

JOOLA North American Team Championships

(Baltimore, MD, Nov. 27-29)

By Tim Boggan

Ah, Thanksgiving! It's family-time again at Richard Lee's 2009 Joola North American Team's—relatives and friends getting together to enjoy the year's unique 227-team bounty of play. Yep, the players here have gotta be turkey-stuffed thankful—not only to major sponsor Joola for the use of their 150 brand new 3000 SC Tables, and for their prize-money awards (which, a rumor of hope has it, will be increased next year), but to the City of Baltimore and its Convention Center that harbors so many traveling holiday pilgrims. Thanks, too, to Rockville, MD's Club Joola, Phillips Seafood, Senoda, and State Mortgage for their continued encouraging sponsorship. Meanwhile, large slices of pumpkin pie to those who made it possible for me to write this article—Tournament Director John Miller, Tournament Media/Entertainment personality Alan Williams, Registration Director Wendy Troy, and, among others, Tom Nguyen, Mary Palmer, Sandy Pate, and Sean and Wei Wei Lonergan. Add some mellow whipped cream on that pie for Referee Bill Walk and his uniformed umpires intent on keeping alert (ball thrown up on serve 4-5-6-7-8 inches?) and the peace pipes smoking.



Believe me, I don't exaggerate—coming to this tournament is like coming to a new world. So many formidable players, so many unrecognizable names and faces being given the red carpet treatment—how identify them? Never mind—that may well be too difficult. Enough for all participants to know that once harbored here they'll need all their survival techniques to advance.

Preliminary Play

Black Friday—are the vibes good or bad? At the outset, players are divided into 16 Preliminary Groups according to the combined strength of their three highest-rated players. Modified round-robin play then determines what Divisions they'll play in for the remainder of the weekend. As usual (for 12 straight years now), I begin my write up by establishing the 16 initial Group winners who'll be joined by the four top-seeded teams to make a total of 20 theoretically in contention for the \$10,000 first prize. These 20—actually 21 because a late-entering seeded team was allowed to play—are then divided into four round robins, Division 1A, 1B, 1C, 1D. Out of each

of these round robins two teams will advance to single elimination play—via a quarter's, semi's, and final—to determine the winner.

Since the teams are placed relative to strength in a snake format 1-16; 17 (vs. 16)-32 (vs. 33)-48...it might be assumed that the #1 through #6 teams, playing respectively the #32 (and backwards) through #27 teams as their presumed toughest opponent, would all win 5-0 easily—and they did. That includes East China University (ECU) 1 over Aruba Aloe; four-time U.S. Champion Cheng Yinghua's NYAC/STL team over the Mexico Boys (seven teams here represented Mexico); and Joola + 1 over current U.S. Champion Crystal Huang's LATTA team.

The following teams were also blanked:

The #3-positioned Bongrippetz team upset Coach Liu Hui Yuan's NYTTC 5 team to finish second in their Group—but of course that wasn't good enough to advance to Division 1 title contention; Gao Jun's NYAC (NY Athletic Club) Women's Team, Captained by Gail Kendall, was much too strong for them. Coach Liu, who manages the well known Flushing, Queens Club, after his

All Photos by Gerry Chua. See page 30 for the photo captions.



first success as a player for the Henan, China Provincial Team returned to teach and coach at Henan University where his most famous pupil was Deng Yaping, future World and Olympic Champion. When Reza Ghiasi ripped through Liu and his teammates, and Winifred Addy added another two wins, that put them, along with the other second-place finishers, into Division 2.

Perhaps "The Diplomats" were so-named because their #1, "Bad Boy" Barney Reed of last year's originally named "Fighters" team, showed on a recent Ellen DeGeneres show that he could be winningly personable? Barney and teammates weren't so diplomatic with the runner-up MyTableTennis.NET 1 team, though—didn't give them so much as a game. Professional harpist Dickie Fleisher of this My 1 team, found harmony in talking with my wife Sally—her Long Island choir would be singing Benjamin Britten's Ceremony of Carols at her upcoming winter concert, and usually this was performed with harp accompaniment. Dickie wasn't a Harpo Marx (though he had Harpo's harp), but he couldn't resist repeating a joke. To those who never win anything at this tournament or probably anywhere else, he again presented his "Dead Last" plaque.

