

# U.S. - Iran Table Tennis Friendship Tour



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*Photo Credits:  
Diego Schaaf (lady player far left and male player right page bottom)  
Rob Trudell (player right page top)  
Steve Hopkins (seven photos from the July 4 Barbecue event)*

This summer, Iran’s table tennis team toured the U.S. and participated in a number of tournaments and exhibitions. The original idea was discussed for many years between Sheri Pitman, former USATT President, and Shahrokh Shahnazi, President of the Iran Table Tennis Federation.

With hard work from those two and many others, the *U.S. Iranian Table Tennis Friendship Tour* was born. The Iranian team visited both Florida and Nevada; trained together; played in the Southern Florida US Open Warm-up Tournament; and ultimately finished their tour by

competing in the US Open as well as participating in US-Iran exhibition matches just before the finals at the US Open.

While in Florida, the group took an airboat tour of the Everglades. On the Fourth of July, following a dinner with a barbecue theme, they traveled to a small town outside of Las Vegas where they joined an old fashioned Independence Day celebration and watched fireworks. Before leaving Las Vegas, the team visited the Andre Agassi Boys and Girls Club and performed exhibitions and provided lessons to the children at the club.

In regard to results on the table—several of the players won cash awards in their Florida tournament, each participant in the US Open advanced to the second round, and three of their players and a doubles team had strong runs in the tournament.

Table tennis results were not the main reason for the tour, however. This was an event designed to bring two peoples closer together—to help bridge the political gap that current exists between our two countries. In this regard, it was hoped that it would mirror the success of the Ping Pong Diplomacy tours of the 1970s.

The Iranians toured the U.S., interacted with Americans, participated and observed our culture and holiday, and competed against Americans and others in a sport we all love. Certainly it should be evident to all that there are more similarities between us than differences.

**“One must respect other’s faith, culture, and lives. We have found that in the U.S.” Shahrokh Shahnazi, President, Iran Table Tennis Federation**