

SWAYTHLING

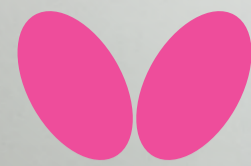
No.112 (April 2023)



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Major Rewards**

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Issue No.112 (April 2023)

Cover: Aditya Sareen

Editor:
Ian Marshall

Sub Editor:
Richard Scruton

Statistics:
Michael Theiss

Contributors:
Won Bae, Will Bayley, Alica Chladekova, Chuck Hoey, Eva Jeler, Ina Jozepsone, Dr. Miran Kondric, Jens Lang, Gaël Marziou, John Murphy, Chulong Nie, Izaac Quek, Aditya Sareen, Stuart Sweeney, Jochen Wollmert, Laura Wong, Andris Zelenkovs

Photographs:
Malcolm Anderson, Alica Chladekova, Remy Gros, ITTF/APAC Sport Media, Gaël Marziou, World Table Tennis, Jochen Wollmert

Designed by J.T

Contents

- 4. Half a Century Later, Still No Equal
- 10. Stunning Debut
- 14. South Africa, Road to Integration
- 18. Muscat Reunited
- 24. Impact of Table Tennis on Seniors
- 28. Jochen Wollmert, Man of Integrity
- 32. Landmark for Australia
- 36. Modest Goals Reap Major Rewards

Attracting Attention

The focus is on performances from totally different eras that have attracted the attention and raised the eyebrows; turning the clock back to the 1928 World Championships in Stockholm, Latvia proved a match for the very best of the era. Turn the clock forward to 2022 and Australia, a country proud of its sporting heritage but never a major contender for global honours in the table tennis sphere, reserved a podium place at the World Youth Championships in Tunisia.

Outstanding achievements, as year after year were those of Germany's recently retired Jochen Wollmert, in many eyes the greatest Paralympian of all; his efforts have stood the test of time, as in a different manner have those of Slovakia's Alica Chladekova. Known by her maiden name, Alica Grofova, she was the women's singles runner up at the 1973 World Championships; since that date, Asian players have always contested the final.

Equally, Alfred Ludwig and Pentti Niukkanen caught the eye in Muscat being ever present at the World Veteran Championships; now attention turns to Durban and the ITTF World Championships Finals, more memorable moments await.

Ian Marshall

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Half A Century Later, Still No Equal

Predominantly Chinese, for over half a century, it has always been players from Asia who have contested the women's singles final at a World Championships. Judging by the amount of talent currently emerging from the Far East, the situation looks set to continue for the foreseeable future.

The most recent occasion when the scenario was different accrued in April 1973 in Sarajevo, nowadays the capital of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Representing Czechoslovakia, Alica Chladekova, playing under her maiden name Grofova, secured runners up spot. She was beaten in the final by China's Hu Yulan.

At the time did we realise how great the achievement? In those day a European female player pressing for honours was not unusual.

Prior to 1973, the only year in the history of the World Championships when a European player had not won a women's singles medal was 1965 in Ljubljana. Conversely, since that date, only three non-Asian players, all from Europe, have gained a women's singles podium finish. All bronze medalists, Tatiana Ferdman for the Soviet Union in 1975 in Calcutta, Romania's Otilia Badescu in 1993 in Gothenburg and now two decades ago, Croatia's Tamara Boros in 2003 in Paris.

Modern day performances reflect the measure of the achievement, one that may never have accrued had it not been for advice from one of the greatest of the immediate post war era.

"At first I played passively, with the occasional attack. It wasn't until the 1966 European Youth Championships in Szombathely, Hungary, where then national team coach, Ivan Andreadis, advised my father that I should adopt a more attacking style," Alica explained. "So, I became an attacking player; eventually, possessing one of the strongest forehands amongst female players."

Medals gained at the European Youth Championships, notably junior girls' team gold in partnership with Miloslava Polackova and Ilona Uhlikova in 1967 in Vejle and the following year in the city then known as Leningrad; in 1969 Alica made her debut at the World Championships in Munich. Alongside Ilona Vostova and Jitka Karlikova they secured women's team bronze.

