WD semi-final
(Edith Buchholz)

1966 London WD semi-final
(Edith Buchholz)

1968 Lyon WT winner
(Edith Buchholz, Jutta Krüger, Wiebke Hendriksen)

1970 Moscow WD runner up
(Diane Schöler)

1972 Rotterdam WT runner up
(Diane Schöler, Wiebke Hendriksen, Edith Wetzel)

1976 Prague WD semi-final
(Monika Kneip)



Bert Kerr, Scotland's valiant servant

Born on Sunday 4th April 1933, Bert Kerr passed away on Sunday 7th June; he was 87 years old.

A player from the era of the pimpled rubber racket, he won the men's singles title at the Scottish National Championships five times; he represented his country on 166 occasions, his debut being in February 1953 against Ireland. One year later in 1954 in London, he made the first of his five World Championships appearances.

Locally he became synonymous with the Gambit Table Tennis Club in the Edinburgh and Lothians League of which Helen Elliot, the women's doubles world champion in 1949 and 1950, was also a member. The club won the local league title on no less than 31 occasions, setting the standard for Scotland, a fact that was underlined in 1957. In the guise of Ian Barclay, Bert Kerr, Tommy McMichael, Helen Elliot and Helen Houliston, they provided the whole Scottish team for the World Championships in Stockholm.

Significantly, partnering Helen Elliot, the duo presented a most formidable mixed doubles combination. They won the Scottish Open mixed doubles title five successive times.

Success upon success on home turf, on foreign soil he gained valuable experience. On National Service at RAF Wildenrath, for two seasons, he played for RSV Rheydter Spielverein, then one of West Germany's strongest clubs. Notably, he lined up alongside brothers Karlheinz and Reinhard Schöler. They are the elder brothers of Ebby Schöler, the President of the Swaythling Club International, Karlheinz is now 94 years old, Reinhard, sadly passed away in 2008. Notably Reinhard is a former winner of the North Rhine

Westfalia men's singles title, at the time the largest association within the German Table Tennis Association.

Returning to civilian life, eventually Bert became a teacher, introducing many young people to the sport of table tennis. In September 1967 he assumed the role of Director of Coaching for the Scottish Table Tennis Association, setting up a schools' league competition. Later in 1976 he became the first recipient of the Kirkwood Trophy, presented by the local association for outstanding services to table tennis. In 2002 he was elected honorary life member of Table Tennis Scotland.

A host of achievements in the table tennis world; in his younger days he was a most accomplished footballer, having once had trials for Hearts; in later life he turned his attentions to golf, becoming captain of Baberton Golf Club from 1994 to 1996. On more than one occasion, he crossed the Atlantic to watch the Masters in Augusta.

Gifted at sport but there was another sphere in which he excelled; prior to becoming a teacher, he was a cabinet maker. In his spare time he built musical instruments such as violins, lutes and classical guitars. Also, he carried out several commissions, including building two wooden doors at Holyrood Palace; a fact that endorsed his skills. True to his character, Bertie was typically modest: "only the Queen and a few tourists will see them".

Retired but active, in the early stages of the COVID-19 lockdown he went on long walks; sadly, he fell ill, after three weeks in hospital, he died of cancer. Pat, his wife, passed away in 2000, he is survived by his three children, Susan, David and Robert, as well as his many grandchildren and great-grandchildren.



Gerald Gurney, collector extraordinaire

Renowned table tennis historian, the owner of an incredible collection of memorabilia, Gerald Gurney passed away on Wednesday 8th July at his home in Great Bromley, Essex; the village in which he had always lived.

Born on Tuesday 10th March 1931, Gerald gained the distinction of influencing both Oxford and Cambridge universities. Table tennis was not originally recognised for a "Blue" at either university but, with the help of Ivor Montagu, Gerald persuaded the Blues Committee at Oxford to award a "Half-Blue" for table tennis. Shortly afterwards, Cambridge followed suit.

Head of the English Department at Colchester Royal Grammar School, Gerald became the Secretary of the Essex Schools' Association in 1966, motivating 390 teams to compete in the county's inter-regional schools championships. Later in 1968 he became Founder General Secretary of the English Schools' Table Tennis Association, followed by election to the positions of Chair, President and first Life Member.