Preliminary Group 5 was won by the Bay Area Elite, but the #2 spot went to the ZA Club team that saw Austin Preiss down USATT magazine editor Steve Hopkins of the Heavy Running team. For some years now, Austin, who this summer won the Junior Consolation Singles at the Maccabiah Games, has been giving professional t.t. exhibitions with his father (over 2,700 lifetime performances for Scott so far, including half a dozen at Golf-dom's Pebble Beach—a perfect setting for 6-handicapper Austin who's just starting high school).

The U.S. National Cadet Team of Michael Landers, Alexander Yao, and Grant Li couldn't take a match from East China University (ECU) 2—but they did take home \$100 apiece for being the highest finisher in the Boys Under 18's.

Against the Division 1-advancing SPIN New York Mad Classics, Senoda had some chances. Their Dave Sakai, had he patience enough to play expedite, might have beaten Kazuyuki Yokoyama and his point-opening backhand serves instead of losing to him 12-10 in the fourth. And



Eric Boggan, at 1-1 and 13-all in the third with Rocky Wang, might have played on to a win if a couple of late-game nets had fallen his way instead of Rocky's. Bizarrely, given his world-class experience, Eric mis-served three times in this match—twice in a row, something I'd never seen him do ever! He did reach the fifth with many-time Barbados Champion Robert Roberts, but couldn't contest it. You know how addicted people can be to working crossword puzzles? Well, Robert was telling me how he was in danger of being addicted. He recently accompanied New York Times Crossword Editor Will Shortz in one of his can't-live-without-it treks to t.t. clubs round the country—says they visited at least six in Indiana.

5-1 ties? There were three.

The Wang Chen Women found a stubborn resistor in Texas Wesleyan's Chance Friend—he beat Wang Xinyue ("Taylor"), still a teenager but long a member of Beijing's Women's Team, 12-10 in the fifth, and extended Wu Yue to 13-11 in the fourth.

Porky's didn't get totally roasted—no, it wasn't a Truelson who savored the win (Porky's is the name of the Truelson's family's restaurant in Minneapolis), but James Fen. He beat NYTTC 3's Peng Ying—but as Peng edged Natalie Sun, 11-9 in the fifth, that was their only win.

John Bauer's The Punishers punished themselves and not the Philippine team METTA or anyone else when they had to begin playing with only two players.

There were three 5-2 ties (not surprisingly in Groups 14, 15, and 16 where the team ratings were closest) and all of them resulted in upsets.

Spin New York's Cool Evolution, or rather Not So Cool Devolution, saw Fuhua 2's 15-year-old Anne Deng start the reversal when, from down 2-0, she beat De Tran. Then the very promising young lefty, Charles Deng, not yet a teenager but already well-traveled (China, Canada, France), posted wins over Guyana's Paul David and Somewhere's Tahl Leibovitz. Perhaps, though, these losses demanded some show of spirit, so Tahl took revenge on Charles's sister Anne, and De, struggling, beat the otherwise undefeated-in-this-tie Zhang Yanan, just back from China.

The Baltimore Brawlers upset Lily Yip Sports on the strength of three big swing matches: After Barry Dattel

won out over Nazruddin "Oscar" Asgarali, 11-8 in the fifth, there was a sudden change of fortune: Princeton's Adam Hugh (making a late decision to join his sister Judy on the team—she's the current U.S. University Women's Champion out of Rutgers) was up 2-0 and at 10-all in the 3rd against Nigeria-trained Larry Abass, but couldn't close. And Zhao Zhi Yang followed by dropping two stingers—11-8 in the fifth to Abass, and 11-9 in the fifth to 21-year-old Khaleel Asgarali in a Trinidad-Tobago (that's Toe-BAY-go) playing shirt since, following in his father's National Team footsteps, he was (and still is?) their Champion.