It was an eye-opening tournament, a visit to another world!

"There were vending machines everywhere. In our country, cola was not sold, it was rare for us, so we used it to quench our thirst", smiled Alica. "When we couldn't sleep in the evening, we were tired, coach Andreadis forbade us from drinking cola and ordered a small beer for dinner. It worked very well!"



Award ceremony in 1975, organised by the Club of Slovak Journalists and the Slovak Central Committee of the Czechoslovak Association of Physical Education, Alica finished in third place.



Seated front row, second from left, Alica, a member of Czechoslovak team prior to 1965 European Youth Championships.



Nagoya

A successful women's team venture, the women's singles expedition in Munich was not so fruitful, she was beaten in the opening round by England's Karenza Mathews; two years later in Nagoya, life was very different.

"In 1971, I won bronze in the teams with Vostova; we were also the only Europeans to reach the quarter-finals of the singles," stressed Alica. "Vostova went one round further, we both lost to the finalists, the Chinese. It was a huge success for us."

Alica lost to Zheng Minzhi, the eventual runner up; Ilona Vostova to Li Huiqing, the winner. An outstanding performance and even more outstanding when the journey is considered.

"To get to Nagoya, we travelled for four days. We crossed the former Soviet Union, flew from Prague to Moscow, then to Khabarovsk, from there by train to Vladivostok and the port of Nakhodka; then we went by boat to Yokohama, followed by a train to Nagoya", explained Alica. "The trip was five times cheaper than a direct flight to Japan." Cheaper but seemingly not cheap enough!

"The return journey was the same route but the tickets for the ship fell on us because no one expected us to advance so far", continued Alica. "We

had to wait another week for boat tickets, so we could return home. I had a ticket for a cabin with a Japanese, but the expedition leader, Mr. Hanek Pivec, wouldn't allow it."

Problems concerning travel, there were also problems concerning clothing.

"For all international tournaments, we got tracksuits and shirts from the central warehouse before we left Prague, but we had to return them when we got back. All with the



Podium in 1973 - Alica Grofova, Hu Yulan, Zhang Li, Park Mira)

Facing Hu Yulan in the women's singles final in Sarajevo



1973 with Hana Riedlova (left) and (right) Ludmila Smidova

national emblem, we had three blue and three orange shirts for the whole World Championships," Alica reflected. "Zoltan Berczik, the Hungarian coach, complained that orange was not an acceptable colour; we played the whole tournament in three blue shirts. We washed them every night so we could play in them the next day, we had no money for hotel services, nobody expected us to be successful. The only thing that was ours were the skirts that Victor Barna gave us."

Sarajevo

A remarkable success in Nagoya, life was even better in 1973 in Sarajevo, mixed doubles bronze partnering Josef Dvoracek was followed by women's singles silver.

Success but it nearly did not happen, the preparation was not ideal, just as in 1966 when encouraged to be more positive by Ivan Andreadis, in a rather different manner, Alica made a major change to her playing style.

"Originally, I thought I would not go to Sarajevo. I was unwell; I was not allowed to play sport for four months. I started training only in December 1972 and I was not in the Czechoslovak team", explained Alica. "At that time, the national team coach, Václav Ostravický, literally forced me to change the rubber on my backhand from Sriver to anti-top spin. I played an offensive game with a defensive rubber; previously I had used Sriver on both sides, the blade being Swedish, given to me by Hans Alser."

At the time it was the combination also used by two national team members, Miloslava Polack and Dana Dubinová.

"After a month, I won the Czechoslovak Open. I beat Zoja Rudnova for the first time and in the final, Ilona Vostova. The next month I won the World Student Championships in Hanover, again defeating

Rudnova, this time in the final; thus, I was named for the World Championships in Sarajevo", said Alica. "I didn't perform my best in the team event; I injured my knee during the free day. I played the whole individual competition, including the finals, with a knee pad and a bandage."