A collector of memorabilia of several racket sports, Gerald's table tennis collection is regarded as one of the most extensive private collections in the world; he exhibited in several countries. In 1987 he published "Table Tennis – The Early Years" and assisted Ron Crayden with the publication in 1995 of "The Story of Table Tennis – the first 100 years". Additionally, in 1993 Gerald became the first editor of "Table Tennis Collector" and continued until 2001 when succeeded by Graham Trimming.

"I have so many fond memories of Gerald and visited him several times; we also co-exhibited at the 1991 World Championships in Chiba, Japan", reflected Chuck

Hoey, the Honorary Curator of the ITTF Museum. "We used to tease each other about who was number one and number two as a table tennis collector. I often show the magnificent modern building in China where the museum now resides, saying that this is all Gerald's fault!"

Most notably as a result of his efforts, several years ago Gerald was nominated by Chuck Hoey for an MBE, alas the nomination was not upheld but with wife, Joan, he was invited to a garden party at Buckingham Palace, a memorable experience deeply cherished.

Historian, administrator but also coach and player; he gained his coaching award under the guidance of Jack Carrington, having in the season 1948-1949 won the Colchester and District League junior singles title.



Heather Masters set the example

An international umpire, England's Heather Masters sadly passed away. She was 90 years of age. A prominent umpire in the 1970s and 1980s, Heather became a County Umpire in 1973, National Umpire in 1978 and gained her international qualification two years later in 1980.

She was an umpire at the World Championships in Birmingham in 1977; later she became the first female umpire to be given the honour of umpiring the men's singles final at an English Open.

In addition to being a regular face at numerous prestigious tournaments in England, she officiated at the Commonwealth Championships in 1979 in Edinburgh and in 1985 in the Isle of Man. Also, she was on duty at the Scottish Open in 1980, the Belgian Open in 1981 as well as the Welsh Open in 1981 and 1983.

Ilya Freger, respected coach

Born on Sunday 29th February 1948, leap year day, Ukraine's Ilya Freger passed away in his native city of Kiev on Friday 24th April, he was 72 years old.

The men's doubles runner up, partnering Boris Shafir, the 1968 Ukraine Championships was his crowning moment as a player; a worthy effort but it did not compare with his achievements as a coach. In 1969 he graduated from the Kiev State Institute of Physical Culture and later worked as the head coach for the Soviet Union, Ukraine and Uzbekistan as well as for clubs in Sweden and Poland.

He was the first head coach of the Ukraine national team after the country's independence.



Marie-Jeanne Urchetti, secretarial skills invaluable

Resident at Val Fleuri in Geneva, a medical and social institution for the elderly, after contracting COVID-19, Marie-Jeanne Urchetti passed away quietly, without suffering, on Monday 13th April.

Born in 1930 in the Swiss village of Le Châble in Valais; from 1937 to 1945 she lived in Martigny, before residing in Le Bouveret and then St. Maurice. In 1945 she moved to Geneva with her mother, sister Suzanne and brother Pierre. Later from 1946 to 1950 she worked as a secretary at the Pictet Bank and SA Import Company, before leaving for England where she resided until 1952.

In 1956 she married Hugo Urchetti, a founder member of the Swaythling Club International. Always she took a great interest in the club's activities, attending meetings even after Hugo had passed away in 2004.

At home, her secretarial skills provided invaluable support for the efforts of her husband, a man dedicated to the sport of table tennis. Most significantly, he was the

President of the Silver Star Club for 50 years from 1954 to 2004 and for a decade the President of Swiss Table Tennis. The small typewriter was put to good use, eventually being replaced by a computer but not until after her 70th birthday; in good humour she did admit to experiencing teething problems.

A most active life, in 2017 Marie-Jeanne fell seriously ill, she spent some 36 months in hospital, underwent operations, her good humour never faltering; her courage manifest.

John Burtenshaw, Vice President Table Tennis England

Elected Vice President of Table Tennis England in 2006, John Burtenshaw passed away the week following his 87th birthday.

Representing Kennington Youth Club in the early 1950s in the Ashford League, John became a member of the local association's management committee before turning his administrative attentions more widely. In 1960 he joined the Kent county committee, most notably initiating the Kent Schools' Association, the inaugural tournament attracting 90 schools and 300 teams.

