



USATT

Club Directory

2009

Clubs are the Difference

by Kagin Lee

If it weren't for table tennis clubs, most of us wouldn't be involved in the sport. I might be in badminton or tennis. I'm sure many people would be playing golf instead. For me, finding a table tennis club was what elevated the game to a sport. Imagine if all of our clubs disappeared tomorrow - where would we stand? Clearly, without our clubs, there would be no USATT; there wouldn't even be a sport called table tennis in the United States.

There are areas around the country which are known as being table tennis hotbeds. What makes these places strong? It's not the presence of strong players, but rather the presence of strong clubs. Strong clubs both attract and create strong players.

Looking outside of the U.S., it's obvious that there are many countries which are similar to us both culturally and economically, but are much more successful than us in international table tennis competition despite having much smaller populations. How can countries that are a small fraction of our size not only win a world championship or three, but also continue to contend at the international level year after year?

Again, the difference is the clubs.

While our clubs may be nice places to go hit a ping pong ball, they simply cannot compare to clubs in more successful nations. Dedicated facilities with full time management teams; thoroughly developed club programs rather than "grab a table" free play; many teams playing in different tiers of inter-club leagues. And there are a lot of clubs - in many countries there are more clubs per capita than the U.S. has players.

Just like changing equipment isn't a magic bullet that a player can use to replace training, there is no magic bullet that the USATT can use to transform the sport in this country. Before the sport can be taken seriously, we must have serious clubs. Before we can have professional players, we need to have professional clubs. The success of table tennis in the U.S. is tied directly to the success of our clubs, and the success of our clubs has been and will be based on the hard work of those people who manage and develop our clubs.

The next time you go to a club, be sure to thank the organizers. Better yet, help them out; they've been working hard.

If you would like to separate this directory from the magazine, simply remove these pages (pages 33-48) and replace the staples.