Most certainly the knee injury did not hamper her performance in the women's singles event. A straight games win against Yugoslavia's Eva Jeler in the early rounds, underlined she was in good form.

"It was so hard to play against Alica; she played with anti-spin on the backhand, remember in those days both sides of the racket were the same colour, reflected Eva Jeler. "At the time new surfaces were emerging. In 1973 I had no experience of playing against such surfaces. I think the first time I came against anything resembling her kind of play was in 1971 in Nagoya. I'd never practised against such a style. Later, I discovered how to play against someone of that style."

A comprehensive win, against the lady who became one of the most respected coaches on planet earth, was followed by a much closer encounter in opposition to Hungary's Beatrix Kishazi, a contest in which Alica recovered from a two games to nil deficit to secure victory.

"Against Beatrix I was passive, I wasn't playing very effectively; I lost the first two games and was down 9-15 in the third, it looked like a quick end. I managed to play some good points and that probably encouraged me," recalled Alica. "However, I had no idea that I could still win the match. It was the only occasion in my life when I was able to turn a match in such a way and against a defender! It was literally a miracle."

Hard earned success against Beatrix Kishazi; in the next round, the quarter-finals, Alica beat the Soviet Union's Elmira Antonian, before overcoming Korea Republic's Park Mirae to reach the final where China's Hu Yulan ended dreams.

"After the match against Kishazi, I played really well; unfortunately, except for the final", smiled Alica. "The huge tension and excellent tactical game of my opponent Hu Yulan did not allow me to repeat the good performances from previous matches."

Reaching the final was a momentous achievement, Alica had raised her game to a new level. On the February 1973 World Rankings issued prior to the World Championships, the name of Alica Grofova did not appear amongst the 30 listed names; Hu Yulan occupied top spot. Following the tournament, Hu Yulan retained first place, Alica entered at number three.

“Since the beginning of the year, I had trained a lot, I wanted to return to the national team. I put my studies aside. I really missed Ilona Vostova, she was pregnant at the time; I became the leader of our team,” recalled Alica. “Before the final I was terribly nervous, I was in the dressing room with my friend Marta Novotna, Maria Hrachova’s coach, trying to calm me down and encourage me. A packed arena, television cameras, one table, Czechoslovakian television covering the event, the nervousness level was so much higher!”

Hu Yulan held the answers in an era that was very different from now, and makes the achievement gained by Alica Grofova even more remarkable.

“I never had the opportunity to practise against Asian women. I only learnt to play against them during World Championships or at some tournaments in Europe. I really admired the confident way they played and their excellent serves,” said Alica. “Nowadays there are many Chinese women playing in Europe and all over the world, there are many opportunities to meet them, practise against them and study their game.”

Now does that theory suggest the European female players of the present century should do rather better against Asian adversaries?



Partnering Irina Bosa at the 1968 Women’s Day Tournament



with Marta Luzova



The women’s singles podium in Sarajevo, Alica Grofova, Hu Yulan, Zhang Li, Park Mira

Milan Orlovski and Alica Grofova silver medallists at the 1974 European Championships



Known for a strong forehand

Mixed doubles

Success in the women’s singles, earlier in Sarajevo it had been mixed doubles success partnering Josef Dvoracek. After winning a hard-fought full distance quarter-final contest against the combination of Yugoslavia’s Antun Stipancic and Romania’s Maria Alexandru, the pair experienced defeat at the hands of China’s Liang Geliang and Li Li.

“At the beginning of the year, Dvoracek and I played together for the first time. At the Czechoslovak Open we reached the semi-finals. He played a top spin game, I played close to the table, aggressively,” recalled Alica. “I played great in the quarter-finals. Anton put his head in

his hands after my attacking shots. It was probably the peak of my abilities.”

Silver and bronze in 1973, the colours of medals, but it was a golden experience.

“I am extremely proud of my success. It was wonderful”, reminisced Alica. “My father and brother were there in Sarajevo, they shared the success with me, my mother watched the final at home on television.”

Returning to Bratislava, Alica was a national heroine; she had lifted the image of Slovak table tennis, the country had a role model, one who could compete against the best, the very best.