Later in 1968 he moved to Weston-Super-Mare in the west of England where he became president of the local association in 1987; two years earlier in 1985 he received the merit award from Table Tennis England for his devoted services to the sport.

Tony Ross, administrator and photographer

A most efficient administrator, always working in a calm and reserved manner, Tony Ross, died on Wednesday 22nd April in Hull, a port city in the north east of England.

Locally, he performed a wide range of roles including that of General Secretary, later becoming a qualified umpire and referee. Nationally, he served on several committees for the English Table Tennis Association, including Development and Tournaments in addition to Press and Publicity.

In recognition of his work in 1979 and again in 1983, he received the prestigious Ivor Montagu Award, the first person to be honoured twice. The latter citation read: "in recognition of his innovative contributions and his persistent advocacy of progressive ideas".

Respected for his efforts in officialdom, Tony had another string to his bow; he was most prolific photographer. Many of his photographs appeared in Table Tennis News, the official magazine of the English Table Tennis Association.



Peter Shead, England international

Former England international, prominent in the 1950s and 1960s, Peter Shead recently passed away at his home, an RAF flat in Rottingdean, Sussex; he was 91 years old.

Born in Islington on Friday 4th March 1929, an evacuee, he started playing table tennis in 1944 in Blackpool. Alongside Ken Craigie, Alan Rhodes and Harry Venner, he made his England debut against New Zealand in Winchester on Wednesday 3rd March 1954; England recorded a 10-0 win.

However, arguably, his greatest achievement was reaching the men's singles last 16 at the World Championships in 1954, the furthest of any English player. Similarly in 1963 he advanced to the same round at the English Open.

Bobby Raybould, all round sportsman

Former England international and national champion, Bobby Raybould, passed away on Friday 10th April; born in Stratford, London on Saturday 8th December 1934, he was 85 years old.

He started to play table tennis when 14 years of age, making his debut for the Essex county team in 1951; his first title of note being in the 1951-1952 season when he won the junior boys' singles event at the Surrey Open. After completing national service in the Royal Air Force, he made his England debut on Saturday 3rd January 1959; the match staged in Leicester, a 10-0 win was the end result.

Notably, partnering Bobby Stevens, in 1962 and 1963 he won the men's doubles title at the English National Championships as well as at the Welsh Open; additionally at the latter, in 1958 he partnered Shirley Jones to mixed doubles success.

Outstanding in the sport of table tennis, also he was a fine cricketer. On one occasion he played against a touring West Indian side which included a young Gary Sobers in addition to Frank Worrell, Sonny Ramadhin, Alf Valentine and Everton Weekes. Bobby made 103 not out!

John Tannehill, member of a most celebrated team

A member of the United States team that visited China following the 1971 World Championships in Nagoya, the event that heralded "Ping Pong Diplomacy", John Tannehill passed away on Thursday 2nd July after a year-long fight against cancer.

Born on Thursday 1st May 1952, he grew up in Middleport, a small town along the Ohio River; he was introduced to table tennis by his father Chet, the editor of a local newspaper, his introduction to the sport being in Columbus. Notably the distance from his home was 100 miles, thus the visits were often resigned to weekends where he would be accommodated by local club members.

In 1965 he won the under 13 boys' singles title at the United States Open. Later, from 1969 to 1971 he stood in second spot on the United States men's rankings behind Dal Joon Lee, the player against whom he was to lose twice in the national championships men's singles final.

Close but not close enough; however, he did gain one major title, maybe his greatest success, in 1979, self-taught, he won the Columbus City Chess Championships.

Following his retirement from table tennis, he worked full-time for the American Veteran's Association (AMVETS) for over 20 years. He was inducted into the United States Table Tennis Hall of Fame in 2005.

Hitting the headlines



Saturday 2nd May: Top of Austria Challenge

Broadcast live from the studios of ORF in Vienna, the national television station, all necessary precautions met, in the women's match Liu Jia beat Karoline Mischek, for the men Stefan Fegerl accounted for Daniel Habesohn. Immediately following, the women having a six point start each game, Daniel Habesohn overcame Karoline Mischek; Liu Jia defeated Stefan Fegerl.

Commentator for the event was Michael Roscher, assisted by Werner Schlager, the programme concluded with reflections of Paris 2003 when the Austrian was crowned world champion.

