

# PARA PAN AM

by Edward Levy

The 2007 Para-Pan Am Games were held August 13-19 in Rio De Janeiro, Brazil. This was the first time that table tennis was included in this multi-sport event which contained athletes from twenty-five countries competing in ten different sports. The team— Mitch Seidenfeld, Wayne Lo, Andre Scott, Stuart Caplan, Noga Nir-Kistler, Pam Fontaine, Norm Bass, Ed Levy, Tahl Leibovitz; along with Coaches, Sean O'Neill and Keith Evans, Team Leader Larry Rose and Medical Trainer Craig Elder— was the strongest that the United States had ever fielded.

Everyone worked hard after making the team in April and all were prepared to perform optimally in order to qualify for Beijing. The team arrived in Rio from Washington D.C. on August 10. After waiting at the airport for what seemed like forever, everyone was happy to at last get to the Para-Pan-Am village (especially Leibovitz and Seidenfeld who had to race



**Top right:** Tahl Leibovitz, 2007 Para Pan Am Games 3x Gold Medalist

**Team photo:** 2007 Para Pan Am Table Tennis Team -- (back row) Wayne Lo, Norman Bass, Edward Levy, coach Keith Evans, coach Sean O'Neill, Lawrence Rose, manager Craig Elder Tahl Leibovitz, (front row) Pam Fontaine, Andre Scott, Noga Kistler, Mitchel Seidenfeld, Stuart Caplan

**Lower left:** Pam Fontaine, Women's Class 3 Silver Medalist and Women's Class 5 Team Silver Medalist

**Lower right:** Wayne Lo, 2007 Para Pan Am Games Gold and Bronze Medalist

to the venue to get reclassified). Everyone was impressed with the top-notch conditions found at the village and venue. From the apartments down to the cafeteria and playing hall, everything was absolutely perfect.

Team USA started out strongly when Open Singles events began on the thirteenth. All team members made it to at least the round of sixteen... Leibovitz won the Standing Open, and Andre Scott lost a hard fought battle in the Bronze Medal match of the Wheelchair Open to Geovanni Rodriguez Granados of Costa Rica. The class events were held next. These events were most important because each gold medalist would automatically qualify for the 2008 Beijing Paralympics, and everyone was prepared to fight for the win. The team continued its success; with Leibovitz winning eight, Seidenfeld winning seven, and Bass beating Levy for the Bronze. Pam Fontaine earned silver in 1-3 and Noga Nir-Kistler narrowly missed gold in class five.

The team event brought similar results with Andre Scott and Stuart Caplan, along with Fontaine and Nir-Kistler earning silver in the men's and women's 4-5 respectively. Seidenfeld, Levy, and Bass went on to earn gold in seven, while Leibovitz and Wayne Lo earned gold in eight.

Seidenfeld also won the "Player of the Americas Award," which is given to a player who exhibits fine results and sportsmanship throughout the tournament. Everyone was really happy for him— He made the quarterfinals of the Open, directly qualified for Beijing by winning class seven, and demonstrated an exemplary demeanor both on and off the table throughout the competition. Though only one U.S. team member directly qualified for Beijing (Leibovitz did not, due to some classification controversy), it was a great trip and everyone was generally pleased with the results.

The team would like to give special thanks to coaches, Sean O'Neill and Keith Evans, who spent many tireless hours working with the players in the months leading up to the event and during the competition. Also, special thanks to team leader, Larry Rose, for working out all the logistics and being a huge help; and to Team Trainer, Craig Elder, for providing great stretching and medical attention. The team thanks Nike for providing uniforms and extra shoes, the Table Tennis Pioneers for providing playing clothes, and Newgy for providing Robots and balls.