“There was a beautiful welcome prepared for me by the manager of the hall where I practised. I was received by leading Slovak politicians; I had many discussions in schools and interviews with the media,” reflected Alica. “In 1973, I was named the best Slovak athlete; I was fifth in the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic. However, I had to catch up very quickly on missed classes and university exams. I had a lot of responsibilities ahead of me, it was challenging.”

Wonderful memories of 50 years ago, her passion for table tennis remains as strong as ever, organising and encouraging, she is one of the most active supporters of World Table Tennis Day.



The most successful athletes in Czechoslovakia in 1973; seated Vladimir Vackar (cycling), Miroslav Vymazal (cycling), Jan Surdence (cycling), Jindrich Pospisil (cycling), Helena Fibinger (athletics), Milena Duchkova (diving), Alica Grofova (table tennis), Jan Kodes (tennis), Kvetoslav Masita (motor cycling). Alica Grofova, the only Slovak female athlete present, finished in fifth position. Jan Kodes, having won Wimbledon, secured first place.

Coach Ivan Andreadis and Alica Grofova



Stunning Debut

An application to join the International Table Tennis Federation completed, accepted officially by Congress, in 1928 Latvia made its first appearance in a World Championships; they were present for the second edition of the tournament staged in not too far distant, Stockholm.

Furthermore, the arrival was announced in style. In the men's team event they finished in a most creditable fourth place behind Hungary, Austria, and England but ahead of Sweden, Czechoslovakia, Germany, Wales, and India. Also present were players from Denmark and Norway but they competed in only the individual events.

In the 1920s table tennis was gaining in popularity in Latvia, proceedings being supervised by the Organising Committee of Table Tennis, in later years to become the Latvian Table Tennis Union.

The World Championships in 1928 were staged from Tuesday 24th to Sunday 29th January; the decision to participate with a team of three men being made at a meeting attended by table tennis clubs on Friday 29th December 1927.

"It has been decided to take part in the European ping-pong championship in January in Stockholm with three participants in the men's game. Last year's master, H. Kuznecova expressed her wish to start in the women's competition in Stockholm, bearing personally the travel expenses," the newspaper Jaunakas Zinas reported following the committee meeting.

Any proposal to send female players disappeared immediately from the agenda, the focus was totally on men. The use of the word European by the newspaper was no doubt owing to the fact that it was the original name for the inaugural World Championships in 1926. Players from India were accepted, thus the change, but this was after much of the literature had been printed.

"Riga Table Tennis Championship, as it is known, will start on January 2 and it will show which players will represent Latvia in Stockholm. In case the tournament gives unexpected results, a second smaller tournament with the best players will be held immediately after it, so that the strength of the candidates who will represent Latvia in Stockholm can be determined



Players at the Riga tournament

definitively," was the comment printed by Pedeja Bridi newspaper at the end of December.

Furthermore, it appears there was a financial implication, the organisers hoping to gain funds from ticket sales.

Venue for the Riga Championship was the Jewish Idischer Sport Klub in Merkela Street 11; at the time, the centre for table tennis in the city. Four events were held, men's singles, women's singles, men's doubles, and mixed doubles. Some 60 players entered, eight being women, notably 31 entrants were from the host club and 12 from Jauneklu Kristiga Savieniba (the Young Men's Christian Association). The number of participants from the other sports clubs was much less.



Arnold Osins



Mordecai Finbergs

Two tournaments needed

A detailed schedule in place, the largest entry was in the men's singles with no shortage of matches, four groups, 16 players in each group, the top four from each group advancing to a final group.

Eventually, first place went to brothers, who in the local press and programme at the 1928 World Championships, were named Rosenthal I and Rosenthal II; both were members of the Idischer Sport Klub, third place was gained by 17-year-old Arnold Osins from Jauneklu Kristiga Savieniba. Helena Kuznecova, representing 1. Rigas Ritebrauceju Biedriba (1st Riga Cycling Association), who had offered to pay her own way to the World

Championships, won the women's singles finishing ahead of Anna Dauksa from the Union Sports Club Union. The men's doubles was claimed by the Rosenthal brothers, the mixed by Rosenthal II in partnership with Z. Halfina.