A notable absentee was Sofia Polcanova, she was forced to withdraw at the last moment owing a recurring pain in her right hip; she underwent surgery, recovered and in August married.

Monday 4th May: Hungarian women's team returned to action

Tests for the COVID-19 virus completed, training sessions for Bernadett Balint, Fanni Harasztovich, Leila Imre and Maria Fazekas, members of the women's team based in Budapest, commenced under the watchful eye of Zoltan Batorfi, the head coach.



Thursday 7th May: Training sessions resumed in Greece

Thermometer checks on entering, safeguards in place, eight members of the Greek national team returned to action at the Peace and Friendship Stadium in Athens. It was the first time since mid-March, when quarantine was imposed, that the

premises had been open for any sport.

Friday 15th May: Jörgen

Persson appointed head coach

Jörgen Persson was named head coach for the Sweden men's national team; the appointment commencing officially on Thursday 1st October. Part of a new national team structure, he succeeds Peter Blomquist, who assumes a talent detection role.



Monday 18th May: Hungarian men commence training sessions

Under the direction of Peter Musko; Nandor Ecsecki, Tamas Lakatos, Bence Majoros and Adam Szudi resumed training at the Ormai Centre in Budapest. Junior players Csaba Andras, Oliver Both and Patrik Juhasz were also present.



Wednesday 27th May – Monday 1st June: Return to Svalbard

Earlier in the year in January, Norway's Kristin Duval and daughter Ilka had visited Svalbard Turn, the world's most northerly table tennis club.

Five months later with husband Alain joining the family group, the situation was somewhat different. The coronavirus outbreak meant the table tennis hall was closed but with continual daylight as opposed to the never ending darkness on the previous visit, a midnight barbecue provided a most convivial occasion.



Friday 29th May: ITTF Foundation nominated for Sport Business Awards

Slum Ping Pong and the 2019 Parkinson's World Championships were nominated. The winners will be announced on Wednesday 16th December at an awards ceremony, staged at the Brewery in London.

Monday 1st June – Sunday 30th August: Düsseldorf Masters

Involving a maximum 16 players on each occasion the Düsseldorf Masters was organised to provide match practice for club members alongside representatives of the German national team and those based at the Düsseldorf Training Centre. Overall, the men's competition comprised a total of 10 events; the final meeting involving only eight players

A women's tournament was held on similar principles on the fifth and concluding week.

Men

Monday 1st - Tuesday 2nd June **Winner:** Timo Boll **Runner Up:** Steffen Mengel **Semi-Finalists:** Kristian Karlson, Qiu Dang

Monday 8th - Tuesday 9th June **Winner:** Dimitrij Ovtcharov **Runner Up:** Qiu Dang **Semi-Finalists:** Meng Fanbo, Kanak Jha

Monday 15th – Wednesday 17th June **Winner:** Dimitrij Ovtcharov **Runner Up:** Omar Assar **Semi-Finalists:** Qiu Dang, Kanak Jha

Monday 22nd – Thursday 25th June **Winner:** Bastian Steger **Runner Up:** Qiu Dang **Semi-Finalists:** Benedikt Duda, Steffen Mengel

Friday 10th – Sunday 12th July **Winner:** Benedikt Duda **Runner Up:** Omar Assar **Semi-Finalists:** Anton Källberg, Qiu Dang

Friday 17th – Sunday 19th July **Winner:** Qiu Dang **Runner Up:** Anton Källberg **Semi-Finalists:** Gerrit Engemann, Tobias Hippler

Thursday 23rd – Saturday 25th July **Winner:** Anton Källberg **Runner Up:** Benedikt Duda **Semi-Finalists:** Omar Assar, Cedric Meissner

Friday 7th – Sunday 9th August **Winner:** Dimitrij Ovtcharov **Runner Up:** Patrick Franziska **Semi-Finalists:** Benedikt Duda, Anton Källberg

Friday 14th – Sunday 16th August **Winner:** Benedikt Duda **Runner Up:** Omar Assar **Semi-Finalists:** Steffen Mengel, Tobias Hippler

Friday 21st – Sunday 23rd August **Winner:** Qiu Dang **Runner Up:** Steffen Mengel **Semi-Finalists:** Gerrit Engemann, Anton Källberg

Women

Saturday 4th – Sunday 5th July **Win-**

ner: Han Ying **Runner Up:** Sophia Klee
Semi-Finalists: Shan Xiaona, Wan Yuan

Saturday 29th – Sunday 30th August
Winner: Nina Mittelham **Runner Up:** Kristin Lang
Semi-Finalists: Annett Kaufmann, Hana Matelova

Monday 1st June: Daughter for Georgina Pota



Georgia Pota, in recent times Hungary's leading female player, gave birth to her first child, Regina, weighing nine pounds three ounces.

