

# LIFEWEST OPEN

on the 2007 JOOLA NORTH AMERICAN TOUR

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Recreational Sports Facility, University of California, Berkeley, CA

Every tournament takes a great deal of effort to stage, and every tournament's champions deserve recognition for their efforts— but the LifeWest Open was an extraordinary event, and the efforts we witnessed place it a notch above the normal. Before mentioning another thing, it's necessary to tip our hats to the men and women of UC Berkeley's Table Tennis club and their mentor; Yau-Man Chan. Also to Ryan Hsu, Kenny Schang, and their cohort of student volunteers, who are beyond compare in their efforts. The Golden Bears labored for many hours, with cheerful effectiveness in setting- up and dismantling the playing site. (Honestly, at most venues, volunteers tend to disappear over the hours of the labor, but at UC Berkeley there are more visible and working each hour, and just as many for the teardown as the setup.)

Referee Dr. Azmy Ibrahim and his coterie of umpires; Tom Miller, Kenny Tien, and Saul Weinstein did excellent work as always. Amanda Ho manned the vendor booth for the Tour sponsor, JOOLA. LifeWest University and sponsor Bricancorp held a round robin group exclusive for LifeWest enrollees, and also provided an information table about the benefits of chiropractic adjustments. Dennis Davis, organizer of the upcoming World Junior Championships, also had a presence and was pre-selling tickets to that event to raise awareness.

More than 215 players, with assorted spouses, children, grandchildren, coaches, and friends, filled the playing site; a real festival atmosphere prevailing with all the associated activities. The players amply rewarded all these efforts, including the struggle to find parking on the same date as a UC Berkeley home football game. But no player turned in a more mind-boggling effort than Nelson Yu.

While it's not unusual to see 'Ironmen' at NATT events, Nelson had to go some distance to earn this distinction: His day began on Saturday with Open Singles, where he qualified for the second stage round robin (a group of four players, the tournament's best, all playing matches to seven games). Nelson played continuously from 4:30 until the hall finally closed at 10, his Under 2125 final being the last match of the day. On the way he had tough encounters with Dave Sakai, his Under 2375 round robin group, the Open Singles matches, and, when the day finally ended, a huge black and blue goose egg on his shin that 'just appeared' when he made a sprawling attempt to retrieve a wide smash. Nelson returned on Sunday morning to win the Under 3200 doubles with Yeh Man-Ju.

Equally impressive was newcomer to the JOOLA Tour Shen Hailong. This energetic young player has an incredible speed, great court coverage, and a cheerful disposition. In addition to reaching the Open Singles quarterfinal, Shen played a spectacular U-22 Men's final with California's Auria Malek. The very first point had seven 'impossible shots' and ended with a full-blown loop bomb that Auria directed a good 25 feet away from the sprinting Shen. Cheers erupted from the start, and both players deserved them— Shen triumphed in four close games.

The Ying-Lo Junior competitions were particularly good efforts here, thanks to the large number of active coaches and junior programs in the Nor Cal area. Eric Shahnazari and Terence Sun played a fine match in the U-13 boys final, with Shahnazari winning 6, -6, -12, 16, 5. Both of these young men then went on to terrorize the grown-ups, with Shahnazari finishing second in the Under 1700 and Sun winning the Under 1250 event. Ariel Hsing, winner of the Girls' Under 16, became the youngest girl to ever qualify in Open Singles at an NATT Tour Stop, joining the second stage round robin, and coming second in Women's Singles as well. Ironically, Hsing's round robin group in the Open also contained her Women's Singles final opponent, Jiaqi Zheng. Young Prachi Jha, second to Hsing in the U-16, was first in Girls' U-13.

The Sol Feingold Memorial senior events saw longtime friends Khoa Nguyen and Tuan Le in the Over 40 final, a match Khoa took in four games. The Over 50 Champion, Kock Loe, in six exciting games with Francisco Mendez, put his aggressive flat-hitting penhold style to great use. Over 60, it was Dave Sakai besting John Harrington in the title match.

