



Why Haven't I Seen Pilgrims Medaling in the Olympics Lately?

By Adam Bobrow, history expert/coolness patrol

Remember the first Thanksgiving? I do. It was a cold day in 1621 and I couldn't access my Twitter account because the wireless connection was actin' a fool. Some European table tennis players came to New England (or as you know it today, England 2.0... but don't be fooled, it's in the U.S) because they had made plans to have a nice family style dinner with some Native Americans (like me... I am a native here). Since they were the originals, I think I'll refer to them as "Original Americans."

The European table tennis players (who you probably don't know because they were before your time... but I'll name just in case: Timo Boll, Werner Schlager and Michael Maze) will be referred to from now on (in the interest of time) as the "ETTP", came over with more than a dinner plan. Oh yes. Their real mission was to convert the Original Americans to believers in table tennis.

In their European traditions, millions of people played in their teams leagues and were constantly practicing, improving their games, and enjoying meeting new people. They received a text from an American friend who felt that the passion for table tennis needed some SERIOUS intervention and fast! The ETTP had made reservations for a party of two hundred at 7PM at the Buca Di Beppo on First and Main, but the Original Americans had trouble

dealing with traffic. Rumor has it that there was an eight carriage pile up on the freeway that evening and one carriage-pooling party got a flat horse and wasn't able to make it. So while the showing wasn't as strong as the ETTP had hoped, there were still a good fifteen people there (so a tip was still included, of course).

After a delicious, Italian-style meal of lasagna, turkey, stuffing, potatoes, and cranberry slices-- the real conversation started. Unfortunately, the ETTP had very thick accents and the Original Americans listened respectfully and tried very hard, but they simply could not understand what the ETTP was trying to say. The ETTP got tired of trying and a bit annoyed and decided to just enjoy their spumoni, pay the bill, and go. The ETTP grabbed their paddles and paddled all the way back to Europe... yes, Europe specifically.

The Original Americans were completely prepared to pay for the bill and even though they didn't understand a word of the ETTP, they got the message. The ETTP came to treat them to a nice meal and for that, the Original Americans were always thankful. The name ETTP was a bit tough for them because it was four syllables and so they came up with a new name to refer to these people. They thought... there were three people... which is approximately "Pi" and because there were not FIVE people, they had more "legroom" under the table at dinner that lovely and confusing night in 1621. They then realized that "Pi-legroom" wouldn't fit on their carriage license plates so they abbreviated and came up with "Pilgrim." I don't know where the second "i" came from. I don't have ALL of the answers.

Adam, are there still Pilgrims alive and playing table tennis today? Yes, USATT reader... YES, indeed! They might not be so obvious and easy to recognize since they changed their fashion and they don't wear those big Captain Crunch-like hats anymore. They would still be wearing them today except when they would hit forehand loops, they would often knock their hats off and it was embarrassing in major tournaments... not because of their hat hair, just because they looked clumsy.

Every year to honor the way of the Pilgrim, we now have an EXCELLENT celebration of their culture by holding the Baltimore teams tournament every Thanksgiving so you can ditch your family and enjoy getting back to the roots of what Thanksgiving is all about, teams table tennis.

I am not a history teacher, so don't quote me on this article, but I know you are dying to know the answer to YOUR question and the title of MY article "Why Haven't I Seen the Pilgrims Medaling in the Olympics Lately?" You might have seen some of these Pilgrims competing in major, world-class tournaments but simply didn't realize it. We even have some Pilgrims that currently compete in the Los Angeles area. I would mention a name but Will Graff might be upset if I say anything. Another way you can recognize a modern day Pilgrim, is that in their culture, they sometimes spike their hair to look like a shark fin. It looks really cool. Trust me. I've seen it. The main reason that you have not seen Pilgrims medaling in the Olympics is... that China is just too dominant. Don't forget to show your family some love, thank the chefs for dinner, share the TRUE story of the Pilgrims and have a happy Thanksgiving!