



WEIXING ROLLS

AUSTRIA'S CHEN WEIXING LOST ONLY THREE GAMES OVER SIX MATCHES ON THE WAY TO HIS FIRST US OPEN CHAMPIONSHIP. OTHER TOP SEEDS, CRISAN AND KARAKASEVIC, FELL IN UPSETS.

LAS VEGAS, Nevada – In one of the strongest and deepest tournaments since 2005 (when the US Open was also an ITTF Pro Tour event), Chen Weixing of Austria (World No. 31) outlasted the field to claim the Men's Singles title. The Men's field included five 2008 Olympians, six players in the top 100 in the world, and 13 players with USATT ratings in excess of 2700.

Some of the other competitors included Adrian Crisan of Romania (World No. 21), three-time US Open Champion Aleksandar Karakasevic of Serbia (World No. 54), Jörg Rosskopf of Germany (World No. 55), Andrei Filimon of Romania (World No. 73), and Thomas Keinath of Slovakia (World No. 81).



(left) Patrick Baum, (center) Weixing Chen, (right) Thomas Keinath
Baum and Keinath photos by Steve Hopkins, Weixing photo (this page) by Diego Schaaf. Fireworks photo by Rob Trudell. Photos on right page by Steve Hopkins.

Thirty-five year old, Weixing is a defensive specialist who also features a devastating attack. The former Chinese team member, who immigrated to Austria in 2002, has had a World Ranking as high as No. 9 and has won a European Team Championship as well as two European Doubles Championships.

The top seed, Adrian Crisan, was disqualified in the fourth round for purposefully damaging his racket. Crisan, who was trailing to Germany's Patrick Baum at the time, apparently hoped to be granted permission to switch paddles.

Two-time defending champion, Aleksandar Karakasevic also fell in an early upset - losing to Shinnosuke Kihō of Japan in the Quarterfinals. Karakasevic arrived late to the



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match and with minimal warm-up found himself trailing three games to none. He rallied to win the next two games, but Kihō closed the match out with a win in the sixth game.

Thomas Keinath emerged from his side of the draw to meet Chen Weixing in the finals. Keinath had a hard fought battle with Kihō in the semifinals and a seven-game nail-biter with Patrick Baum in the quarterfinals. He may have benefitted from the two major upsets -- as he played Kihō and Baum instead of Crisan and Karakasevic along his road to the finals.

Weixing had been tested in the Semifinals as Jorg Rosskopf played him well -- mixing slow loops and soft chops with his strong attacks to move the chopping Weixing all over the arena. In the end, Weixing won the important points and advanced 4-1.

MEN'S FINAL

Chen Weixing v. Thomas Keinath

Not exactly a chopper and not exactly an attacker, Weixing Chen balances components of both styles. In this match, his service returns were normally a flip with a little sidespin. He then either attacked (with lightning fast footwork and a long forehand stroke) or he backed up with the ball and played a chop (often moving to his right to allow for a backhand chop).

Unlike Rosskopf in the semifinals, Keinath chose to aggressively press the pace and attack Weixing. The strategy appeared to play right into Weixing's strength as he kept the ball in play and forced mistake after mistake from Keinath. As the points rolled on, Keinath was never able to gain momentum or win a series of points in a row. There were certainly strong points and highlights on both sides, but Weixing was in control from the beginning -- winning in straight games at 5,7,5,7.

WOMEN'S FINAL

The USA's Gao Jun and Xia Lian Ni of Luxembourg were the top seeds in Women's Singles. Gao Jun was pushed in the Quarterfinals by NingYang Dai of China -- a seven game test that was tight throughout. Xia Lian Ni cruised through her draw without ever being pushed to a seventh game.

Gao Jun defeated Fuduan Li of China in the Semifinals. Gao Jun won the first three games, lost the fourth, and then closed out the match in the fifth. Fuduan Li was the aggressor for the entire match mixing up her left-handed serves to Gao Jun's forehand. The styles and approach were very different with Fuduan taking the first long ball and hitting driving loops and Gao picking the ball up early and blocking sharply and deeply from corner to corner. Balls to Fuduan's backhand often resulted in a sharp flat hit. Her forehand continued to attack Gao's backhand, but were repeatedly blocked sharply. Fuduan lead late in both the first and second games but Gao seemed in control and always won the late points. 11-9, 11-9 were the first two game scores. The third game was all Gao with sharp strikes moving Fuduan left and right. In the fourth game, Fuduan clearly came out with the intent to move Gao left and right and she pulled out a close game. However, Gao was dominant in the final game and closed out the match.

Xia Lian Ni joined Gao Jun in the Finals after defeating Ying Lu. Ying Lu attacked Xia Lian Ni with a forehand loop that seemed to come from her whole body -- with two long steps beginning the loop and a follow through that brought her whole body forward several feet. Both players are left handed and much of the match centered on their footwork stepping around their backhand to finish points



Women's Champion Gao Jun

with their forehand. Ying Lu's forehand - an all-out loop drive... and Xia Lian Ni's forehand a sharp cover of the ball immediately after the bounce. Early in the match, the Ying Lu loop worked well, trading points with Xia Lian Ni. After the fourth game, the players were tied 2-2 (and each had scored exactly 40 points). By the middle of the fifth game, Ying Lu began to look more sluggish on her forehand loops with her legs seeming to tire. As her body slowed, her loop slowed. At the same time, Xia Lian Ni became stronger and stronger winning the fifth game and then dominating the sixth and final game.

The Finals was a battle of classically trained, right-handed, pips-out pen-holders. The pace of each aspect of their games from serves to attacks to blocks was a near mirror image as they traded fast serves, carefully placed blocks, and countered each other's smashes with their own. In the end, Gao Jun had more energy and better execution closing out the match 4-1.



