

# Umpire's Report

2010 Harmony China Open and Pro Tour (Suzhou)  
Suzhou Sports Center, Suzhou, China  
August 18 – 22, 2010

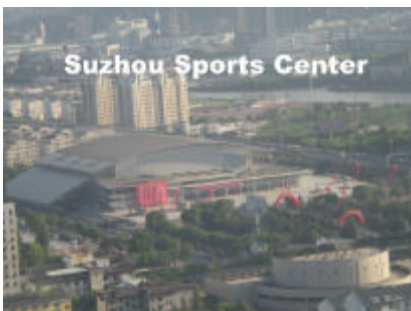


First of all, I want to thank the Selection Committee for allowing me to umpire at this prestigious tournament. For me this was even better than when I had umpired at the 2008 World's Team Championships in Guangzhou, China. There I was relegated to the auxiliary playing hall where lower divisions played. At the China Open this year, however, there was only one playing hall with 12 tables. I umpired quite a few world class players such as Ma Lin, Wang Liqin, Guo Yue, etc. But I am getting ahead of myself.

Close to 235 players from 35 nations, including USA, came to compete for the \$330,000 prize money, the highest in the Pro Tours. The city of Suzhou has a five-year contract to hold this event and this is their second year. Six events were played on 12 tables: MS, WS, MD, WD, U-21 Boys and U-21 Girls. Two men, Adam Hugh and Wally Green, and three women, Jiaqi Zheng, Yue Wu and Maggie Tian, were from the USA.

On August 16, the long flights to China did not begin very well. The first leg from Baltimore to Philadelphia was uneventful. The second leg from Philadelphia was repeatedly delayed, first due to late crew arrival, then an auxiliary power unit repair, so that I missed my final connecting flight from Toronto to Shanghai. As a result, they rebooked me the on the next day's flight from Vancouver to Shanghai, causing me to miss the Referee's orientation, first day's matches, opening ceremonies and the banquet. Because while in Canada I had no way of communicating my flight changes to China Table Tennis Association for airport pickup, I had to rely on my wife in the USA to relay the changes. Apparently they received the changes because a volunteer was waiting for me at the airport to take me and another Korean player to Suzhou, two hours away by car.

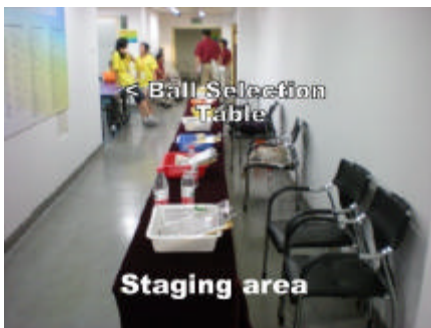
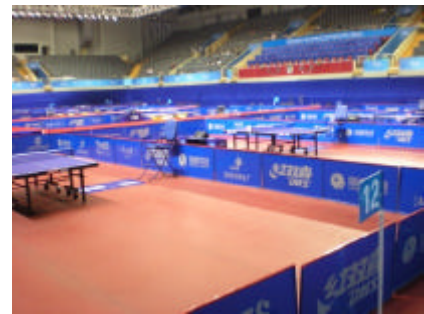
The local organizing committee spared no expenses to provide plush accommodation to the eight visiting umpires from Australia, Hong Kong, India, Iran, Japan, Singapore, Taiwan and the USA. We stayed in the brand new five-star Marriott Hotel (opened in Dec 2009) with each umpire having his own room. The players stayed here as well, so we not only umpired them at the venue but also ate with them in the hotel. We were given meal coupons for all the meals, but did not have enough time to return to the hotel for lunch each day. Instead, box lunches were provided at the umpires' lounges. The hotel buffet provided all types of exotic ethnic fares from India, Japan, Thailand, Malaysia, etc., but the box lunches of typical family cooking dishes suited my taste buds much better. The Chinese umpires were quartered in a different hotel and we had no opportunity to socialize with them away from the venue.



From my 38<sup>th</sup> floor window, I could see the sports center two long blocks away. It was a five-minute ride by shuttle, which ran punctually

every 30 minutes. It took less than 10 minutes to walk, as I did couple of times, if one cared to do so in the prevalent hot and humid weather. Two umpire lounges with lockers, chairs, tables and bottled water were provided to the 30 Chinese and 11 visiting umpires. Initially both rooms allowed smokers, but at my suggestion, one room was designated for non-smokers.