Monday 8th June: Mauritius back to action



Located in the Indian Ocean, Mauritius was the first country in Africa to lift the overall ban on sporting activities. The national table tennis team, six men and six women practised at the Beau Bassin Sports Complex after more than 75 days of inactivity.

Monday 8th June: Puerto Rico, national team practises in Utuado



Staged at the Águilas de la Montaña Table Tennis Club in Utuado, located high in the island's central mountainous area; players from the Puerto Rico national team gained permission to return to training.

Tuesday 9th June: New date announced for European Veteran Championships

Hosted by Table Tennis Wales and staged at Cardiff Metropolitan University, originally planned for Sunday 27th June to Saturday 3rd July 2021, the European Veteran Championships will now be held from Sun-

day 26th June to Saturday 2nd July 2022.



Sunday 14th June:

1. FC Saarbrücken wins Bundesliga title for first time

Represented by Patrick Franziska, Shang Kun and Darko Jorgic, 1. FC Saarbrücken won the German Bundesliga for the first time in their history.

In the play-offs, at the semi-final stage they recorded a 3-0 win against SV Werder Bremen represented by Kirill Gerassimenko, Mattias Falck and Marcelo Aguirre, prior to securing a 3-1 success in the final when opposing the TTF Liebherr Ochsenhausen trio formed by Hugo Calderano, Simon Gauzy and Jakub Dyas. In the counterpart semi-final, TTF Liebherr Ochsenhausen had overcome Borussia Düsseldorf who fielded Timo Boll, Kristian Karlsson and Anton Källberg.



Saturday 20th June:

World Refugee Day

Projects promoted by the ITTF Foundation were recognised. Notably in Ecuador, organised by FUDELA (Fundación de las Américas), over 400 young people, migrants from Colombia and Venezuela, have been introduced to the sport of table tennis. In Jordan, where there are some 11 million Syrian refugees in Za'atari and Azraq, supported by the Agitos Foundation and Ping Pong Alkmaar from the Netherlands, over 80 players attended training sessions.



Sunday 21st June: International Yoga Day

Reducing stress and anxiety, helping cope with tense situations, India's Harmeet Desai and Sathiyam Gnanasekaran alongside Luxembourg's Sarah de Nutte celebrated the day. All believe Yoga is of great benefit.

Monday 24th June: Ping Pong Parkinson's Progress

Well known in the United Kingdom for his efforts in supporting the cause, Andy Butler has agreed to sponsor the British team to compete in the 2021 Parkinson's World Championships. Following the death of his father, who lived with the condition, Andy Butler set up a Facebook group". It has grown beyond all expectations, now possessing a staggering 56,000 followers.



Wednesday 1st July: Tamara Boros to succeed Jie Schöpp

At the conclusion of the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games next August, Tamara Boros will succeed Jie Schöpp as the German women's team national coach. Jie Schöpp will join forces with Lara Broich, the national junior coach, assuming responsibility for girls in the cadet age group.

Friday 3rd July: Puerto Rico announces first international open

Hosted at the Convention Centre in San Juan, the Butterfly 2021 Puerto Rico Open will be staged from Wednesday 28th July to Monday 2nd August. It is the first ever open international tournament to be organised in the Caribbean.

Hitting the headlines

Sunday 5th July: Sporting once again Portuguese champions

Selecting Bode Abiodun, Quadri Aruna and Diogo Carvalho, Sporting won the Portuguese National League for the 37th time in their history. They beat the GD Tolédos team represented by Énio Mendes, Boboye Oyenyan and Diogo Silva by three matches to nil in both legs of the final.

Saturday 11th July: Butterfly support for Ping Pong Parkinson



A total of 30 rackets were received in Croton-on-Hudson, a village in Westchester County, New York; it was a delighted Nenad Bach who was most appreciative for the support.