Chen Weixing, and Thomas Keinath

CRISAN CONTROVERSY

Top Seed, Adrian Crisan (World No. 21) lost in the fourth round to Germany's Patrick Baum. The match was tied 1-1 with Baum dominating the third game. As the game progressed, Crisan became more and more bothered with the performance of his paddle. He scraped the paddle on the corner of the table and then asked the Umpire for permission to change it. The damage was purposeful, so permission was denied. The damage made the paddle unplayable so Tournament Referee Wendell Dillon issued a red card and disqualified him from the match.

The entire episode was reminiscent of the Schlager/Boll European Championship match of 2003 where Schlager purposefully damaged his paddle on the table and was disqualified. Boll went on to win the Championship.



JUNIOR EVENTS

JUNIOR AND CADET BOYS

India's Sathiyna Ganasekaran cruised through the Junior Boy's Event at the US Open. He lost two games in six matches and won both the final and semifinal in straight games. Perhaps the best match of the event was Ganasekaran against Don James Alto of California in the round of 16. The two players traded points for two games with Ganasekaran winning the first 11-9 and Alto winning the second 11-13. Then Alto pulled away in the third game, winning at 6. However, Ganasekaran found his composure and dominated the final two games to continue his run— not losing another game in the event. Ganasekaran continued his great tournament with a run in the Open that didn't end until losing to eventual champion Weixing Chen in the round of 16. The second place finisher was Shubham Sharma— also from India. Sharma's path to the finals was anything but smooth, losing at least one game in all but one of his matches and including a five-game battle with Alex Wang of Texas that could have gone either way (-7,10,-9,8,-9).

In the Cadet Boy's Singles, Puerto Rico's Daniel Gonzalez outlasted Alex Yao in the semifinal (3-2) and Michael Landers in the final (3-2). Puerto Rico also claimed the Boys' 11 and Under title when Bryan Afanador defeated Californian Ethan Chu 3-2. The Boys' 9 and Under was an all-California final with Kanak Jha facing Krishnateja Avvari. Avvari won in straight games (9,7,8).

JUNIOR AND CADET GIRLS

China's FuQuan Li dominated the Junior Girls' Event at the US Open. She won six matches and didn't lose a single game. She then continued her strong tournament in the Women's Open defeating Biba Golic, Korea's Kyung Ha Kim, and Japan's Satoko Kishida before falling to Gao Jun in the quarterfinals.

The other finalist in the Junior Girls' was Anne Deng who defeated Tina Truong, Sanya Sehgal of India, Cynthia Gonzales of Puerto Rico, and Yihua Yin of China before falling to Li.

Anne Deng also had a strong showing in the Cadet Girls', this time losing to Sheng Xu of China in the final. In the Girls' 13 and under, China's Yihua Yin defeated Ellen Hwang of California 3-0. In the Girls' 11 and Under, Leanne Lee outlasted Camille Tremblay 3-2 in the opening round and then defeated Emily Zhao in the final. The Girls' 9 and Under champion was Heidi Kim.



Anthony Chu photo by Marissa Feliciano, Felici Photography

Sathiyna's Great Performance

by Bruce Liu

Among the list of those players who advanced to the round of 16 in the Men's Open, there is a relatively unknown player from India— probably the shortest (5'4"), the lightest (94lbs) and the youngest (15), too. His name is Sathiyna Ganasekaran and he is a member of the India cadet team.

Sathiyna may look small but his game is huge. Not only did he make it out of the preliminary round robin, but he upset Stefan Feth (2690) in the first round from down 1-3. Some people thought it might have been a fluke but he beat his next opponent Zolt Sel (2637) from Serbia 4-0!

The overall second seed Weixing Chen ended his incredible run. Chen was probably a bit surprised by Sathiyna's size and was trailing 1:5 in the first game before coming back to win the game and the match. Nevertheless, Sathiyna's great performance made him arguably the most appealing player of the tournament.



Sathiyna Ganasekaran photo by Steve Hopkins

US Open Notes

U-2600 Singles: Seemiller

One of the best runs of the 2008 US Open was that of Dan Seemiller in the Under 2600 Singles event. There was a strong field of contenders for the U-2600 title. Ying Lu, the top seed at 2587, and Jeff Lin Huang at 2585 were the top two seeds. Also, Steven Wang (2572), Dan Seemiller (2527), Adam Hugh (2495), Alfred Najem (2477), and Hector Berrios (2443).

In the round of 16, Jeff Huang just got by Collegiate champion Alfred Najem 11-9 in game five. Adam Hugh took out John Leach 3-1, Seemiller over Jackie Lee 3-0, and Berrios over Shao Yu 3-1.

In the quarterfinals, Ying Lu won 3-2 over Kim-Kyung Ha. Berrios who has been training in Sweden, won against the defending champ, Adam Hugh, 3-1. Seemiller took Jeff Lin Huang 3-2. Seemiller had trailed 1-0 and 9-4 but came back to tie the match 1-1. In the fifth, Huang led 7-5 but Seemiller scored five in a row to clinch it 3-2. Stephen Wang also advanced to the semifinals. Ying Lu, a lefty penhold with excellent serves and an uncanny ability to block, just got by NATT San Diego winner Stephen Wang 13-11 in the fifth. Seemiller, meanwhile, defeated Berrios 11-1 in the first game using his anti-spin well against the Puerto Rican attacker. But anti play makes Seemiller passive and Berrios won the next two games and lead 8-5 in gamefour. Seemiller rallied just in time to win game 4, 13-11, and easily takes game 5, 11-5, to move on to the final to face Ying Lu.

In the final, Seemiller won the first 14-12 but was down 9-4 in game two. Seemiller took some chances and won 12-10 to go up 2-0. In game three, Seemiller lead 7-6 but Ying's block was getting steadier and Seemiller started to miss his loops. Games three and four go to Ying. In game five Seemiller lead 5-2 and 7-4 but Ying races back to an 8-7 lead. Seemiller settled down to achieve match point at 10-9. He missed a makeable forehand loop. Ying got her own match point 11-10 but Seemiller held serve to deuce then counterlooped to go up 12-11. A nifty anti block that Ying misses and Seemiller won three games to two. Dan Seemiller, after being down in each of his last three matches, emerges as the U-2600 Champion.