Effort is a word you usually hear associated with Samson Dubina, and at the LifeWest Open, Samson got greater rewards for his effort than usual, defeating Shashin Shodan in the Under 2500 and playing a major role in the Open Singles story. Don't expect to see John Springer in the Under 2000 category again... several upset wins, capped by his title win against Michael Squires, make it unlikely he'll be eligible.

## Open Singles:

Mark Hazinski had an unbeaten record in his Group, but B seed Auria Malek went down in tremendous match with Shen Hailong, seven strong games, twice to deuce,



LifeWest Open Champion: Mark Hazinski

which advanced Shen to Sunday's quarterfinals. Qualifier Nelson Yu got no traction.

Du Cheng Yi went unbeaten, Samson Dubina placed second, but only after he got past Shashin Shodan, 15,8,8,-11,-7,7, in a thriller. Robert Shanzari's upset of Shashin in six games place him third.

Jiaqi Zheng made it look easy, never going more than five games in a match to advance unbeaten into the quarterfinals. De Tran's only loss was to her, and Tuan Le held off Ariel Hsing in six games to place third.

Khoa Nguyen started his group with an upset loss to Justen Yao, but Yao couldn't follow on his fast start and finished 1-2. Yahao Zhang also finished 1-2 and head to head win against Guo Xi broke the tie between the two men who finished 2-1.

## Quarterfinals:

Guo Xi vs. Mark Hazinski

Guo Xi is a great player and he had moments that brought cheers from the partisan observers, but Hazinski's a level higher. Guo Xi accepts the quarterfinalist's check, 4,8, -8,3,7.

Samson Dubina vs. Zheng Jiaqi

Jiaqi's quick and smart at the table, and you better respect her backhand, slapping and redirecting over the table. Dubina brought superior size, strength, and power to bear in defeating her, 9,7,9,-8,8, on his way to the semifinals.

Khoa Nguyen vs. Shen Hailong

Nguyen's an Olympian and a proud and dignified man, but he's over 40 now, and that fact wasn't lost on Shen Hailong. Hailong's superior speed and quickness was the difference here, 8,9,9,9, in a thrilling example of high-level play.

De Tran vs. Du Cheng Yi

Du Cheng has a complete skill set, and wasn't bothered by playing the southpaw from New York. Watching this match gave one a good sense of his grasp of tactics. De Tran managed to nick his opponent for game two, but the rest of the match was all for Du Cheng, 7,-6,5,8,9.

## Semifinals:

Mark Hazinski vs. Samson Dubina

Two aggressive and well-trained young men at their physical peak, and that was proven point after point. With few stylistic differences and similar builds, these two players repeatedly brought gasps of admiration from the onlookers. Dubina showed his lack of fear with an immediate 11-2 game one win, but Hazinski turned up the dial to even the match 11-3. Dubina took game three and a 2-1 advantage in the best-of-seven game match. From there on in, it was war, a war that Hazinski won battle by battle by the narrowest margins. This match would have been a spectacular championship match at most tournaments, but here at LifeWest, it was just one more step on the ladder. Hazinski ran off three straight games, 11-8, 17-15 and 12-10 to emerge victorious, and the crowd gave the pair a standing ovation for their effort.

Du Cheng Yi vs. Shen Hailong

Faced by the talented U-22 Champion, Du Cheng took the match to another dimension. Not only did he work his opponent side to side, but in an attempt to neutralize Hailong's amazing court coverage, he worked in and out as well, repeatedly forcing Hailong to return to the table and then drop back to looping distance again. The points were often long, and the play nothing short of stellar. Hailong's tactics proved successful, but his opponent, Du Cheng ultimately triumphed

9,10,9,11. One couldn't ask for better play.

