



JOOLA North American Team Championships

By Tim Boggan

Just as turkey legs (“Dark meat, please”) have been important to many a convivial family member at many a Thanksgiving turkey-time feast, so in another sense have “legs” or stages of development been important to the annual holiday success of North American Table Tennis (NATT) President Richard Lee and the family members (literally and figuratively) of his perennial tournament staff. Working together over the years they’ve been pilgrim-blessed for having taken the initiative and built up, through trial and error, a series of internationally-flavored NATT Team Tournaments that culminated this November 28-30 at their Baltimore Inner Harbor Convention Center site. Here they achieved a record-breaking 11th-season spread of 244 teams and 969 players.



Yep, bit by bit, or bite by bite, since Thanksgiving 1998, it’s been quite a trip for Richard, Tournament Director Fong Hsu, Registration Director Wendy Troy, Media/Marketing man Alan Williams (loved the Grieg and Sibelius sounds greeting me on my early morning arrival in the Hall), Tournament Referee Bill Walk and his crew of volunteer umpires, and, for their indispensable recording and filing of hundreds and hundreds of Prelim and Division matches, those who were very helpful to me personally, the dedicated John Miller, Mary Palmar, Sandy Pate, and Joyce McCready. Many thanks to them all, and to the Troys, the Lees, and Tom Nguyen who worked the NATT/JOOLA booth. Also, a very special thank you to the repeat sponsors—especially to JOOLA, the tournament table supplier and prize money provider (winning team gets \$10,000), and to the other dependable sponsors, Brican Systems, State Mortgage, Phillips Seafood, and Senoda Printing.

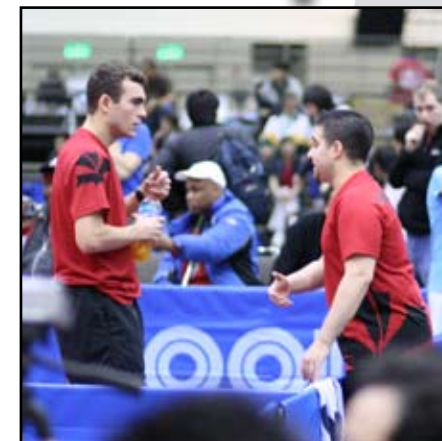
Photo of Team JOOLA (top) provided by NATT. Other photos by Steve Hopkins



Preliminary Play

Initially, teams are placed according to their strength into 16 Preliminary Groups, with the many teams in each Group playing a modified round robin (from two to four ties) to determine the final Division they’ll compete in. Seedings and placings depend on a team’s rating, arrived at by totaling the ratings of its three highest players. Each match is best three out of five games; each team tie until the semi’s best five out of nine matches. As usual, I limit my write-up to those teams who from the beginning are theoretically—and I stress theoretically—in contention for the Championship. As the tournament proceeds, winners of each of the 16 Preliminary Groups will join the four highest-rated teams that have been exempted from earlier play. These 20 teams will then form four round robins of five teams each designated as Division 1A, 1B, 1C, 1D. From each of these Divisions two teams will advance into a straight-elimination quarter’s, semi’s, final.

The #1-seed Paranormal team got off to an abnormal start in Prelim play when the Wallabies bounded by them, 5-4. Lily Yip returned



after a two-and-a-half-year absence to win three (through superb ball-placements, and helped by a timely coaching assist from son Adam against Ernesto Ebuén). Lily’s teammate, Westfield’s Richard Williams, taking the place of Wally Green who someone said was off dancing around Japan, produced two key matches—over Tahl Leibovitz in five, and over Roel Aguanta, 13-11 in the fourth. Tahl’s play of course always catches one’s eye. Having fun in his own way, he drops his racket, flings his racket, kicks the towel holder, loudly curses, looks disgusted enough to step on the ball (which he sometimes does), looks in paranormal fashion like he’s never supposed to miss a shot.

So his team didn’t advance? Ah, but it did. What’s more, since the Platinum Loopers lost 5-2 to the Paranormals, and the Wallabies lost 5-3 to the Loopers (Lily again won three—beat Jason Shim, Gary Zhong, and Roy Sears, after Jason and Roy had upset Tahl), the advance of the Paranormals to Division 1—via a 9-7 match-result tie-breaker—was scientifically explainable.