Group 16 vs. Group 17 pits the NYTTC 4 Korean team of Lee Sang Mook, penhold hitter Kim Bong Geun, the Ko brothers, Carlos and Ed, and chopper Sumi Lee who once played for the Korean Airlines Women's Team ("Even twenty years ago," she said, "if there were 10 players on a League Team, only one would be a chopper"). Their opponents? An East China University 3 Team of Yu Hua, Yue Jiang, and Yue Deng. I can hear in my mind the beginning of an old Abbott and Costello routine:

Here comes one of the Ko brothers ready for action. "Who do you start off against?" asks an interested bystander.

"I think I play Yu."

"No, no, you don't play me."

"Of course not. But maybe I play Yue."

"No, I told you—you don't play me!

"I know that. Could I possibly play the other Yue?..."

The New York Team is off to a great start—Lee beats Deng Yue from 2-1 down and 11-all in the fourth; and Carlos Ko triumphs over Yu Hua 11-8 in the fifth. Then they lose 1-2-3-4-5 matches in a row, all in straight games.

Perhaps the most-followed ties were the two 5-4 ones.

In an everybody-contributes effort, Canada 2—Xavier Therien, Andre Ho, and Arnaud R-Nadon (that R's not an initial but a singular part of his last name)—knocked out NYAC/NYTTC 2 (Thomas Yu, Choor Sime Oh, and Yang Lin). Ho-ho-ho opened and closed with wins, Therien added two more (he lost to Yang in five), and Arnaud the key swing match—an 11-9-in-the-fifth win over OH!



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Guillermo Munoz's Mexico advanced (though of their nine matches not a single one was closely contested) over second-place finisher Dickie Fleischer's MyTableTennis. NET 2—in addition to the NET Elite team of Chinese, one of the six NET teams (David Mahabir's was another) consisting of forum members sponsored by Ontario's Alex Li.

Division 1A through 1D Play

In Division 1A, Canada 2 didn't win a tie, but had the distinction of providing the best competitive matches. They lost 5-3 to The Diplomats, but were in the tie until Raghu "Rags" Nadmichettu, who'd lost his two previous matches, sneaked, 14-12 in the fifth, by R-Nadoun. Canada also lost 5-4 to SPIN New York Mad Classics who, having been blanked in their other ties, zeroed in against the Canadians. Forget diplomatically that Mad and/or Classic defender Yokoyama Kazuyuki, up 2-1 and 10-6 in the fourth, failed, deuce in the fifth, to beat the Boris Shafir-coached Barney Reed (forget, too, Barney's compulsion to keep spectators abreast of just how many forehands in a row he was missing against Germany's Torben Wosik). In this Canada tie, Kaz, retrieving from all over the court, won all three, getting by both Therien and Ho in five. But again, alas, Arnaud lost the last match—to Rocky Wang.

In other ties, Therien went five with Germany's Rosskopf (said he was 9-all in the fifth with the serve), and had a good win over 2007 World University Games silver medalist Liu Juan of this Division's second-place finishing team, East China University 1. Ho, meanwhile, gave Germany (20-1) their only match loss—beat Nico Stehle in five (for which there was a little "Thank You" written under the result printed on the match sheet). Rossi at 1-1 and 10-all in the third was also challenged by 25-year-old Frenchman Damien Provost who went down to ECU 1's Tang Li Ying in five. Damien, who back in 2001 had been on the winning team in the European Junior's, played for the first time in this country at our 2009 U.S. Open. He'd Facebook-contacted scholar/athlete/diplomat Marcus Jackson about playing on his team here, and that was fine. He had French League credentials—his 2nd Division team finishing first last season with Blotinos, Javor, and another Damien—Eloi—until rather recently a perennial stalwart of the French National Team.