Dan Seemiller photo by Rob Trudell

JiaQu Zheng: A Run of Her Own

by Bruce Liu

The former Beijing player, JiaQu Zheng, who currently lives in San Jose, CA had a great tournament. She won the U21 Women's event by upsetting Yao Tong of China (2562) 4-2 in the final. She also upset another Chinese player, Liu Juan (2696), 4-3 in the eighths in the Women's Open. Her fantastic run was ended in the semifinals by yet another Chinese player-- Lu Ying (2587) who currently lives in Philadelphia.

Lu Ying and JiqQi Zheng are both penholders. The difference is that Lu only uses smooth rubber on one side and JiaQi uses short-pips on the forehand side and smooth on the backhand side.

Lu Ying also had a good tournament in the U2600 semifinal, Lu beat California's Steven Wang (2572) but lost to Danny Seemiller deuce in the seventh in the final.

In the first two games, Lu was unstoppable. Although JiaQi's defense was also great, Lu's excellent footworks helped her chasing down everything that JiaQi put back on the table. It seemed that Lu was in command. However, JiaQi did not agree. She turned the table completely winning the next three games – one game was down 1:7! Now Lu was in trouble. However, she found her form back in the game six to avoid being eliminated. Lu maintained a comfortable lead in the 7th. At 6:1, Lu's leading, JiaQi mounted a tremendous comeback to tie the decisive game at deuce. Now, the match is up in the air for grasps. Lu was not going to let it happen though. She won the last two points and earned herself a ticket to the seme-final. Both JiaQi and Lu Ying earned lots of applause. Great match!

Karakasevic Wins Another Title: Men's Doubles

Though clearly not the title the two-time defending Singles champion was seeking, Aleksandar Karakasevic teamed with Zolt Sel to defeat the team of Joerg Rosskopf and Thomas Keinath. The match was not marked by changing tactics or momentum changes. The teams were pretty evenly matched and both sides were very careful to play standard points with primarily short underspin serves followed by carefully placed flips and then a series of driving loops from both sides. Keinath was the only right handed player of the four— though Karakasevic's dominating backhand often had him playing like a right handed player (moving to his right to set up his big shots). Most of the points included four to six exchanges. Both teams traded points throughout. In the end, Karakasevic and Sel managed to avoid mistakes late in the games... winning 4 to 1.



photo by Steve Hopkins

2008 US Open Over 30-and-up Age Events

By Tim Boggan

Men’s Over 30

The 50-entry Men’s Over 30’s was won by the #1 seed, Defending Champion Gao YanJun (rated 2660), who didn’t lose a game en route to taking the (\$300) first-prize from (\$150) runner-up Tahl Leibovitz. After playing in German leagues for nine years, four of them in the formidable Second Division, YanJun came to New York as a training partner for Wang Chen. On the no pips advice of his brother or whoever else had been coaching him, he’s always used inverted rubber on both sides of his racket, and has obviously done pretty well.

The 30’s match that drew the most attention, however, was Leibovitz’s five-game semi’s with Shao Yu—primarily because a spectator shouting for Tahl at the top of his lungs, point after point, brought an ever-increasing crowd to the match. Of course Tahl himself, with his dramatic home-made strokes and exclamatory asides, is always uniquely entertaining. Begin to watch him and you see him, a la Ma Lin, fast-flipping the sides of his racket as he awaits serve. In the first game, which he wins, he’s down 4-1, up 8-5. In the second he’s down 4-1 again, this time dropping his racket, and, down 7-1, dropping it again, whereupon the noisy spectator, as if fearing a permanent melt-down, is shouting desperately, “No, no, Tahl. C’mon! Let’s go!” Meanwhile, Tahl’s Coach Sean O’Neill is calmly taking notes. One game each.

In the third, Leibovitz gets off to a rousing start—wristy, modified-Kreangasque backhands go in, as does a smooth switch-hands loop, followed by a lob-edge. Tahl is up 8-3...10-5. At 10-8 Sean calls Time, and when the players return, Shao pushes his serve return into the bottom of the net. But if the SCREAMING spectator, furiously clapping, is getting on his nerves, as I think he must, Shao keeps his poise, face impassive. In the fourth, after Tahl leads 4-2, Shao calls Time—only it doesn’t seem to help, he’s behind 6-4. But then he scores seven straight, runs out the game!

In the fifth, though, there’s a turnabout. “YEAH!” roars Tahl’s #1 fan as his man goes up 2-0. “YEAH!”...”YEAH!” Tahl’s up 4-0. But Shao fights back—he flips one in, and Tahl’s racket drops. “YOU ARE THE BEST, TAHL!” comes the thought-needed reassuring scream in response to the now 7-7 tied-up game. Tahl adds insult to injury with a closing edge. After the match, Sean, Tahl, Mitch Seidenfeld, and former Philippine Champion Ernesto Ebuen discuss Tahl’s strategy against Gao. The discussion will help him to a game but gameless 30 points.

Women’s Over 30/40

In the one 30’s semi’s, the letters in Elmira Zainabudinova’s last name indicated how many points she got against Gao Jun; and in the other, Tawny Banh gave up an even dozen to Hyeon Young Bhoo—“I like to play penholders with long pips and no reverse backhand,” Tawny said. Bhoo had played for a South Korean University Team, then had graduated to marriage and two sons and had come to the States where her husband Seong Hee earned his Ph.D. He’s now an Associate Professor in the Department of Genetic Engineering at South Korea’s Kyung Hee University, and is here on a 2008 sabbatical. In the final, Tawny put up strong 11-9-in-the-fourth resistance against Gao, but felt the about-to-be Women’s Open Champ with a bit of a recurrent cough wasn’t at her best. Still, even a weakened Gao’s ball is “weird”—lots of not only heavy underspin but variations of spin, and of course she’s good at serving short and receiving well too.

Bhoo was able to take the Women’s 40’s final quite easily from Charlene Xiaoying who in allowing herself to be blanked in the third game, seemed to be making the statement, “I don’t like long pips! I don’t want to be part of any match in which they’re used!”