Japanese arrivals, Tohoku Fukushi Univer-



sity 1, advanced 5-1 over the Undecided—but there was nothing indecisive about Dennis Karlsson’s deuce in the fifth upset of Kakemizu Kohei. Dennis, just out of a Swedish high school, is getting another kind of education as an au pair with a U.S. family in Great Falls, Virginia. This TFU team lived up to their #1 seeding in the Group with a 5-3 win over the NYTTC Show Stoppers. Carlos Alvarado did grab the spotlight for a moment, though, when against Keizoh Ozawa he rallied from 2-0 down to send the tie into the eighth match. After this tournament the 22-year-old Ozawa would have to hurry back to Japan and work on the thesis he needed in order to graduate in March.

The TFU 2 team defeated Queens Boulevard, but Jerry Vasquez had two big upsets—over Takuro Asano and Tatsuya Yano. Then, surprise, out went these Japanese, the Group’s #1 seed, outplayed 5-2 (when only Keisuke Sato could score) by the Canadian team of Sara Yuen, Alex Li, and Dave Mahabir who makes a living teaching tennis and table tennis. There was also a TFU 3 team—all three teams brought here through the assistance of

TFU Professor Suguru Araki whose longtime friend Scott Preiss had his son Austin train in Japan with these TFU players last summer. This team downed the Don't Need Speed Gluers 5-1—but Philippe Dassonval did in "Kaz" Yokoyama, a 300 rating-point favorite. And Dickie Fleisher with his harpy grip, up 2-1 and at 20-all in the fourth, almost clawed to death Shunya Tateoka. Dickie obligingly introduced me to his famous pianist father, Leon, in the audience, and, more than obligingly, produced for a deserving team a set of plaques. Each read DEAD LAST.

Lily Yip Sport's team beat The Choppers 5-2, but Florida's Kit Jeerapaet (rated 2244), who 27 years ago was winning the U.S. Open U-13 Doubles with Jimmy Butler, starred in three matches, slapping balls left and right to defeat both Adam Hugh and Barry Dattel deuce in the fifth, and forcing Xiao Chun Yao (rated 2650) into five games.

Group 9 saw Puerto Rico put up a good though losing 5-3 fight against the New York Athletic Club (NYAC)/New York TTC 2 team. Jerica Marrero Morales (women of course can play on the same team as men) and Hector Berrios, the Puerto Rican National Champion now playing in a league in Spain, provided the challenge, but Yong Ye Xue and Coach Hui Yuan Liu's son, Yang ("Andy"), were able to repel it.

The Philippine team, METTA, who've been practicing at the Maryland JOOLA Club for maybe a week, figured to beat the Canadian Renegades and did 5-1. But there were two huge swing matches—righty penholder Ting Ledesma 11-9-in-the-fifth stopped Tony Liu,

and bespectacled Joseph Cruz 12-10-in-the-fifth did the same to Arnaud R-Nadon (a sci-fi name if ever I heard one).

Although the Fighters, led by Barney Reed, blanked Diversity 1, they'd been in, well, a fight—Mitsunori Takizawa dropped an 11-9 in the fifth match to Rich Burnside, then fell in five to John Wetzler, while Li Chen, up 2-1 and at deuce in the fourth, couldn't pull it out against Marcus Jackson. Encouraged by this result and a second 5-0 win, over the Puerto Rican Los Caribenos 1 team, the Fighters changed their name to Momentum. Barney didn't want a rough-and-tumble in this second tie, but he did ask that the Puerto Ricans have their rackets tested—and, sure enough, Santiago Coste's didn't pass. He hadn't been competing for five years, was a medical student, and apparently not aware that an ENEZ test might be in the offing at this tournament.

In a related case, the hardbat player Steve Berger was told that, despite the fact, as he said, that he was the one player out of the thousand here who was playing real table tennis, he couldn't play with the same identical hard rubber on both sides if he didn't observe the red/black color rule. This wasn't the U.S. Closed, this was an International tournament, and that made all the difference.

Got Rice—what kind of name is that? A shortened one; the longer one, according to my source and the song, being more Not Nice than Get Rice. This young team (Peter Li, China-immigrant Yahao Zhang, and Timothy Wang), will win the Boys Championship by getting by Junior Team Canada 5-3. Their jump start made a big difference—Li, 15,

who's trained in China with the East China University and Fujian Province players, came from 2-0 down to beat Andre Ho, and Wang, 17, prevailed in the fifth against Pierre-Luc Theriault. Ling-Kun Yang rallied back but couldn't get to the ninth match to try to save the day for Canada.