"As the founder of Ping Pong Parkinson I am very grateful to Butterfly for supplying table tennis rackets for our New York and New Jersey headquarters and chapters. Since COVID-19 happened we stopped our regular activities. Now with the new protocols by having our own paddles, we will be able to sanitize them properly and therefore make our sessions safe for all involved, people with Parkinson as well as volunteers. For those that are not familiar with the history of Ping Pong Parkinson, Butterfly has been with us from the first moment when the idea was born and presented to the world."

Wednesday 15th July:

eMuseum opens in Brazil

A virtual event, the eMuseum was launched. Names from generations past including Dagoberto Midosi and Biriba through to Claudio Kano, Hugo Hoyama and the present era are featured in the table tennis section.

Sunday 19th July: Full house for Trang Mai

Staged in Saigon, Trang Mai emerged the most successful player at the 2020

Vietnam National Championships; she completed a clean sweep of titles. She led HCM City to women's team first place, partnered Duy Le to mixed doubles gold and Thu Nguyen to women's doubles victory. She ended the day by overcoming Nga Nguyen to secure the women's singles top prize. Meanwhile, Duc Tuan won the men's singles title overcoming Tu Le in the final, after leading Vicem Hai Duong to men's team victory, Duc Le and Hoang Dinh claimed the men's doubles title.



Thursday 22nd July: Happy birthday Hans Soova

The coach to more players than any other who have progressed to represent England, Hans Soova celebrated his 86th birthday in his home town of Bradford.



Sunday 2nd August: Scaling the heights

Table tennis at the Olympic Games may not be happening as scheduled but that has not been the scenario on Mount Olympus. On Sunday 2nd August two former Greek champions, Giannis Kordoutis and Diana Zerdila climbed the highest of the 52 peaks and gorges; they climbed Mytikas, 2,918 metres above sea level. Moreover, they reached the top carrying a table tennis table on their backs!

Saturday 8th to Friday 21st August: China prepares

Emulating the proposed 14 day schedule, Lingshui City in Hainan Province was the home for the "Tokyo 2020 Preparation for China Table Tennis - Olympic Simulation Games." Notable

absentees recovering from injury were Ding Ning and Liu Shiwen; Ma Long played only on the men's team event.

Mixed Doubles Gold: Xu Xin / Sun Yingsha Silver: Wang Chuqin / Wang Manyu Bronze: Lin Gaoyuan / Sun Mingyang

Women's Singles Gold: Sun Yingsha Silver: Wang Manyu Bronze: Wang Yidi

Men's Singles Gold: Liang Jingkun Silver: Wang Chuqin Bronze: Fan Zhendong

Women's Team Gold: Chen Meng, Sun Yingsha, Wang Manyu Silver: Chen Xingtong, Gu Yuting, Sun Mingyang Bronze: Liu Fei, Qian Tianyi, Wang Yidi

Men's Team Gold: Fan Zhendong, Ma Long, Xu Xin Silver: Liang Jingkun, Lin Gaoyuan, Wang Chuqin Bronze: Xu Chenhao, Zhao Zihao, Zhou Yu



Saturday 29th August: Repeat success for Stina Källberg

At the Swedish Tour Halmstad Open, Stina Källberg won both the women's singles and under 20 women's singles events; the success a repeat of two weeks earlier on Saturday 15th August in Köping when she had achieved the same feat and elder brother Anton had been crowned men's singles champion.

Likewise in Halmstad, Elias Ranefur was in form. He emerged the men's singles champion; notably in the final he accounted for Mattias Falck, silver medallist at the Liebherr 2019 World Championships.



Friday 4th September: Africa and France in accord

A partnership agreement was reached between the African Table Tennis Federation and the Athletic Club Boulogne Billancourt based in Paris in order to help players from the continent prepare, in particular, for the Paris 2024 Olympic Games.

20TH VETERAN WORLD CHAMPIONSHIPS TABLE TENNIS

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A professional table tennis player, Timo Boll, is captured in a dynamic, low-angle shot. He is wearing a dark blue short-sleeved shirt and a black headband. He is leaning forward, holding a red table tennis racket in his right hand and a white ball in his left hand, ready to serve. The background is dark, highlighting the player's form and the motion of the game.

Timo BOLL
(GER)

DIGNIGS



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