Men’s Over 40

There was a complete 64-draw in the Men’s Over 40. Defending Champion Cheng (“Chen”) Yinghua advanced to his semi’s giving up less than six points a game, with only Maximo Vasquez reaching double figures against him. Last year’s finalist, Danny Seemiller advanced to his semi’s giving up on the average four points a game. We’ll see in a moment if a replay with Chen is coming up. In the top half of the draw, Stanley Tang downed Steve Downing 15-13 in the fourth, then squeaked out a 13-11-in-the-fifth win over Vladimir Altman. Xuan Liu, winner in the Under 4200 Doubles with Rudy Miranda after surviving three five-game matches, got off to a decisive start in the fifth to take Eddie Bertin.. And Sakda Timsuwan with his long pips played one gutsy five-gamer after another. Down went Don Hayes. Down went Parviz Mojaverian (Parviz, up two match points, 10-9 and 11-10 in the fifth, said he should have known better, but was simply hoping Sakda would make an error, only he didn’t). And down went Alireza Hejazi who Timsuwan felt played much the same style as Parviz—which wasn’t surprising since years ago they were together on the Iranian National Team.

In the bottom half of the draw there were more good matches. Henry Hu got by Spain-based Barry Meisel, 15-13 in the fourth; India’s Ramachandran Hari cut down Seidenfeld, 14-12 in the fifth; and Atanda Musa reached the semi’s and Seemiller by stopping Barry Dattel, 7, -11, 9, 7. Danny had won

the 2600’s—over Lin Jeff Huang, 11-9 in the fourth; over Puerto Rico’s Hector Barrios (from 2-1 down and 12-all in the fourth); and over Ying Lu in five (by winning three deuce games)—so he was on a roll. When Danny won the third game from Atanda, 13-11, to go 2-1 up, it looked like he couldn’t be stopped from winning the close ones.

But though Danny considered Musa’s serves weak, he had some trouble with them. Also, he always had to be careful to keep the ball away from Atanda’s powerful forehand—though in doing that he was faced with his opponent’s very steady blocks. Up 9-8 in the fourth, Danny, perfectly anticipated Musa’s on the run loop and was there to block it for what would have brought him to match point, but the ball agonizingly hung on the net then dropped back on Danny’s side of the table. On into the fifth...and now Danny, up 9-6 was lookin’ good (except that was the same lead you can bet he remembered he had, but couldn’t hold, in the June Meiklejohn final he lost to Khoa Nguyen). Then...deuce.

Up 12-11, Danny push-returned perfectly, Atanda flipped it late, and the gods gave him a net/edge. After a thrillingly extended 13-all point, allowing Seemiller another ad and an opportunity to win the match, he made what he said was his “biggest mistake”—he called “Time.” The 14-13 moment was wasted. Coming back to the table, he didn’t have a serve firmly in mind, and Musa scored with a flip to Danny’s wide forehand. At 14-all Danny dove to return a ball, and lofted it table-ward high. But although many thought he had time to scramble back up, he just lay there. Then, down 15-14, he ran out of patience, and gave Atanda a risky side-top serve—nope, not his best choice, match to Musa.

For winning the 2600’s and gaining the semi’s of the 40’s, Danny’s prize money was \$375, much less than the \$500 Bhoo got at the Meiklejohn for just winning the Women’s Over 40. “Such little prize money in the U.S. Open for our home-grown players—it’s disgusting,” said Danny, as if ready to reprise his picketing role in the 1976 U.S. Open.

Musa went on in the final to get pushed around a little by Chen whose backhand loop to Musa’s backhand was strong enough to keep Atanda from forehand challenging for three of the four games.

Men’s Under 1800 Over 40

In the popular 68-entry Men’s Under 1800 Over 40, Ohio’s Jim Zimmerman, just retired at 65, thought he’d take a vacation and combine it with, what the hell, some play in the tournament. He wasn’t one of the 17 round robin seeds, but he did just fine. In the final he met Henry Blankenship who plays at the Las Vegas Club, and though for the first two games Henry blasted and jabbed one-ballers in, suddenly Jim’s steady long-pips play cooled Henry off and Jim won the last three games without a struggle.

Men’s Over 40 Doubles

The 40 Doubles winners, Barry Dattel and Lim Ming Chui, didn’t lose a game. But the big match in this event saw runner-ups Santos Shih and Stanley Tang score a five-game win over an almost unnoticed Chen Longcan (2794) and his partner Xuan Liu (1992). You remember China’s Chen Longcan, right? Almost a quarter of a century ago he was the World Men’s Singles runner-up to Jiang Jialiang, and in 1987 the World Men’s Doubles Champion with Wei Qingguang. Alan Williams did a great job as Finals Night announcer, but no one was alert enough to make Chen’s presence known so Alan could have him take a bow.

Men’s Over 50

Chen Yinghua didn’t drop a game in winning the Men’s Over 50’s. But in his top half of the draw there were some exciting matches. Francis Guidace (1797) upset California Hall of Famer Bill Ukapatayasakul (2072) in five. Santos Shih knocked off Hejazi, 11-8 in the fifth. Against Yutaka Takahashi Ron Von Schim-melan opened and closed with 12-10 games. And Lim Ming Chui, though losing 13-11 and 15-13 games to Duc Loi, advanced to Chen and a three-game score it’s best I don’t mention here. Duc wasn’t happy that he had to give up his now illegal long-pips racket, but somebody was telling me that if you treat the new rubber with oil, it will have much the same effect as the old, and, ha, ha, there’s no machine in the States YET to check the legality of it.

On the other, Barry Dattel side of the draw, I’ll quickly mention Homer Brown who lost in five to Kazuhiro Kamada yet was a winner in attending his 40th straight U.S. Open—an unparalleled feat of showmanship worthy, I would hope, of a sponsor savvy enough to exploit it. Ah, how symmetrically-chained the players were in this section. Raphael Francois beat Rodel Valdoria, 16-14 in the fifth...Mark Johnson, from down 2-0 then beat Valdoria, 11-8 in the fifth... Jian Zhuang then beat Johnson, 11-9 in the fifth...and finalist Dattel then beat Zhuang, 11-8 in the fifth.