In Division 1B, the Philippine Team METTA A didn't win a tie, couldn't post a better result than 2-5. But against Gao Jun's NYAC Women's Team, former Philippine National Champion Joe Cruz forced both Hubei Province's Mai Gejie (American equivalent "Jessie") and Western Open winner, penholder attacker Zheng Jiaqi ("Jackie"), into the fifth, while Ting Ledesma and Lauro Crisostomo both beat former Chinese Junior Team member Li Tao. Against Mexico, Lauro stopped Guillermo Munoz in five, and Ting rallied from 2-0 down to defeat Okoh Jude. Munoz, Mexico's longtime International, had a good win over ECU 2's Cai Shanshan, who'd been one of the women on the historic 2007 winning team, but Cai finished by 12-10-in-the-fifth outlasting Jude.

The only tie that was really competitive in this Division was between Gao Jun's New York women (5) and Mexico (4). Munoz took all three, including close wins over Mai (13-11 in the fourth) and perennial U.S. Champion Gao (11-8 in the fifth). Mai, however, got the better of Rafael Mendez, 13-11 in the fourth. But though Jude beat Mai, he lost a killer, 11-9 in the fifth, to Jiaqi, who earlier, in a big swing match, had come from down 2-0 to beat Rafael, 12-10 in the fifth.

Gao didn't play against runner-up finisher ECU 2 (only Mai could win a match). In the Division's premier tie, ECU 2 resisted Canada 1...up to a point. Geng Yaning went down 11-9 in the fifth to Wang Zhen (Eugene). But then she recovered to a 14-12-in-the-fourth win over Pierre-Luc Hinse who also lost in five to Dai Ningyang, winner in the Team's and Women's Doubles at the 2006 World University Games. However, it was Pierre-Luc who took the 5-2 clincher from Cai Shanshan, 11-9 in the fifth.

In Division 1C, with a 2-20 record, the Baltimore Brawlers were more Baltimore Bawlers—though Khaleel Asgarali had a good win over John Leach, 12-10 in the fifth. At the other 20-2 extreme was Alex Li's MyTableTennis. NET Elite Chinese team. In between there was a three-way tie for second, and since each team finished 2-2 in matches, the tie-breaker would be based on a percentage of games won and lost. At the 9:00 a.m. Saturday tie, the Bay Area Elite's Zhang Weijian (2655) zapped his three NYTTC 3 opponents. And though Zhang's teammates Wang Siliang (Steven), a professional player from Chi-



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na's Hebei Province who was fresh off a \$2,500 win in the Joola North American Tour Finals, and Avischy Schmidt both lost to Chen Guo and Liang Anhong, both easily beat the badly mismatched Peng Ying (2135).

The 51-year-old Cheng would defeat the entire Bay Area team, and get just enough help from former Asian Games winner Duan Yongjun (who beat Steven) and Justen Yao (who beat Avischy) to win the tie 5-3. But earlier the NYTTC 3 team had downed Cheng's NYAC/STL TT team 5-2 with Ms. Peng again dropping matches—this time to Duan and Justen, another young scholar/athlete who this summer had trained at the Shanghai Sports School. (Justen's out of St. Louis, hence the STL in their team name.) The 13-11-in-the-fifth clincher went to 42-year-old Liang and his wicked serves who in the My Elite tie had defeated Chen Hao (rated 2650). Thus the NYTTC 3 team posted a 9-7 games record that could not be overcome and so advanced to the quarter's.

In Division 1D, the Joola + 1 team, despite Han Xiao's three wins against Wang Chen's Women's Team, couldn't get anything going and so, come Saturday night and their 7:00 p.m. tie, said to hell with it and defaulted. Which gave Fuhua 2 its only win—though earlier against the Grace Lin 1 team both Zhang Yanan and Charles Deng (2250) took down Du Chengyi (2631), as in another tie did Joola's China-trained Peter Li, 14-12 in the fifth. And what does young Deng like to do when he isn't playing t.t. or picking up pointers there in Houston from Coach Huijing Wang? He plays the clarinet and reads...reads anything. Maybe even something I wrote. When he overheard, as I was talking to his father Zhenghan, that my name was Boggan, he said, "Wasn't there an Eric Boggan who won the U.S. Championship when he was 15?" M'god, a 12-year-old who knows that from more than 30 years ago is ambitious, thinking ahead.