However, the tournament did not meet the intended aim. Mordecai Finbergs (also referred to as Markus Finbergs) withdrew from the tournament. Thus, a special competition involving the top three players from the Riga Championships plus Mordecai Finbergs was staged on Monday 9th January. Once again, the Idischer Sport Klub being the venue.

The so-called "round robin" format, each player competing

against each other was the order of proceedings; points awarded for matches won, there was a tie for first place, the same for third position. Play-off matches were held, Rosenthal I beat Mordecai Finbergs to secure top spot, Rosenthal II overcame Arnold Osins to reserve third place.

However, owing to costs it was decided only to send two players, each receiving 150 Latvian lats; any balance had to be met by the players. Travel was expensive, it was winter, there was no regular steam ship between Riga and Stockholm, the journey had to be via Tallinn, the capital of Estonia. The only option was to travel to Tallinn, then to Turku in Finland and on to Stockholm.



Arrival in Sweden

At the last minute, a solution was found, on Saturday 14th January a fund raising evening involving cabaret, dance and table tennis was held at Idischer Sport Klub; on Thursday 19th January, all four departed for Stockholm. Eventually they arrived in the Swedish capital city on Sunday 22nd January and played their opening fixture on Tuesday 24th January. They recorded a 5-4 win against the hosts; a perfect start.

Nine singles matches; in the group stage, in all fixtures at least six matches were played, even if one team had secured the required five, Latvia finished just one place short of reaching the play-offs; the top three teams in the group advanced to play for the medals. In the play-offs Hungary finished ahead of Austria and England, the only three teams against whom Latvia experienced defeats. In addition to Sweden, wins had been recorded in opposition to Germany, India, Czechoslovakia, and Wales; notably Mordecai Finbergs being on duty in all

eight fixtures.

He was very much the star man. Against Hungary, he beat Laszlo Bellak, the eventual men's singles runner up; in opposition to Austria, Alfred Liebster, listed in second spot on the 1928 world rankings.

"Latvia, which for the first time in its existence participates in international table tennis competitions, has achieved particularly brilliant results in Stockholm," was the review from the newspaper *Pieci Santimi*.

An outstanding success but in the individual events life was not quite so profitable. The newspaper *Pedeja Bridi* reported that Arnold Osins followed by Rosenthal I had lost in the early rounds to Hungary's Zoltan Mechlovits, the eventual winner. Similarly, Rosenthal II had experienced an early exit, losing to Czechoslovakia's Erwin Fleischmann,

whilst Mordecai Finberg, after beating Denmark's Alfa Nielsen had also departed at Hungarian hands, losing to Laszlo Bellak. Meanwhile, in the men's doubles, England's Charles Bull and Fred Perry had ended the hopes of the Rosenthal brothers.

Defeats but against most worthy opposition, one year later Fred Perry was to win the men's singles title in Budapest, famously making his mark in the tennis world by winning eight Grand Slam tournaments.

In Stockholm, Latvia exceeded expectations, they set an example for their colleagues. The following year in 1929 in Budapest it was a similar outcome as it was in 1932 in Prague and 1935 in Wembley, quite outstanding results, milestone moments in the nation's sporting history.

Latvia – Men's Team Event at the Stockholm 1928 World Championships

LATVIA 3-5 AUSTRIA Mordecai Finbergs v Paul Flussmann 16,-19,-18 v Munio Pillinger 14,-21,17 v Alfred Liebster 19,-13,22; Rosenthal I v Paul Flussman -16,17,19 v Munio Pillinger -14,-11 v Alfred Leibster -19,-17; Arnold Osins v Paul Flussman -19,-16 v Alfred Liebster -11,-24