When two of the three Hubei, China players didn't show, Ms. Ge Jie Mai moved over to the Three Zero team—and won three key matches to help her teammates (Amaresh Sahu and Kunal Shah) get by the Alameda, CA Club (Freddie Gabriel, T.J. Beebe, and Avishy Schmidt), 5-4. Alameda, down 4-1, courageously rallied, with Avishy pulling out the necessary 19-in-the-fifth eighth match, only to see T.J. get off to a bad start against Amaresh in the 5th and be unable to recover.

The Group 16 deciding tie brought with it more than a bit of controversy, which I think it best to detail only cursorily here, though detail it in some general way I must. Dave Sakai's Senoda team, a 30-year throwback entry with the brothers Danny, Ricky, Randy Seemiller, and Eric Boggan, was drawn against Cheng Yinghua and his students Reza Ghiasi and Charlie Sun, a team with the unlikely name of the Fire-Breathing Rubber Ducks (suggesting an incongruous but dragon-like fiery exhalation?). Danny, not on the official Players List, had decided to play at the last minute and was accommodated; Cheng also decided to play, not just coach as Senoda had thought he would.

When, after Eric had defeated Charlie in the opener, Danny lost to Cheng, 11-9 in the fourth, the Randy-Reza match became increasingly important. By its 11-9 in the fifth end, Randy's difficulty in handling Reza's high balls had proved more of an undoing than Reza's problems with Randy's serves. Danny then tied the tie with a win over Charlie. However, since Cheng was likely to beat both Randy and the non-tournament-playing and little-practiced Boggan, Eric would have to win his match with Reza if Senoda was to advance.

During Boggan's opener against Sun, the experienced U.S. umpire, who knew Eric, had warned him, then called a fault on him for not throwing his serve high enough. This umpire later described Eric's serve as marginal but did not fault him again. Referee Walk—who knew Eric could be volatile, and perhaps knew that Eric through his world-class career had had little respect for many umpires and their fine-line subjective decisions—had wanted this same umpire for Eric's second match. But this umpire by accident or choice was unavailable, and so another umpire, who'd never heard of this U.S. Open/U.S. Closed Champion and World #18 and #1-positioned



Bundesliga player, routinely volunteered to take the chair. Very soon after play had begun, this umpire, too, warned Eric to throw the ball up more, and soon missed two calls and twice had to change the score on the scorecards. Knowing that umpires are as human as the players, that they differ considerably in their personalities, their subjective decisions, I was already apprehensive—the umpire did not seem very experienced.

But play went on without incident. Then after Eric was up 2-0 and 6-0 in the third, this umpire suddenly decided to fault him for not throwing his serve higher—said later that his serve "had deteriorated," which I thought unlikely for he certainly seemed to be following the same muscle-memory motions as before. This call broke Eric's concentration—he made a series of errors, and began complaining aloud that "That's why I don't like to come anymore—they won't let us play." How often over the decades has one heard that. At 6-5 the umpire faulted him again, and by this time he was acting very badly, so he got a red card for abusing both the umpire and his opponent who caught up in it all rapidly became no model of behavior himself. A pocket of fans, not liking Eric's words and actions, began getting hotly into it, rooting for Reza and exchanging words with Eric. Referee Bill Walk was brought in to observe.

After the three points had been taken away from Eric, and the score was 8-8, play proceeded at a fiery but controlled pace with excellent exchanges until Eric, who'd been up double match point, only to see a great gutsy forehand by Reza go in to deuce it, finally won the match 12-10 in the third. Then, as if he were David Zhuang taking an ecstatic triumphant run, he, though now unlike David, mindlessly hurled himself uncontrollably toward the crowd who'd taunted him, lost his balance, fell into the crowd, was pulled up, pulled away by teammates and friends as, still very incensed, voicing obscenely his outrage, he was in no mood to be reasoned with. Many of course rightly thought his outbursts appall-



ing, but one fellow said to me that, given the many socially-minded players here, he liked "the color, the drama, the refreshing show of passion Eric way past his prime at 45 still brought to the Game.