The #2 seeded, #2 finishing NYAC/NYTTC team dropped an up and down tie to Grace Lin 1. Du Chengyi ("James") may lose it with juniors, but he beat former Philippine Champ, the 2600-rated Eastern Open Champ Ernesto Ebu, 11-9 in the fourth. Ernesto then fell to 2700-rated Li Hu, 8, 5, 3. Li (2700) stayed strong against Gao Yanjun after Gao had 14-12 saved the fourth, and Zhu Wen Tao also took the fifth from Gao. Our 2008 Player of the Year, David Zhuang, was up 2-1 on Zhu,



then 11-2, 11-4 down, down, down. But David did win his team's only match—it was over Du.

The Wang Chen women were more than pretty in pink, they were fighters. Check out their 5-1 loss to the "sleeper" ECU 3 team (actually, these were high school teenagers who practiced with the more practiced university students). While only Wang Xinyue (that's "Taylor") could score a winner, 12-10 in the fifth over Yu Hua, she and her teammates might well have won not only more matches but the tie itself: Sun Boh lost 11-9 in the fifth to Yue Jiang and later 13-11 in the fifth to Yu Hua; Wu Yue {"Jennifer"}, like "Taylor" long a member of the Beijing's Women's Team and 2007 winner of the ITTF's Taiyuan Junior Open, lost to Jiang in five; and "Taylor" lost to Yue Deng 13-11 in the fifth.... You got all that, did you?

ECU 3, though finishing third, put up a 5-3 struggle at 9:00 in the morning and at 7:00 in the evening. First, against the NYAC/NYTTC 1 team (with David Zhuang sitting out—spending a little breakfast-time with the wife and kids, was he?). Here the ECU teenagers were beaten by a combined team effort—Ernesto and Gao taking two, and Shao Yu one. Then, against undefeated Grace Lin 1, the teenagers still looked fresh—with Yue Deng downing Du Chenyi 12-10 in the fifth, then (after almost losing three straight—escaping by staying 12-10 up in the second) winning again in five over Li Hu; and Yue Jiang last-gasp giving Li a second loss. ECU 3 won the \$300 first-prize for U-18 Girls, but I was told that, unlike the University-sponsored ECU teams 1 and 2, they had to pay their own way here.

Quarter's

In the Single Elimination Sunday-morning quarter's, Germany blanked East China University 2. Expect Roskopf to show mercy against Head Coach Shanshan and her Shanghai women's team? Not a chance. He doesn't want his own two daughters playing table tennis—says it's all too complicated. And his son looks not to Timo Boll but to Bernhard Langer, likes golf

MyTableTennis.NET Elite was too 5-1 strong for NYAC/NYTTC 1 when only David Zhuang could score a win—over Ma Yawei (though that didn't stop David from playfully exchanging yells or growls out there on court with Chen Hao). Score did I say? Roskopf's daughters

did I just speak of? Ah, a perfect chance to segue into a mention of David and wife Joannie's daughters. Cassidy is perhaps a little young but how's Zoe's t.t. career going? What's that?...She's a member of the Central Jersey Youth Orchestra—plays musical instruments (piano, double bass, bass guitar)...just like her mother. David! Assert yourself! Tell her there's money to be won in t.t. Your four-man team share for finishing highest among the Over 40 teams was \$75.

The tie between Canada 1 (men—but without Homaoun Kamkar-Parsi who's now living and working in Germany) and East China University 1 (women) is the most contested. Pierre-Luc Hinse, 22, who's been perambulating around the t.t. world—to Scotland for the Commonwealth Championships, Belgium for the Flanders Open, Austria for the World Cup—lost to both Tang Li Yin, who I think is the current World University Champion in Team's, Singles and Doubles, and Liu Juan of the Chinese National Team. However, Wang Zhen balanced with wins over Ma YuFei and Tang. Pradeeban Peter-Paul lost to Liu, 3-0, but the 20-18 game they put on was great fun for the spectators. Back came 2009 Arnold Challenge winner Pradee—his muscular attack just strong enough to subdue Ma in five and with an added acrobatic finish. Tie tied.

