

SOUTH BEND: Building Juniors

Dan Seemiller recently finished his tenth year as coach in South Bend, Indiana's table tennis club. During those ten years, South Bend has produced many top juniors. Recent program alumnus Mark Hazinski is the third rated Olympic eligible player in the country and in 2007 he represented the U.S. in both the Pan Am games and the World Championships. Current South Bend juniors include Joseph Cochran, the top junior qualifier at the US Junior Team trials and AJ Brewer, the top cadet qualifier to the World Junior Championships.

South Bend Juniors by Dan Seemiller

In 1996 I made the move from Pittsburgh, PA, to become the coach of the juniors in South Bend. It was not an easy decision moving my wife and two children out here and leaving family and my friends at the South

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Park Table Tennis Club.

South Bend impressed me because the focus was on the kids. Also, the previous coach, Victor Tolkachev, was a disciplinarian who instilled excellent fundamentals in these youngsters. When I visited in early 1996 there were 12 juniors who were all ready to move to the next level. I have found that it takes plenty of time and discipline to start a young player from scratch... to develop them into a player with excellent fundamentals. Victor had already done the ground work. I took the coaching position and I have enjoyed working with the juniors immensely. This job has allowed me to stay in the sport that I love and to use my experience as a player and coach so these youngsters can reach new heights.

Here are some of my rules as coach:

TEAM: We are a team and support each other. When one person does well it is a reflection of the team concept.

TRAINING: We play the right way, all the time. The idea is just to keep improving; not worry about results. Be prepared, focus, do your best. Results don't matter.

DISCIPLINE: I have suspended sev-

eral players and even removed players from the team who didn't buy into the team concept. They must support each other at all times. This means practice with lower players, and when not playing themselves they better be

SPORTSMANSHIP: Be a good sport. No whining, no excuses, be respectful of your opponent, etc...

RATINGS: My students are not permitted to discuss ratings or worry about them. Ratings are a distraction. Distractions take away focus. Mark, Joe, A.J., and Dan Jr. know I don't care about their rating, so why should they worry about it? I actually had to remove one player, who had great potential, from the team because he and his parents believed that the rating was a barometer for success.

Our training sessions run five days a week in the evenings from 5-8. We also play as many tournaments as possible because this is where we learn and gain valuable experience.

A special "Thank You" to my assistant coach, Mark Nordby. He has given of his time, energy and coaching expertise. He has helped our juniors make it to the next level.

Left Page: Dan Seemiller
Right Page: Top-Joe Cochran, Bottom Left- Joe Cochran and Coach Seemiller, Bottom Right- Mark Hazinski and AJ Brewer. Photos by Gang Li

Typical Training in South Bend

A typical training day for the South Bend Juniors would run three hours. During that time we have two 75-minute training sessions with a 10-minute break. The last 20 minutes are for game play, physical exercise, or something fun, like shooting baskets. The juniors are expected to do their physical training on their own time.

The duration of most drills are 7 to 10 minutes each. There are endless drills that we could do, but here are our top five:

1. **BACKHAND-MIDDLE-BACKHAND-FOREHAND:** Player A hits his backhand to Player B's backhand, then middle F.H., backhand again then wide forehand.

2. **RANDOM TOPSPIN:** Player A hits his backhand anywhere randomly to Player B and Player B Spins all the balls to A's backhand. In this drill Player B spins all forehands and if there is time, B also spins the backhand. If B is not in good position then B counters the backhand. This drill can also be done to the forehand.

3. **FOOTWORK DRILLS:** (a) in and out on the forehand and backhand. (b) Side to side one - one forehand. (c) Falkenberg drill - one backhand, step around the backhand corner for a forehand and then wide to the forehand.

4. **SERVICE DRILLS AND COMBINATIONS:** example: Player A serves short under, Player B either drops short on the forehand or cuts deep to the backhand. Player A either drops or flips the short forehand and backhand loops the deep cut to the backhand.

5. **MULTI-BALL:** Player A feeds multiple balls from a box and can simulate any drill.

We also discuss on a regular basis: ball placement, service patterns, new serves, psychology, blocking techniques, counterlooping, etc.