Only later, the next day, after his anger had dissipated, did Eric apologize to the umpire and to Referee Walk. Though the tie was now 3-2 favor of Senoda, Danny and Dave, mindful of all the disruption caused by Eric's reactions, offered to forfeit the tie to the Ducks who'd breathed in and out the flames of that fire. But Cheng, and I was told also the parents of one of Cheng's players, urged that the tie be played out. So it was—with Cheng over Randy, Danny over Reza, and Randy over Charlie to allow Senoda to advance 5-3.

With play over, Tahl, on his way out of the Hall, says to me, "Well, I guess Eric one-upped me today." To which a bystander overhearing replies, "A world-class player has higher standards."

Division 1A Through 1D Play

Division 1A's #1-seeded JOOLA Team (current U.S. Open Champ Chen Weixing; He Zhi Wen, world-renowned for over a quarter-century; and 1989 World Doubles and 1992 European Singles Champion Jorg Roskopf) didn't lose a match—though "Rossi" was down 2-1 and at 6-6 in the fourth with Barney Reed who afterwards said, "Why not stop there?" Barney, shuttling back and forth to play in Germany, knows, though, you gotta finish—he's won five of the last six tournaments he's played in.

Since two teams would advance to the quarter's, the Big Dogs (Samson Dubina, Justen Yao, and Joey Cochran) kept their hopes for advancement alive by winning a 5-4 tie over Momentum who, having newly acquired it, now lost it. Cochran, who'd just beaten Danny Seemiller to win the 4-Star Highland Park Open, dropped all three (including five-gamers to John Leach and John Wetzler). But young Justen balanced with three wins, and Samson, trained now in Firefighter/Paramed-



ic skills but at the moment coaching table tennis in Canton and Cincinnati, Ohio added the necessary two more.

Momentum, then, went not forward but backward, losing all their ties, including a nasty 5-3 one to Guyana. Leach, 19, had returned from his successful Bundesliga play—his Team had won their Third Division, moving them up next season to the Second. But John had opted not to return to Germany, instead was taking Bio, Eco, Calc classes at the University of Colorado. In this tie he himself got going with a 12-10 in the fourth, 12-10 in the 5th start against Paul David, but Burnside, trying unsuccessfully to retrieve a ball at match point, injured himself, so had to endure his second loss, and then, because he couldn't continue, his third. Meantime, his teammate Wetzler, wearing a shrouded Reaper's skull on the back of his playing shirt, lost two killers—an 18 in the fifth to returnee Idi Lewis, and, to end it all, a 19 in the fifth to David.

The Big Dogs beat Guyana 5-2, but their climactic tie was with prominent lawyer Zhiyu "Jimmy" Hu's Cosmos team: Ding Yi; former Chinese National Champion Li Yu Xiang; and Alex Perez who at one point delighted the crowd with a flamboyant flourish which he described in his native Dominican as either, depending on how you pronounced it, a "Si-Si" or "Zi-Zi"—a balletic sight to behold. Ding and Yi were friends in China 30 years ago, and played in the German Bundesliga 20 years ago. In 1996, when Ding was among the Top 30 players in the world, Li was not only evolving as a Coach in Germany but was able to win the World Over 40 Singles Championship, a feat I was told Ding duplicated in the recent World Veterans Championships in Brazil. Ding won his three without being pressed, but it wasn't enough. In a bevy of contested matches, it was Cochran over Li, taking the fourth 11-9 to enable him to win the fifth. Then Justen over Alex in five, and over Li, 11-9 in the fifth. "The players are o.k.," said Li, "but the parents are crazy." Or is Li just getting old? In the Momentum tie,

Photos by Steve Hopkins

Marcus Jackson who'd been toughened up mentally by former Russian National Coach Boris Shafir, and given constant encouragement by his father Morris, beat Li in straight games. But, Li old? Down 2-0 to Samson, he wasn't finished. At 11-all in the fourth, the umpire faulted Li, then the next point, perhaps inwardly flustered by the complaints his call against Li had precipitated, this umpire missed Li's edge ball and so pronounced the game, match, tie over and done with. Samson himself had to sportingly point out that Li's ball had indeed hit. And for his honesty he got to play the fifth game...and lose. Cochran, however, rose to the occasion and beat Perez from 2-1 down for his team's 5-4 advance. Zhiyu "Jimmy" Hu had to be content with his Cosmos winning the Senior prize.