Again Wang came through. And now it was up to Peter-Paul to increase the Canadian take of the prize money from \$500 to \$1,650 or more. In the first game against Tang, Pradee ran it out from five-all. The second he won from 10-7 up. And in the third I don't know if Tang was nervous or not, but after mis-serving to go 3-1 down, she failed to return serve, failed to return serve again to go 6-4 down, and failed to return serve again to go 10-8 down, then lost the game and match. Since East China University 1 and 2 were both beaten in the quarter's, they shared the \$500 award for top finisher in the Women's.

Against Grace Lin 1, the NYTTC 3 team is at a disadvantage. Gao Shu Wei, listed on their roster as 2400, didn't show—which meant they had to rely on their only other player, Peng Ying (rated 2135), and she was saying about herself and teammates, "We're all old" (Peng confesses to being 40). So, no, they ain't gonna win this tie—though they do better than maybe even they expect. Liang An Hong, showing quite a touch with his precision



placements, beats Zhu Wen Tao in five (at 24 Zhu is 18 years Liang's junior), and blanks 20-year-old Du Chengyi (2631). Teammate Chen Guo challenges both Du and Beijing Big Leaguer Li Hu into the fifth. And even Peng Ying, who looks anything but old, forces Li to 11-9 in the fourth.

Semi's

It's Sunday afternoon—some pilgrims are eager to stay, some eager to go back home. The format has changed—now only three matches per tie are necessary to win, and matches are best three out of five games (not four out of seven as they were in 2007). Each team still has to field three players, but he/she who's positioned third plays only that one match.

Against MyTableTennis.NET Elite, Torben Wosik, who I'd seen warming-up—a stretch, I thought, this bright ribbon he'd attached to the stands and, childlike, appeared to be playing with. But perhaps Torben (who my son Eric more than a quarter-century ago during his days on the Bad Hamm Bundesliga Team remembered as being just a little kid) wasn't your typical German—says he prefers red wine to beer. He preferred to beat Chen Hao too, but didn't—though down 2-0 he stayed alive by winning the third, and rallied from 10-6 down in the fourth before finally succumbing 11-9. Gonna be a big swing in prize money here—lose in the semi's your team gets \$1,600; lose in the final it's \$4,000.

Since 40-year-old Roskopf is sponsored by Joola, it'd be nice for them if he and his teammates could win this tie. The name Joola, I was told decades ago, came from an original "Joo"-something, but only the "Joo" was kept then combined with "la," the first two letters in Landau where the company was located. I was also told that in the late 1970's their factory could make 200 tables a day.

Roskopf had won the World Doubles with Stephen Fetzner 20 years ago, but could he now—focused more on being a National Coach than a player—consistently match up with China's Zhou Xin who only two years ago was playing in the Chinese Super League? In the first, Rossi's down 6-1... then up 8-7... only to lose from 10-all when Zhou bangs in two winning backhands. By 1989 Rossi already had a sweeping snap-backhand; since then,





in Europe or Asia, many another has come to have one of his own.

In the second, Rossi's up 10-3 and serves off. Quickly continues—what does it matter?—quickly gets the win.

Now, though, there are distractions. Announcer Alan Williams pleads for “No flash-photography,” but such a light catches a player's eye (as another will another). I myself at courtside wear a yellow shirt and Rossi requests I move a bit, out of his line of sight. There, Rossi's more comfortable, and his game shows it—he's won the third 11-6, and is up 5-1 in the fourth, has won eight of the last nine points. Yessir, he's on a roll. But then the most amazing thing happens—I've never seen the like. Rossi—and how is it possible for a player of such renown?—loses 17 of the next 18 points! And throughout just keeps playing, without hesitation, expressionless. This of course is a disastrous turnaround for Team Germany, and they're now down two matches to one.