Men’s Over 50 Doubles

Danny Seemiller/ Dave Sakai, losing the first but turning the match around with a 12-10 win in the second (after being down 10-7), advanced to the final over Chui/Dattel. Seemiller had been following a morning routine of running/walking (“Maybe 100 days in a row so far”) and his stamina showed to his mid-fifties advantage. Acrobatically returning balls, Danny, during one point, twice—this way, that way—ran the length of the court making returns much to the spectators’ delight. Meanwhile, Chen Yinghua (2647) and his pressured

partner Julian Waters (1925), after a shaky start against James Rautis/Meredith Elston, reached the final with a win over Richard Hicks/Hank McCoullum who’d been 4, 9, -12, 9 tested by Takahashi/Kamada. Hank was recovering from pulmonary embolisms (clots), and when his doctor said that playing a little ping-pong wouldn’t present any problems, Hank clued him in, whereupon the doc advised, “Well, take it easy.”

The give-and-take final, where any temporizing shot proved fatal, was won by Seemiller/Sakai. Danny and Dave rallied from 7-3 down to take the first game, 11-9, but then blew a 9-4 lead in the second. In the third, from 7-all Seemiller scored on two strong loops, but then he whiffed an easy ball...and it was 10-all. Julian got in a winner (he must have had a partnership understanding that he couldn’t play passively), but then—his shot selection was often understandably suspect—he tried unsuccessfully to hit in the serve, and he and Cheng eventually lost that game. In the decider, Danny’s returns to Julian’s far forehand proved very effective, and the Seemiller team came back from 9-7 down to win the decider 13-11.

Women’s Over 50/60

At the Meiklejohn Bella Livshin won \$300 for the Women’s Over 50’s. Here for beating arch-rival Charlene Xiaoying in 4 in the final she got an A. Bella, who loves teaching table tennis, knows what that means—A stands for Award, not money. Cheered on by a supportive California crowd, Bella’s steadiness prevailed over Charlene’s. “It was my turn to win,” she said. Uh, when was it Charlene’s?

In the Women’s Over 60’s, Gail Kendall, who’d taken two weeks off work to practice four hours a day at Coach Liu’s N.Y. Club, won a tough five-gamer over Spanish/Portuguese teacher Millie Drake—but, alas, Gail didn’t get an A. She lost to Chiyako Suzuki, the winner over Harriet Brin who’d advanced in five over a familiar opponent, Judy Semenza. Though Chiyako had come from Japan to the U.S. 35 years ago, her marriage and two sons kept her away from competition until just four years ago. Now she was a U.S. Open Champion.

Men’s Over 60

In the top half of the draw, both eight-time Over 60’s finalist Dick Hicks, and the #1 seed, Changping Duan (2225), were in for an unpleasant surprise. One, Jong Hyun Hong, reached the semi’s by beating them both in five games. Turns out this Hong, born in 1946, was once South Korean National Champion, and then the National Team Coach when Yoo Nam Kyu won the 1988 Olympics in Seoul. They share the same penhold inverted play. Hicks who stubbornly 12-10 won the fourth from Hong, then was the start-off net-edge victim of Chance, said that Hong with soft returns invited him to hit, but when Dick did, Hong placed his returns perfectly. Chanping, suddenly gaining momentum by winning the third, 11-7, and the fourth 11-2, appeared ready to take his match against Hong, but then fell behind in the fifth and couldn’t recover.

In the companion quarter’s, in early round matches, Harlan Jamison won in five from Jerry Tenenbaum, then lost in five to Martin Sundel. Canada’s Chang Po, bringing with him, as one opponent said, a “ridiculous” ringer’s rating (1734), knocked out Duc Loi (2192) and Ron Von Schimmelman (1973), then continued to play bad man against Jiri Hlava (2164), falling, after his patented down-the-line backhand to his opponent’s forehand had brought him to 9-all in the fifth, just short of upsetting him too. Hlava’s win over Po put him up against Hong—and down he went, 3-0. Oh, but wait... the match didn’t count, Hong had yet to play Duan in the quarter’s. Then, on beating Changping, he faced Hlava again, this time in the semi’s, and Jiri beat him 12-10 in the fourth. How’d that happen? Well, Hong in blocking seems to catch the ball higher than most players, then jabs down and through, and makes, as Hlava said, “amazing placements.” So Jiri knew he had to try to raise his game, be aggressive. Up match point in the fourth, he called Time, then gave Hong a surprise short serve to the forehand that won him the match and moved him into the final.

In the bottom half of the draw, the Defending Champion, Germany’s Karl-Josef Assenmacher, who for 16 years had been the well-known Bundesliga National Referee for football (soccer), had knee trouble and so had to default. In history-laden matches, famous U.S. players coming back to play after decades went at it—with Errol Resek 10, 11, 6 defeating Bobby Fields. But if, as someone remarked, Bobby’s too tense, Errol too relaxed, that left Dave Sakai to advance out of their section? Yes, but it was as if he tried not to. Though Errol had been having trouble with Dave’s serves, he got a break when in the end-game fourth Dave served off. Still Sakai prevailed to reach the semi’s where he went down in four to Alireza Hijazi.

In the companion quarter’s, it doesn’t seem possible, but Chui, after leading Bill Ukapatayasakul (Bill “U”), 21-3, 21-2, and, he says, 6-1 in the 3rd...didn’t win the match. Meantime, disaster had almost befallen Hijazi at the hands of Jim McQueen’s changing persona: Uncle Sam in the Hat helped by a how-to-play-him hint from Hlava had Ali down 9-6 in the fifth...but Jim didn’t win. Ali, who this tournament had experimented with a new blade and new rubber and was missing his usual control, fell 2, 10, 9 in the final to Jiri.