Division 1B's top-seed Canada qualified easily for the quarter's. As for the bottom-placed Got Rice team they proved to be seriously underrated. They opened with a key 5-3 win over Lily Yip Sport. After Lily's son Adam, nursing a knee problem, struggled by Peter Li, 12-10 in the fourth, 12-10 in the fifth, Li retaliated with a 12-10 in the fifth squeaker over Xiao Chun Yao. The remaining matches weren't close—Timothy Wang took three, and Yahoo Zhang, earlier coached by former Mexican National Francisco Mendez but now summer-training in China, lost to Adam but beat Adam's sister Judy. Yao, who coaches at the Lily Yip Academy, is now 37. Years ago, he and Lily paired together to win a China Youth Mixed Doubles Tournament. For eight seasons he played for a Beijing pro team.

The Japanese TFU 3 team 5-4 squirmed

through their opening match with Coach Hui Yuan Liu's NYAC/NYTC 2 team. Yong Ye Xue tried to brighten the morning for the New Yorkers by winning all three, two of them close—12-10 in the fourth over chopper Yokoyama; and 14-12 in the 5th over penhold attacker Tateoka. But Xue couldn't quite get enough support—"Andy," Liu's son, needed to win the fifth from Tateoka for the turnaround, but couldn't do it. After Got Rice had scored a near blowout 5-1 win over this TFU 3 team, they secured their second-place advancement by defeating Coach Liu's N.Y. 2 team, 5-3. But it wasn't easy—the tie decided by three swing matches: Peter Li, 11-9 in the fourth over "Andy" Liu; Li 12-10 in the fifth over Xue; and Timothy Wang 11-9 in the fifth over "Andy." Xue also figured prominently in his team's 5-2 loss to Yip, winning over Barry Dattel and Judy Hugh, but losing to Yao, 13-11 in the fifth.

In Division 1C, David Zhuang and his NYAC/NYTC 1 team were surprised to see METTA's 2004 Philippine Champion Joseph Cruz defeat Zhuang in straight games. But though David hadn't been playing, his racket now without the usual speed glue, he'd risk losses to get a needed warm-up for the approaching National's. YanJun Gao wasn't immune either—Three Zero's formerly isolated Hubei player, Mai, beat him. Perhaps by now someone had explained to Mai that her adopted team's strange name had been suggested by her now teammate Qassim Khan who in Sunday League play on coming off court and being asked how he did, often said, "Three Zero" and made a very convincing slashing

motion across his neck. Which I think meant he hadn't lost, wasn't figuratively cutting his own throat, but the other fellow's.

The second-place team was decided first thing in the morning. TFU 1's only competition for this quarter's spot was Senoda. After Team Captain Takahira Doi had split matches, winning over Dan Seemiller, 12-10 in the 4th, but losing to Boggan; and after Ozawa had split matches, winning over Rick Seemiller in 5, but losing to Boggan; and after Kohei had split matches, winning over Rick, but losing to Dan, the tie was tied 3-3. Then, however, there was no more splitting—Ozawa beat Dan in 5 (down 6-3, he ran seven straight), and Kohei (behind 2-0) beat Eric in 5. Three Zero also 5-3 stopped Senoda. Eric and Randy were better than Kunal Shah, and Eric 13-11 in the 5th a tad better than Amareh Sahu—but that left them two matches short.

Division 1D saw the #1 seed Gao Jun team move 5-1, 5-2 easily to their four o'clock round robin. The #2 seed in this Division, Wang Chen's TTC-1's "Pretty Girl" team as she appropriately called it, outfitted by CURRENT WORLD QUARTERFINALIST Wang ("Cindy") herself, in pink with a special logo, opened 5-2 against the (Canadian) CCTA-1 team. Strange, but it's often been commented on that the Yuen sisters' body language, their outward lethargic manner, always makes them look like they really don't want to play, so much so that someone said they need a mental coach. But Sara Yuen against Tahl Leibovitz, who do you like?...Uh-huh—Sara in five. The Canadians, who entered at least 20 teams, did win the Girls Championship.