## Championship Match

Mark Hazinski vs. Du Cheng Yi

Commenting by Internet, Ben Johnson thought that Du Cheng Yi was ready for a breakthrough; the win that would vault him into the rarefied air of the U.S. Top 10. Hazinski quickly established his power game, and 11-4, took game one. Ben certainly seemed like a prophet though for the next 20 minutes, though... the crowd cheered their local favorite, Du Cheng, and he showed that he clearly belonged in this match, winning the second and then the third games by scores of 16-14 and 11-9. Just as he had in the semifinal, Hazinski now trailed two games to one. Hazinski struck back

11-7 to even the match, and again 11-7 in game five, to put Du Cheng's back against the wall. As the match progressed, Hazinski had greater success in re-looping Du Cheng Yi's drives and dominated the longer rallies. Du Cheng conceded nothing however, and forced deuce in the sixth game.

The whoop of victory that escaped Mark Hazinski's lips with his 13-11 win, and the title, in game six was well earned. It had been an amazing effort by both men. Mark earned \$1500 for his remarkable attainments, and Du Cheng picked up \$700 for the finalist's prize. As the remaining events drew to a close and spectators flooded to the exit, the Golden Bears of UC Berkeley bent cheerfully to the task of removing the JOOLA tables and barriers from the playing hall. It was a remarkable effort, and just another stop on the road of the 2007 JOOLA North American Tour. All that awaits now is the tour final, at Stanford University in October.

Champion	Finalist	EventName
Zheng, Jiaqi	Hsing, Ariel	Women's RR
Shen, Hailong	Malek, Auria	Ying/Lo Junior Competitions Under22 Men's RR
Yao, Alexander Shin	Zhang, Yahao	Ying/Lo Junior Competitions Under18 Boy's RR
Wang, Melody	Wu, Erica S.	Ying/Lo Junior Competitions Under18 Girl's RR
Zhang, Yahao	Fuentes-Afflick, Tomas	Ying/Lo Junior Competitions Under16 RR
Hsing, Ariel	Jha, Prachi	Ying/Lo Junior Competitions Under16 Girl's RR
Shahnazari, Erick	Sun, Terence	Ying/Lo Junior Competitions Under13 Boy's RR
Jha, Prachi	Sun, Vivian	Ying/Lo Junior Competitions Under13 Girl's RR
Ou, Jonathan	Lokavarapu, Madhukar	Ying/Lo Junior Competitions Under10 Boy's RR
Zhou, Ivy	Xiao, Claire	Ying/Lo Junior Competitions Under10 Girl's RR
Nguyen, Khoa Dinh	Le MD, Tuan Dai	Feingold Memorial Over40 RR
Loe, Kock	Mendez, Francisco J.	Feingold Memorial Over50 RR
Sakai, David	Harrington, John G.	Feingold Memorial Over60 RR
Dubina, Samson David	Shodhan, Shashin	Under2500 SE
Shodhan, Shashin	Le MD, Tuan Dai	Under2375 RR
Loe, Kock	Yu, Nelson	Under2250 RR
Tam, Tony	Chai, Jim	Under2125 RR
Springer, John R.	Squires, Michael	Under2000 RR
Wang, Yuan Xi	Nie, David	Under1850 RR
Li, Steven	Shahnazari, Erick	Under1700 RR
Chan, Ricky	Lai, Stephen	Under1550 RR
Poon, Jerome C.	Chang, Mingjia	Under1400 RR
Sun, Terence	Lau, William	Under1250 RR
Sun, Vivian	Sun, Terence	Under1100 RR
Chan, Cornelius	Salisbury, Shaffer	Under950 RR
Lipscomb, Luke	Wong, Kenny	Under800/Unrated RR
Sung, Shing-Li & Li, Tzu-Ying	Nguyen, Trieu-Tien H. & Sit, Shing Sui	Under4200 Doubles SE
Yeh, Man-Ju & Yu, Nelson	Ramakrishnan, Vivek & Bhalla, Eshaan	Under3200 Doubles SE
Hazinski, Mark	Du, Cheng Yi	Open Singles Final Round