Men’s Over 60 Doubles

McQueen may have played a Dr. Seuss character off court, but paired with

Duc Loi in the 60 Doubles he couldn’t have been more serious. They beat Billy Neely/Ray Fahlstrom 11-9 in the fifth, then reached the final via a win (from down 2-0 and 9-all in the third) over Sakai/Resek. Dave wanted Errol on receiving serve to spin forehands, but Errol said he would have been more comfortable taking those balls with his backhand. The #1 seeds, Hlava/Chui, after rallying against Bill U/Dick Hicks (Dick felt after this tournament he was having a very strange up and down year), were able to quell a 3, 4, -9, 11 McQueen/Loi come-back attempt and so took the title and dinner money.

Over 65

The 65 round robins produced some close play. Ray Filz, who’s replaced his long pips with a less effective anti, nevertheless played well enough to beat Marv Karno in five and then squeak by Earl Scott, 12-10 in the fifth. Norm Bass stopped Odo Wang in five. And Sammy Liang, after toppling Andy Phan, 11-8 in the fifth, had everyone abuzz with his 2-0 lead over Hicks. It didn’t hold up though (Sammy was down 7-0 in the fifth after Dick with a wink said, “I changed my strategy”). But in the next round it was Dick who didn’t hold up, despite having kept in shape either by playing table tennis or walking briskly with hand weights five times a week. Bill U beat him—first, by getting a key forehand in at 10-all in the third, then watching Dick soar a backhand three feet off the table that put Bill up 2-1. In the fourth, though, Dick undeterred, scored with a backhand to 11-9 stay alive. But, ohh, in the fifth, who would believe it—steady defender Hicks down 8-0. Talk about strange ups and downs!

Resek, meanwhile, in real life a safety inspector at a construction company, got just enough smooth strokes safely through Fields to meet U in the final. Though winning a game, Bill had a lot of trouble with Errol’s serves, and ended up down 2-1 and down 9-0 in the 4th.

Over 70 Singles/Doubles

Over 70’s round robin play saw Dick Peregrine with some hand-wringing get by Marty Theil, 11-9 in the fifth, before losing to Gayle Wickerd. All eyes had to be on 2006 Champion Billy Neely, for he was 2-1 down and at 10-all in the fourth against Dean Johnson, and even went five with Bill Brin, before advancing to meet last year’s runner-up Jack Howard. The two-time U.S. Open Men’s finalist (beaten both in 1968 and 1972 by six-time U.S. Champion Dal-Joon Lee) moved from down 2-0 to winning the third 12-10, the fourth 11-3, as Neely lost patience and focus. But as bad as Billy played in the fourth, as well did he play in the fifth, and won 11-2 going away.

Billy’s next opponent, Ray Fahlstrom, had recently been in Sweden on a six weeks vacation, and at Upsala University had played players with all sorts of different rubbers. Ray’s wife Nancy who accompanied him, sat and watched and listened to the men’s table talk, it seemed for hours, days, weeks, and so could later say dryly to me, “My Swedish is improving.” Neely’s switch from Inferno to Hallmark rubber and the absence now of racket-reversing spin, demanded from him an adjustment he was not ready for, and he went down docilely to Ray in straight games. By now Hicks was in an “up” zone, had Sammy Liang’s number, and Ray’s too, so swept through without losing a game. Paired with Jerry Marcum he did the same in 70 Doubles, blanking Defending Champs Fahlstrom and Neely.

Over 75 Singles

In round robin 75 play, 2006 finalist Dick Peregrine was upset by Rudy Hartmann, and by Al Miller, 12-10 in the fourth. Al also needed every extended bit of his unique elongated racket to reach for and secure a -8, 9, -7, 9, 10 win over Hartmann who last summer spent two months in Germany where he took table tennis lessons from a coach in Dusseldorf. In his spare time Rudy’s an inventor and has a patent for a computer that’s not stationary but rises—this so that one can recline, neck comfortable, as he works the keys. Miller then got to the final by beating British Columbia’s Art Ngai who remembers me playing in Toronto in 1952. He himself played for Canada in the International Matches and went the full three games with U.S. Hall of Famer Johnny Somael. In 1954, he beat Bobby Gusikoff, later to win two U.S. Opens. Though taking anti-oxidants for macular degeneration and cataract problems, he saw well enough, played well enough with his tackiness and extended handle to 9, 10, 10 nip Dean Johnson before being unable to control the ball against Miller. In the final, Al put up 12-10 in the fourth resistance, but Billy kept his serves short, and so scored his fifth U.S. Open Championship in just the last two years.

Over 80 Singles

In the 75’s, Hall of Famer Si Wasserman (1344) had lost a tough match—12-10 in the fifth (on an edge ball after being down 10-7) to Frank Suran (1527). Now, as runner-up in the 80’s, he dropped another five-gamer (up 2-1, he tired) to the winner, Mac Horn (1627), who keeps fit by playing three times a week at his El Paso Club. Of course Si’s presence is not only felt on court, but pre-eminently off-court as he, Steve Isaacson, Danny Seemiller, and the nation’s top juniors continue to prepare for the big Nate Wasserman Junior Scholarship prize-money tournament to be held in November at the Highland, Indiana Open. Thanks again to Si for his \$100,000 contribution, and to Steve for the work he’s already put in to make this annual prestigious tournament happen.



2008 U.S. Open Hardbat Events

By Tim Boggan

Hardbat Singles/Doubles

When in Group 1 Defending Champion Freddie Gabriel didn't show, 69-year-old paralympian Norm Bass, with a single win over Alaska's Andy Hutzel, went right on out to the semi's to accept a \$50 check. There he met last year's finalist Loc Ngo (2393), the Group 3 winner, who'd advanced over Errol Resek. (1936). When in Group 2 Tahl Leibovitz (2441) defaulted, Bob Palgon, besting Dean Norman, reached the semi's and last year's Under-2400 finalist Trevor Runyan (2271), Group 4 advancer over Bong Geun Kim and Ed Ball.