Representing Wang Chen's N.Y. 1 Club, er, make that Modeling Agency, as one wit said, were (newly adopted American names in brackets): Yue ("Jennifer") Wu who it's said trains with World and Olympic Champion Zhang Yining; slender, small-boned penhold attacker Jiaqi ("Jackie") Zhang; Xingyue ("Taylor") Wang; and Li ("Michelle") Ma who, while the others go to language school, she attends high school. Their two o'clock afternoon match provided them with an unwelcome surprise—a 5-4 defeat at the hands of the Mad Classics (3-time Central and Caribbean Champion/6-time Barbadian National Champion Robert Roberts; Rocky Wang; and Raghu ("Rags") Nadmichettu—with Brian Pace opting to coach not play).

Trouble right off for 34-year-old Roberts—no, his disc problem is there, he can feel it coming back when he doesn't want it to, but his back's not bad now, it's his racket; it isn't acceptable to umpire Saul Weinstein, the rubber's too thick on one side. What can he do? Pace hands him another racket—the rubber's very different from what he's used to. Oh,



oh—hadn't he found Gao Jun's rubber impossible to handle? Now he himself had to wield a strange racket. But, winning Weinstein's voiced admiration, Robert proceeds to take all three matches, ending with a 14-12-in-the-fifth nail-biter, after Pace had called Time and Robert had returned, match point down, to score on a fearless serve and follow. Contributing two winners to the crazy heroics, two classic comebacks against Wang and Zheng, was Raghu "Rags" Madmichettu. His fishing, lobbing, and startling counters thrilled his supporters as he played probably the best tie of his young life. Boy, thought Brian, to be able to run around like that, you had to be in shape—I wonder how many really know how to prepare themselves for serious play here.

The four o'clock tie for the Women's Championship brought together the Wang Chen team, with its chief supporter Jerry Wartski (just given an award from South Korea), and the Gail Kendall-Captained/Gao Jun-led NYAC/CATT Women's team. Former World Women's Doubles Champion and four-time Olympian Gao was joined by the Texas-based penholder Huijing Wang who used to play in the Super League in China but has recently been inactive; U.S. Olympian Yao Xi ("Crystal") Huang; and Tao Li, a former Chinese Junior Team member who, on coming to live with her parents in Richmond, VA, is now the U.S. Under-18 #1. She too is taking English language courses, and when asked what other sport she plays, she says, "I play swimming."

In this 5-3 tie, Crystal couldn't strongly compete, but when Gao prevailed over Wu in 5, and H Wang, with her wicked backhand, beat not only X Wang, 12-10 in the fifth, but the ex-Beijing professional Zheng as well, the Gao team led 3-2. Earlier, in the Paranormal tie, Gao had not been at her focused best—had failed to beat the energetic Ernesto Ebuena with a 2-0 start (up match-point in the fifth she'd netted her serve return and on reaching deuce again had served off). Now she suffered a straight-game loss to X. Wang. One explanation I heard was that this Wang, like



Gao, plays a "soft" game. Which was effective, since Gao would much prefer, as in martial arts, to use her opponent's strength against her, only, as we could see, Wang has no power game. Afterwards, Gao's H. Wang could not this time win the close ones and fell to Wu 12-10 in the third, 13-11 in the fourth.

Could the Wang Chen team in its upcoming last tie be deprived of its #1 position, even #2 position in the Division? Yes. True, a win would give them a 3-1 match record and the tie-breaker advantage over the Gao Jun team. But a loss would give them a 2-2 match record and the tie-breaker disadvantage against the Paranormals. So, Yes, this last tie of the evening could do them in. And Yes it could if the Paranormals had even two not three Ebuens. He was a whirlwind taking all three matches—the last a 13-11 in the 5th win over Wu to keep his team alive. But paranormal help he couldn't get. Teammate Dr. De Tran, for one, had maybe what you'd hesitate to call a "normal" life—he's so busy, always on the go—has two offices, doctors working for him. But withal he finds time to play competitively, to work out, for, as he says and we all know, "Success and Health"—having one is also having the other.

Quick Quarter's

Not much excitement in the quarter's—the favorites are too strong. Here are some random observations.

JOOLA over Got Rice (5-0). Has-been lefty He Zhi Wen opens against teenager Timothy Wang and is taken down 11-6 the first game. Well, Wen was good when. But in the second, a re-evaluation is called for. Wen's up 9-0, and after play moves on to completion, Tim asks, "What happened after the first game?" Against 39-year-old Jorg Rosskopf, Peter Li engages well—loses in four, 12-10 in the 3rd, 11-9 in the fourth. Next time. Then, what fun to watch Chen Weixing—"chop" is more appropriate than "cutting stroke" to describe his authoritative defense.