We know the Chinese Elite are formidable National Team players from the Shandong Luneng Club. We know the MyNET sponsor, Alex Li, is the Founder and Director of the Canadian Chinese Table Tennis Association—and that he has flyers and business cards to prove it. But who's this Nico Stehle? At one time he played in the First Division Bundesliga with Rosskopf, did he? Is now 28 but still plays (Third Division out of Herborn) and describes himself as both a student of Business and Sports Science. “Yeah,” says his friend Rossi, “he's studying backhands and forehands.” The first game is close—and it goes 12-10 to Ma Yawei. But then—it's a surprise to me—Nico keeps Team Germany's hopes alive, wins in five, putting together 5, 7, 7 games.

Against Zhou, Wosik, unlike Rosskopf, never loses a flurry of points, but when he loses the first two games from 8-all, he can no longer challenge. So Team Germany won't win. However, they don't look at all broken up about it—will go on about their lives as if they've just enjoyed a holiday. Certainly Torben isn't unhappy playing in the French League, feels there's definitely less pressure on him there than in Germany. He's based in Angers, 300 kilometers from Paris, and with great hopes for the future will soon open his own 24-table Academy.

Canada 1 tried to make a match, match, match of it with the Grace Lin 1 team, but couldn't catch momen-

tum. Canada Cup Champion Wang Zhen didn't help by losing his opener three straight to Zhu Wen Tao. Down 2-1 to Li Hu, Peter-Paul took the fourth with the help of an out-of-position counter of a ticked-net ball. But in the fifth from seven-all, Li got in a forehand, Pradee took a bad shot, and couldn't recover. Hinse, who at the University of Ottawa is into Environmental Studies and so is giving me dire warnings about global warming, couldn't have been feeling too upbeat about himself after losing the first, 15-13, to Du Chengyi. He fought back, took the second from Du who has this unusual and perhaps distracting serve motion—whirling the racket around behind him then coming down and through the ball. But in the third and fourth games he couldn't bring Canada 1 back into contention.

Final

In an all-China final, the Grace Lin team is clearly too strong for the MyNET.Elite. Li Hu wins 5, 6, 6 against Chen Hao who seems to force too much, tries to win the point too fast. Zhu Wen Tao drops a game to Zhou Xin, but is otherwise 8, 7, 7 secure. MyNET's Ma 5, 6, 7 strikes back. But Li, up 2-0 and 10-1 in the third against Zhou, quickly moves to end it all. One longtime observer—no, not me—was a mite depressed. I think he longed for a simpler, slower time, a Detroit Intercities, Detroit (wood) tables. Seeing not the lower-rated players competing contentedly away, his attention centered elsewhere or, more precisely, nowhere. Like the great majority of spectators, he wandered around, unfamiliar with the names and faces of the foreign players, knowing little or nothing about them.

The first Thanksgiving was a convergence of strangers from different lands to one festive gathering. What better way to celebrate the holiday. Ah, Thanksgiving.

PHOTOS:

Page 22: Li Hu (left) and Chen Hao (right); Page 23: Grace Lin TTC 1, Chen Hao (MyTableTennis.net Elite), Li Hu (Grace Lin TTC 1); Page 24: Torben Wosik (Team Germany), Wang Zhen (Team Canada); Page 25: Joerg Rosskoff (Team Germany); Page 26: Team Germany, Charles Deng (Fuhua); Page 28 Royal Air Force team (UK), Pradeeban Peter Paul (Team Canada); Page 29: Nico Stehle (Team Germany), Piere Luc Hinse (Team Canada); Page 30: Du Cheng Yi (Grace Lin TTC 1), Zhu Wen Tao (Grace Lin TTC 1); Page 31: Li Hu (Grace Lin TTC 1)

--All Photos by Gerry Chua

