

# Classic Reisman

by Robert Palgon

The Lower East Side of Manhattan, stomping grounds of America's greatest ping pong hustler, and now home to *Pong*, a single table ping pong parlor open to the playing public, recently featured the Lower East Side Hardbat Challenge Match. Held on August third, the match occurred between five-time U.S. Champion Marty Reisman and 37-year-old Kazuyuki Yokoyama. The match was held in the small theater of a local cultural center. The theater, with a seating capacity of just 75, ended up hosting some 250 patrons, the majority of which had to remain standing.

Reisman challenged his younger opponent, who usually plays with technologically advanced modern equipment, to play classic hardbat, a game in which players' skills are fronted as equipment advantage is removed from the equation. Reisman brought decades of skill to the forum against the younger, high-rated Yokoyama.

Because a show of hands proved that most spectators knew little about Marty, Kaz, or table tennis as a professional sport, Marty took the time to explain the various changes that the game had undergone since the 1950s. (The crowd was comprised mostly of young people— 30 years old on average, male and female equally, and ethnically diverse.)

According to a number of attendees, once the match got underway, the crowd quickly warmed to the kind of play they were witnessing—the long rallies and the polished strokes. As the match continued, they became increasingly vocal in their cheering. Soon they were roaring at the exchanges, and began looking, one to the other in wonder and amazement, as if they knew that they were present at something if not magical, then certainly extremely special— and that they were darn lucky they decided to spend Friday

night watching what turned out to be a blast from the past— classic table tennis. Among the viewers, Wally Green, the 2254-rated player from NY, said the atmosphere was electrifying. The interplay between the quality of the play and the intensity of the crowd, made, he said, for the most fun he had had at a table tennis event.

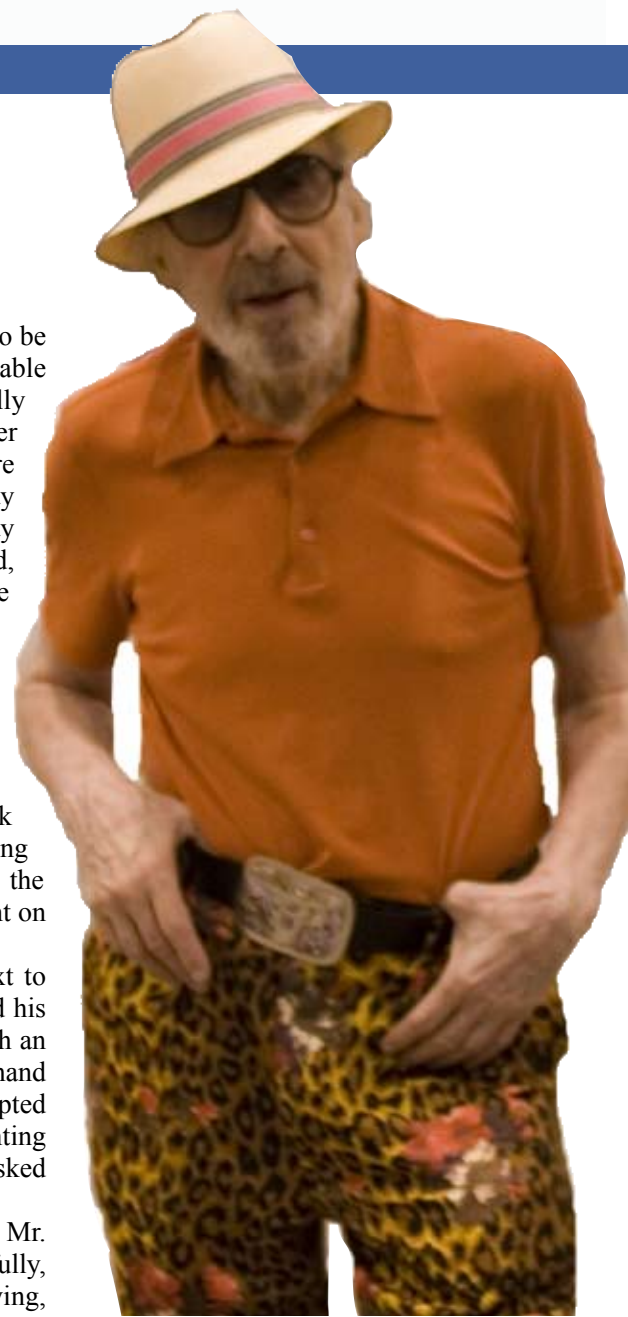
Many people present at the match thought the 77-year old Marty had probably bitten off more than he could chew—and it appeared early on that that might be the case, but Marty took the first game 21-16 and, catching his stride, took a 20-7 lead in the second game, which he then went on to win 21-14.

On the last point, on the next to last shot, Marty hit a ball behind his back, and then followed that with an explosive, match-winning forehand smash. At that, the crowd erupted with extended applause, chanting “Marty! Marty!” as Reisman basked in the glow of appreciation.

His 2563-rated opponent, Mr. Yokoyama, surrendered gracefully, congratulating Marty by saying, “You’re AWESOME!!”

After the match, many spectators approached Reisman to ask if they could take a picture with him, have his autograph, and shake his hand. “You know,” Marty said, “Kaz is far from a slouch—he is a major modern player—to think I could beat him, even with classic racquets ... many thought I must have gone insane. Perhaps—but to my way of thinking—the outcome was never in doubt.”

Classic Reisman!



**Marty Reisman has been one of the most recognizable personalities in American Table Tennis. He won the British Open in 1949 and won the US Open twice, in 1958 and 1960. He has had a colorful career that includes playing his style of classical hardbat table tennis all over the world.**

Top photo: Steve Hopkins, Lower photo: Alex Cardasis