Wang Chen TTC-1 over TFU 1 (5-1). Seek-



ing to Americanize the entire Wang Chen team, to more comfortably feminize them in their pink prettiness to the Sunday spectators, Announcer Alan Williams will refer to them, as they come down the runway or, well, into the court, by Wang Chen's selected names for them. Hence, to repeat, Jackie Zheng; Jennifer Wu, Michelle Ma, and Taylor Wang (Taylor's a boy's name too, I said, my grandson's, in fact, but that's o.k.). The Japanese males, however, well knew their opponents were anything but fragile—and did their best to immediately throw a 1-2 punch at them. Ozawa beat Taylor, but Doi lost the opener, 11-9 in the fifth to Jackie. Kohei, following, tried to make a match of it, but couldn't cut down Jennifer (will it be shortened to Jen?). His team behind 4-1, Kohei tries again—against Taylor. Loses the first, 15-13, after getting in two crosscourt forehands to go ad up; loses the deciding third from 8-all by failing to return two serves.

NYAC/NYTC 1 over Big Dogs (5-0). Justen Yao, down 1-0 and 13-12 to Shao Yu, soft-blocks his serve return into the net. But, recovering, he wins the third, and, though down triple-match-point in the fourth, contests to an 11-9 end. Joey Cochran, coached by Seemiller since Danny first came to South Bend maybe a dozen years ago, has twice been a member of both U.S. Cadet and Junior Teams, and now at 19 isn't about to panic even when making mistakes against the ever-threatening four-time U.S. Champion David Zhuang. Case in point: David's up 10-7—whereupon Joey mis-serves, then fails to return serve, then again fails to return serve. Who wins this game? Cochran, 12-10. But David is formidable—has Joey 7-0 in the third.

Canada over NYAC/CATT Women's (5-0). North American Champion Pradeban ("Praddy") Peter-Paul, up 2-0 and 10-1 showed Huijing Wang no mercy—but so what, she looked as if she didn't need any. Homayoun "Homey" Kamkar-Parsi smashed a 12-10 winner at her too. Hah, maybe our Olympian will be the one to crystallize an avenging response—she's up



Photos by Steve Hopkins



2-0 on Pierre-Luc Hinse....Then has to rally from 10-8 down in the fifth. Then watches helplessly as Hinse, up 13-12, hits in her serve with all his bravura might.

Semi's:

The format has been changed now to best three out of five matches.

JOOLA vs. Wang Chen TTT-1. "Jennifer" Wu, thought by some to be the best player on "Cindy's" team, especially after she'd beaten YanJun Gao to win the just-played Westfield tournament, scores a lead-off five-game victory (from 8-8) over He Zhi Wen.

Chen Weixing, with his all-out forehand picks, will soon fix that, right? Sure, 11-5 for him over Jackie in the first. But then—he looks surprised—slight Jackie is smacking balls through, and he's down 6-1. Our Open Champion is humbled? He digs in, gradually gets to 7-all, then goes ahead 10-9. Jackie responds by snapping a backhand through. Ohh, at 11-all, here he comes, fast-moving into position and swinging, discus-like, that mighty forehand, but What the...?! (as a fellow actually named his team)—Jackie contains it, then counters cleanly into Chen's open forehand, and evens the match at 13-11. Wow! Shades of 2007—will we have another Women's Team winner? Uh, perhaps not. Chen finishes her 3 and 9.

Roskopf, who's no longer even considering playing for the German National Team—it's time to stop, he says—quickly 8, 6, 3 hurtles balls through Taylor. And even more quickly Chen annihilates Jennifer, slipping, to his chagrin and spectator grins, as he tries to play an ending exhibition point.

Canada vs. NYAC/NYTTC 1

Peter-Paul rips through YanJun Gao, 3-zip, as if he'd never lost to him six months ago in that JOOLA Eastern Open at Rutgers.

Next up: David Zhuang vs. the much improved 21-year-old Pierre-Luc Hinse who, tired of traveling about (he'd been in India at the Commonwealth Youth Games), and mindful of doing therapy for his right shoulder, somewhat restricts his days at the Ottawa Training Center, and, feeling the need for an education, spends part of his time attending Ottawa University majoring in "Conflict Studies in Human Rights."