LATVIA 6-2 CZECHOSLOVAKIA Rosenthal I v Bedrich Fritz Nikodem 14,19 v Erwin Fleischman -12,-16; Rosenthal II v Antonin Malecek 18,-14,-16 v Bedrich Fritz Nikodem 16,21 v Erwin Fleischman 12,20; Mordecai Finbergs v Antonin Malecek 19,18 v Bedrich Fritz Nikodem -19,20,12 v Erwin Fleischmann 20,w/o

LATVIA 4-5 ENGLAND Mordecai Finbergs v Adrian Haydon 19,17 v C.G.Mase 14,14 v Charles Bull -18,-14; Rosenthal II v Adrian Haydon -19,-13 v C.G.Mase 18,20 v Charles Bull -12,-10; Arnold Osins v Adrian Haydon -16,-13 v C.G.Mase 18,-15,24 v Charles Bull -16,-17

LATVIA 6-0 GERMANY Mordecai Finbergs v Heribert Haensch 9,-17,18 v Herbert Caro 3,11 Rosenthal I v Herbert Caro 16,19 v Hans-Georg Lindenstaedt 14,16; Rosenthal II v Heribert Haensch 12,12 v Hans-Georg Lindenstaedt 12,18

LATVIA 2-7 HUNGARY Mordecai Finbergs v Laszlo Bellak 19,17 v Daniel Pecsí -16,6,-14 v Sandor Glanz -17,-18; Rosenthal II v Laszlo Bellak -16,-16 v Daniel Pecsí -19,13,16 v Sandor Glanz -16,-19; Arnold Osins v Laszlo Bellak -10,-21 v Daniel Pecsí -13,13,-7 v Sandor Glanz -17,-21

LATVIA 5-2 INDIA

Mordecai Finbergs v S.R.G. Suppiah 17,-20,12 v H.N. Bhorucha 14,6 v S.A. Ismail 12,9; Rosenthal I v S.R.G. Suppiah -13,16,-19 v S.A. Ismail 5,12; Rosenthal II v S.R.G. Suppiah -21,21,-18 v H.N. Bhorucha 9,17

LATVIA 4-5 SWEDEN

Rosenthal I v Valter Kolmodin -11,-20 v Ragnar Soderholz 10,17 v Hille Nilsson -17,-21; Rosenthal II v Valter Kolmodin 12,-14,-14 v Ragnar Soderholz 19,-14,-20 v Hille Nilsson 17,20; Mordecai Finbergs v Valter Kolmodin 18,-16,16 v Ragnar Soderholz -18,12,18 v Hille Nilsson -10,-18

LATVIA 6-0 WALES Mordecai Finberg v Solly Stone 18,18 v Cyril Mossford 11,11; Rosenthal II v Solly Stone 21,19 v Cyril Mossford 10,12; Arnold Osins v Cyril Mossford 7,20 v Hedley Penny 17,15

South Africa, Road to Integration

The end of apartheid, a system of racial oppression, a return to the Olympic Games in 1992 in Barcelona marked the termination of sporting isolation for South Africa; prior to that date their most recent appearance at the quadrennial gathering had been 1960 in Rome.

Nowadays, South Africa is prominent on the international scene, the years of seclusion are over; in the sport of table tennis new ventures are being witnessed. In 2016 Cape Town presented a most successful World Junior Championships; from Monday 22nd to Sunday 28th May, the Durban International Convention Centre will host the 2023 World Championships Finals.

Integration but to reach such a stage, it has been a rocky road, one filled with potholes, highways closed, no entry signs erected. Most significantly it has been a journey that witnessed the International Table Tennis Federation setting the example, policies ahead of time.

Events date back to 1948, the year Daniel Malan's National Party gained office. Under his leadership, the South African government reinforced segregation; a prime example of the existing discrimination being "whites only" were allowed to

stand as parliamentary candidates.

Worldwide, there were stern opponents to the system, one of the most vocal, a certain Ivor Montagu, the first President of the International Table Tennis Federation, his left wing political views did not concur with the policies propounded in South Africa.

He had been responsible for formulating the International Table Tennis Federation's constitution in 1926. Later at the Annual General Meeting staged at the World Championships in Paris in December 1933, the English Table Tennis Association proposed two amendments.