Palgon, during his 14-to-18-year old youth, played nightly at Marty Reisman's New York City Club, and when he asked Reisman to give him lessons, the Maestro replied, "Look, I can't coach you. Just copy me." Then the sponge came in, and Bob quit. Forty-six years later, he and his wife were in Reno where there happened to be a table tennis tournament. His wife said, "Why don't you go check it out? Maybe someone will remember you." Bob did and found a kindred soul, USATT film archivist Scott Gordon who not only knew about New Yorkers of past eras, but was a hardbat player. "You gotta play again," said Scott, and Bob did, emerging with a rating of 829. That was two years ago. Bob's better now.

Group 5 saw Gordon and Lim Ming Chui battling it out—with Scott on a six-point run edging ahead of Ming in their third and final game, only to suddenly go south. That brought Chui to Runyan whose mantra, reinforced by shadow-strokes, was "Keep the racket open." Ming is classified as a disabled player because of his "locked" backhand—and with that infirmity, he says, he can't beat the other good hardbatters. "If all I can do on my backhand is place the ball, I can't win the point. Trevor follows his serves well, and if I drop short balls he comes in and kills them."

In the one semi, Loc had no problem with the steady but arthritic Bass 500 points behind him in the ratings. In the other semi, however, Palgon, now 66, gave the 17-year-old Bay area college student Runyan a -15, 17, -18, -11 match. But first Palgon had to clear his racket with the umpire. Four pips were missing. "That's borderline," said the umpire and went off to check with his colleagues. O.K.—but if one more pip would have been missing...what then? Never mind, Trevor's forehand was too strong for Bob and getting stronger at the end.

In the first game of the final, Loc got off to a 4-0 start but Runyan im-

mediately caught him. Soon Trevor began sticking out his playing arm like a sign-post and looking at his paddle, as if urging it to go the right way. Which it did, easing him to a 21-14 win from 12-all, while Loc refused to swing hard at anything. In the second game, Loc again took an early lead, built it up to 7-2, then went 11-8 down. At 18-all, there was an uncharacteristically slow forehand exchange, won by Loc who increased his advantage to 20-18. But Trevor rose to the occasion. He banged in a serve return to get to deuce, then scored on a serve and follow, then won it when Loc erred.

Jack Howard watching Trevor's play approvingly from the sidelines said, "Correct strokes work." Often Runyan would play soft to Loc's backhand and hit hard to his wide forehand. In the third and final game, Loc rallied from 19-15 down to 19-18, but Trevor called Time and Loc's rally stopped. Shaking his head at the finish, he said, "I have no energy, no strength. I'm not getting enough sleep." That certainly seemed true, for throughout he appeared content to just place the ball rather than play aggressively.

Runyan, who picked up the \$150 first-place Singles prize, and if his long-rumored match with Reisman ever comes about might pick up a lot more, says he only plays Hardbat at the U.S. Open and Closed. He didn't enter the Doubles, but Loc did—and he and Scott Gordon won in straight games from Hutzel and Palgon.

Hardbat Over 40

In the top half of the Over 40's draw, there were two minor upsets. Hermann Luechinger 2-1 defeated cartoonist Dean Norman, and Ed Ball 2-1 eliminated Dean Johnson who's been turning out a series of classy specialty books on USATT Hall of Famers. Both, as expected, were beaten convincingly by Loc Ngo on his way to the final. In the bottom half, Hutzel 2-1 stopped Anthony Cavasos before dropping a quarter's match to Gordon. Palgon, who plays regularly at the India Community Center in Milpitas, tells me that in two-week, three-session summer camps, the Center's Rajul Sheth has 300 kids playing table tennis. Bob himself has the stamina of a kid, can play for hours, just like Chui, and, surprise, in his quarter's match with Ming, matched him point for point right up to 19-all in the third...Then a mis-serve cost Bob the match. In the battle-of-lefties final, Chui, though down 2-0, had a chance to start a comeback in the third against Loc, but couldn't win the deuce game he needed.

Hardbat Under 2000

Since Victor Lorand, the 2006 and 2007 U-2000 winner didn't enter this year, there'd be a new Champ. The ubiquitous Palgon came out of his round robin by beating Scott Kressner in three, and was joined by Ed Ball who 30 years ago helped Bobby Gusikoff run his California Club when he was preparing to hold his 1977 U.S. Open. Palgon was used to throwing his serve ball up from his fingertips and when the umpire had him move the ball to his outstretched palm it threw his timing off a little. As for Ed, he just did what he pretty much usually does—yoga stretches or splits in between games. Perhaps it was in this final that Ed asked Scott Gordon to please get him some water. Scott responded obligingly with, "You want some of that Virgil's you gave me?" (That's the name of Reed's Original Ginger Beer Ed's always supplying everyone with.) Such considerateness got Scott his first ever yellow card. The umpire noted that before the match Scott hadn't designated himself as Ed's coach, corner-man, drink-purveyor, whatever. Because of, or despite, such distractions, Ed, 19 in the fourth, won his first U.S. Open Championship.

Hardbat Under 1500

Defending Champion Dean Norman was beaten by Hermann Luechinger who then proceeded to claim his first U.S. Open title from Peter Markus. The two of them have somewhat similar backgrounds. Having left Reisman's one snowy day, Peter, hurrying down the subway steps as one does to catch a train, slipped and badly hurt his right knee. Then, as he favored that over a length of time, his left knee went bad. That put him out of the Game for 30 years. Later, however, three-hour operations on both knees, followed by extensive therapy on Peter's part, allowed him to come back and play. As for Hermann, he hadn't played for 45 years, but since a myoclonos problem was seriously affecting his balance, his doctor urged him to play table tennis to keep from falling. You see, he was having trouble following moving objects.