A Conflict Study he's got here too—the more so after he loses the first game to David's HAZHAA! then rebounds to take the second. In the third, from 9-all through 12-all, both players are yelling encouragement to themselves after every point. Hinse is fast moving and relies a lot on lobs to try to stay in the point (if his opponent temporizes with a high return he rushes in and fly-swats it down). When he wins this third game 14-12, David, irritated,

Team JOOLA photo provided by NATT. Other photos by Steve Hopkins.



backhands the dumb ball into a barrier. But although Pierre-Luc can flexibly bring balls back up from under the table and can lean over it almost to the net to smack in winners, he hasn't David's consistent table control and goes down 11-5, 11-7.

Canada could use Wilson Zhang Peng who they won with in 2005—but no one's brought him here from Lebanon where he plays in a league (leagues almost everywhere, huh?). Homayoun Kamkar-Parsi—can he beat Stephen Wang? Maybe. For though the veteran Canadian National loses the first game at deuce he wins the next two. In the fourth, "Homey" is down 5-1...10-8, but super-staunch blocks bring him to deuce and beyond, to match point. However, again the momentum shifts, and Wang, attacking, deservedly wins the game. In a continuing burst of confidence, Stephen leads 8-2 in the fifth. But then Homey's on the forehand move... until, bummer for him, having pulled to 8-6, he misses an easy smash. Now Wang's serve and failed follow brings him almost to his knees. Then, again, this time in mid-point, he's almost floored, but regains his balance to eventually go up 10-8, double match point. It's Homey's serve, and he makes the most of it, cradle/dropping the ball again and again and again on the table while trying to make up his mind what to do. Did he visualize the serve and follow that now brings him to deuce? But then he tops off Wang's serve, and after an exchange of net-close drops Stephen attacks first, the ball goes in, and he's the winner.

Against David Zhuang, Peter-Paul opens so overpoweringly that David, down 10-4, swats a give-away ball. This is gonna be easy? David mis-serves, falls behind 6-3 in the second, then 8-5 when Praddy's counter-swing follow through catches David's back-edge ball for a freak point. But now it seems to me the very experienced Canadian goes soft, and from here on in Zhuang, finishing this game with a 6-1 run, is able to jam him. Again and again Praddy tries to move left to power in his forehand but in doing so is again and again



vulnerable on his open right to David's fast thrusts. Several times, too, Praddy is caught trying to step around as Zhuang serves—and David aces him down that open forehand side. Having outplayed and outthought his opponent, Zhuang is so pleased with his win that he exuberantly slaps hands all around, then goes over to scorekeeper Pat Collins and smiling, leaning over him, face up close, I thought for a moment he was going to kiss him.

Final

JOOLA's Chen Weixing opens his final's play with a 4, 7, 5 win over New York's Shao Yu—and what can I say about that? Two things: (1) that I've never seen Shao's enviable snap-backhand more nearly perfect; and (2) that anyone's rating in the mere mid-2500's isn't gonna make him competitive with this classy International. "It's sleep-inducing just watching Chen," someone said. "Attack or defense, he makes it look so easy."

Against He Zhi Wen, David's the underdog. But he knows he needn't growl—once he hits in a backhand and waves his racket cheerfully to the crowd. To me this is a strange match. The first game, Wen repeatedly loops in winners against David's serves, including one



when he's game-point down. From 8-all they play back and forth all the way to 14-all before Wen wins. In the second, Wen is faulted for not taking his hand away far enough. So what does he care? He wins this one 11-6. But, o.k., David—hooray—takes the third. Wen's swing is so grooved, so smooth, it may surprise some that in the second, third, and fourth games he mis-serves. But when it comes right down to it, he's there. From down 9-5, he wins 1-2-3-4-5-6 points, including a high-toss that draws a pop-up from David.

Has YanJun Gao any chance against Roskopf? Nope, not when you see Rossi, almost 40, in chasing the ball jump a barrier. Still, with the German showing a touch of exasperation, Gao does take the 15-13 third. But not the fourth. Rossi's three (6, 7, 5) wins against Gao reflect his Bundesliga position (at Julich)—though as he says, "I'm not that professional anymore. I practice only once a day. There's no stress." He liked this huge tournament, so appropriate for a country so large that organizing table tennis in it is difficult. He sees many good juniors, and wants JOOLA to get bigger in the U.S.—maybe sponsor more and more of these juniors, as it once did in the U.S. and abroad my own teenage sons.