The main playing hall had 12 tables during the preliminary rounds, which then gradually reduced to 4, 2 and then one table on the last day. Next to the main hall was the practice hall with 8 tables. Just outside the practice hall were a row of long, narrow tables with 12 baskets, one for each table, containing the match clipboard, towel, and time-out cards. The umpire of the first match of the day would take these items to the table and leave them there for the day. The umpire of the final match of the day would bring them back. At the umpire's high chair of each table and at the scoreboard table, timers were provided.



About 30 minutes before match time, runners would place the match sheets in the baskets. If the rackets of that match were to be tested, another sheet would be in the basket with players' names. The umpires would pick up these sheets and search for the players, usually found in the practice hall. The umpire would accompany the players with their rackets to the RC room and leave. Later, prior to marching in, the tested rackets would be given to the umpires in bags marked with the players' names and brought to the table.

As with this year's US Open, the matches were best of 7 but only 45 minutes were allocated for each round. As expected, match delays occurred almost immediately. Though I missed the first day's assignments, another umpire told me that on the first day, they worked a long day that lasted to late at night. The Chinese referee also served in the role as the chief umpire. He was constantly coming to the staging area asking, in Chinese, for this or that match's officials. The corridor where the baskets were located and where players would come and select balls was narrow. It was also the area where players and umpires would line up prior to the procession to the hall. As a result, this area was in a constant state of crowdedness, poor ventilation, noise and chaos. I had expected better operation from the Chinese association with many major events, such as the Worlds, Olympics, Pro Tours, under their belt and, therefore, was surprised that the operation behind the scene wasn't as smooth but quite confusing at times.

From time to time, oral announcements of new instructions would be made by the referee, but only in Chinese. He relied on passing on the information from mouth to mouth to those umpires who happened to be there. For example, they decided to enforce the rule that from certain point on, players must have their names on the back of their shirts; otherwise they were not allowed to play. This was orally given in Chinese to umpires present. A written notice in Chinese and English posted on the wall in the staging area and in the umpires' lounges would have been a better mode of information dissemination.

The corridor leading from the staging area into the hall were strewn with cables, wires and cable guards that posed safety hazards. One umpire tripped and fell on the first day, leaving her arms and legs black and blue.

The matches generally started at 10 AM and lasted until the last scheduled matches are finished, usually around 10 PM. The umpires did not have shifts but worked all day with occasional long enough breaks to return to the hotel for some rest or shopping. We were paired off in two-umpire teams, alternating being

umpire and assistant umpire. We were assigned to umpire every other match, averaging five to six matches per day. On the second day of competition (my first day), we umpired mostly U-21 Men's and Women's matches. After that, preliminary rounds of Men's and Women's singles and doubles match were umpired. In general, the schedule was not rushed and umpires had time to rest in between matches. Occasionally but rarely, when delays occurred, we have had to umpire two matches back to back. Due to the caliber of players, most matches went to the distance—but exciting. The highlight of the matches I umpired was the Women Singles Quarter Finals between World #3 GuoYan of China versus #5 Kim Kyung Ah of S. Korea. Kim, a steady chopper, jumped to a 3-0 lead. Guo came back and evened at 3-3 but just couldn't convert her uphill effort to victory, and lost the match at 11-13. Eventually, Kim reached the final but lost to World #7, Liu Xiaoxia, 0-4. China Open matches can be viewed on <http://www.itf.com/itTV/>.



On Sunday morning, the final day of competition, the matches didn't start until 1 PM. Most of the visiting umpires were free for the day. Suzhou, the Venice of the Orient with its many canals, is also well known for gardens built by long-ago high officials and wealthy people which now have become parks. In the morning the organizers sponsored a tour of some of the popular places around the city: Tiger Hill Park, Humble Official's Garden and a silk market, the former two required much walking.



Long before the tournament, about 60 young, college volunteers were recruited from across the country and trained to provide essential services. Some were assigned to pick up people during the first two days and then reassigned to other duties such as attending to the baskets, dispensing balls, crowd control, ticket takers, runners, RC operators, operating computers, even mopping after sweaty players when required. Most stayed with friends or relatives for the duration. The girl who met me at the airport told me it was something worthwhile to do while home from school, something she derived satisfaction in making a contribution. I surmised that this probably was the sentiment of most of these young people who played an

essential part.

As I mentioned at the beginning of my report, to me this was a mini-World's. Suzhou also has a sentimental significance because I had lived there for about a year many decades ago, and to be back after so many years was a memorable trip.

At the conclusion of this competition, I stayed in China one more week to visit relatives and the Expo, but that's another story.

Respectfully submitted,

Joseph C. H. Lee  
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