2008 US Open Results

Men's Singles: 1st Weixing Chen; 2nd Thomas Keinath (4-0)

Women's Singles: 1st Gao Jun; 2nd Xia Lian Ni (4-1)

Mens Doubles: 1st Aleksandar Karakas-evik/Zolt Sel; 2nd Joerg Roskopf/Thomas Keinath (-11,8,8,8,10)

Women's Doubles: 1st Sayuri Shimada/Miwako Ishizuka; 2nd Kaori Suemasu/Saori Sakamoto (5,-8,-4,3,-8,9,10)

Unrated RR: 1st Kameel Rifkha; 2nd Kurt Jensen (3,6,6)

U800: 1st Josiah Framo; 2nd Kailyn Kong (7,7,9)

U1000: 1st Nathaniel Chu; 2nd Kenny Wong (6,10,3)

U1200: 1st Theodore Tran; 2nd Krishnateja (-9,4,8,7)

U1350: 1st William Ho; 2nd Daniel Tran (14,-10,9,6)

U1450: 1st Jodie Kim; 2nd Tim Wang (-12,6,7,10)

U1600: 1st Ignacio Ascencio; 2nd Yuta Haguro (7,8,-11,6)

U1750: 1st Ignacio Ascencio; 2nd Brian Bui (5,10,-8,5)

U1900: 1st Aberlardo Montero; 2nd Anurag Matharasi (8,5,9)

U2050: 1st Jerica Marrero Morales; 2nd Panno Dok (-9,9,9,-6,6)

U2200: 1st Hak Mook Lee; 2nd Andres Molano (-4,9,5,7)

U2400: 1st Yang "Andy" Liu; 2nd Don James Alto (9,-2,9,8)

U2600: 1st Dan Seemiller; 2nd Ying Lu (12,10,-7,-5,11)

U3200 Doubles: 1st Quoc Shicajie/William Ho; 2nd Andy Leung/Kelvin Lau (9,7,4)

U3700 Doubles: 1st Ethan Chua/Anand Engineer; 2nd Christiana Divita/Daniel Divita (5,8,7)

U4200 Doubles: 1st Rudy Miranda/Xuan Liu; 2nd Mark Johnson/Sing Sui Sit (6,-10,10,-6,3)

Boys 9U: 1st Krishnateja Avvari; 2nd Kanak Jha (9,7,8)

Boys U11: 1st Bryan Afandor; 2nd Ethan Chua (9,-6,9,-10,3)

Boys U13: 1st John James Alto; 2nd Gregory Nguyen (7,-6,17,3)

Cadet Boys: 1st Daniel Gonzalez; 2nd Michael Landers (-8,11,7,-7,7)

Junior Boys: 1st Sathiyana Ganasekaran; 2nd Shubham Sharma (7,6,6)

Men's U21: 1st Patrick Baum; 2nd Steffen Mengel (9,8,-8,-9,12,-6,10)

Men's Over 30 Singles: 1st YanJun Gao; 2nd Tahl Leibovitz (12,10,8)

Men's Over 40 Singles: 1st Cheng Ying-hua; 2nd Atanda Musa (5,-10,6,5)

Men's Over 40/U1800: 1st James Zimmerman; 2nd Henry Lee Blankenship (-5,-9,6,4,4)

Men's Over 50 Singles: 1st Cheng Ying-hua; 2nd Barry Dattel (4,6,2)

Men's Over 60 Singles: 1st Jiri Hlava; 2nd Alireza Hejazi (2,10,9)

Girls 9U: 1st Heidi Kim

Girls 11U: 1st Leanne Lee; 2nd Emily Zhao (8,4,2)

Girls 13U: 1st Yihua Yin; 2nd Ellen Hwang (9,5,4)

Cadet Girls: 1st Sheng Xu; 2nd Anne Deng (9,4,-7,-13,1)

Junior Girls: 1st FuQuan Li; 2nd Anne Deng (6,2,9)

Women's U21 Singles: 1st Jiaqi Zheng; 2nd Tong Yao (6,-12,-7,8,3,7)

Women's Over 30 Singles: 1st Gao Jun; 2nd Tawny Banh (9,7,-5,9)

Women's Over 40 Singles: 1st Hyeon Young Bhoo; 2nd Charlene Xiaoying Liu (4,7,0)

Women's Over 50 Singles: 1st Bella Livshin; 2nd Charlete Liu (4,-7,7,7)

Women's Over 60 Singles: 1st Chiyako Suzuki; 2nd Harriet Brin (4,4,4)

Women's U2100: 1st Tzu-Ying Li; 2nd Judy Yang (10,-6,7,6)

Over 65 RR: 1st Error Resek; 2nd Bill Ukapatayasakul (6,-9,7,1)

Over 70 RR: 1st Richard Hicks; 2nd Ragnar Fahlstrom (3,6,8)

Over 75 RR: 1st Bill Neely; 2nd Al Miller (9,-2,6,10)

Over 80 RR: 1st Mac Horn; 2nd Si Waserman

Over 40 Doubles: 1st Barry Dattel/Lim Ming Chui; 2nd Santos Shih/St Stanley Tang (8,10,9)

Over 50 Doubles: 1st David Sakai/Dan Seemiller; 2nd Julian Waters/Cheng Ying-hua (11,-9,12,11)

Over 60 Doubles: 1st Jiri Hlava/Lim Ming Chui; 2nd JimMcQueen/Duc Loi (3,4,-9,11)

Over 70 Doubles: 1st Jerry Marcum/Richard Hicks; 2nd Bill Neely/Ragnar Fahlstrom (8,8,2)

Under 2000 Hardbat RR: 1st Ed Ball; 2nd Robert Palgon (-19, 17, 17, 19)

Hardbat RR: 1st Trevor Runyon; 2nd Loc Bao Ngo (14,12,18)

Hardbat U1500: 1st Hermann Luechinger; 2nd Peter Markus (16,18)

Hardbat Over 40 Singles: 1st Loc Bao Ngo; 2nd Lim Ming Chui (11,9,21)

Hardbat Doubles: 1st Scott Gordon/ Loc Bao Ngo; 2nd Andrew Hutzel/Robert Palgon (10, 14, 14)

Wheelchair (Classes 1-5): 1st Andre Scott; 2nd Pam Fontaine (8,4,4)

Standing Open (Classes 6-10): 1st Tahl Leibovitz; 2nd Lim Ming Chui (8,-4,7,5)

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