In paragraph 2, following the word "amateurs", should be added "and conducting the sport in its territory in such a way as to enable participation in it of all citizens irrespective of colour, race or creed." Additionally in paragraph 17, it was proposed to add to the wording current at the time: "if no distinction be made among the entries on grounds of race, colour or religion." Both amendments were agreed unanimously, they came into effect in 1934 and were included in the 1935 ITTF Handbook.

Later at the Annual General Meeting staged at the 1947



Ivor Montagu

World Championships in Paris, the first following the conclusion of World War Two, it was agreed to strengthen any ban on colour. In paragraph 2, the word "irrespective" was changed to "without discrimination".

Ivor Montagu was crystal clear that such clauses were watersheds for international sporting federations; featured in the April and March 1971 editions of Table Tennis News, the official journal of the English Table Tennis Association, nowadays Table Tennis England, he was unequivocal. "...table tennis was the first sport, nearly a generation ago, to move toward the outlawing of discrimination of race, colour, creed or politics at the international level of the game."

Two Organisations

Sport returning to the international scene following the end of World War Two, in South Africa two establishments administered table tennis, the South African Table Tennis Union (SATTU), open to "Europeans only" and the South Africa Table Tennis Board (SATTB), an organisation with no restrictions.

Efforts were made to find ways to gain co-operation between the two bodies. A proposal was formulated on the basis that each should administer its own affairs, but no national open championships or national team selection should be conducted without the approval of a proposed joint board. The joint board would be constituted to meet ITTF membership requirements. SATTU rejected the suggestion and as apartheid deepened, the idea was a non-starter.

Eager for recognition, at the 1948 Annual General Meeting in London, SATTU applied for ITTF membership. The application was set before a Commission comprising representatives from England, France, Trinidad, the United Arab Emirates, the United States and Wales. Notably, the Trinidad member, Sir Learie Constantine, a famous cricketer in days before World War Two and a strong advocate against racial discrimination, was unable to attend; a five man delegation adjudicated.

Somewhat gullible, the SATTU delegate advised that in South Africa there were about one and a half million Europeans, half a million Asians, one million coloured and 10 million Bantus. The argument propounded was: "that is why we have to keep separate, or we would be swamped".

Eyes opened, one member of the Commission immediately responded in most di-

rect terms: "you mean to say you have the impertinence to come here expecting us to recognise you as "South Africa", when you only represent such a tiny minority". Needless to say, at the ensuing Annual General Meeting, the application was rejected.

Later in 1950 applications were received from both organisations, again the SATTU presentation was denied. Equally, SATTB was not accepted as a full member but there was a compromise. The body was recognised as in "good standing"; its players would be permitted to compete in such events as the World Championships, as would SATTU players if SATTB approved. However, the organisation could not be considered as governing the sport of table tennis throughout the whole country, as a percentage of players were outside its control.

Again in 1951 and 1952 applications were made by both organisations, the outcome the same; an ITTF Committee was set up whose task was to negotiate with both bodies to try to find a solution; no such solution was found. Letters between the two bodies exchanged in December 1958 were quite acrimonious, a war of words. SATTU argued there could be two governing bodies for the sport and was prevented ITTF recognition owing the "good standing" acceptance of SATTB. Conversely,

SATTB, with justification, explained it was the body that was non-racial and thus complied with ITTF principles.

Remarkably, in 1957 there was somewhat of a breakthrough; reported as "South Africa's First Non-European Springboks"; SATTB sent a team to the World Championships in Stockholm. Mr Bassa was stated as team manager, the players being Mahomed Cassim Peer, named as captain, Derek Groenewald, Raghavjee Prantal Mandan, Mohamed Goolam Hoosen Moolla and Ashwin Valjee. Facing much stronger opponents, they failed to win a single match.

One wonders how such permission had been given, on Wednesday 27th June 1956, the South African government had made an announcement that sporting activities for "white" and "non-whites" should be organised separately; sporting bodies that did not follow the policy would have travel permission withdrawn. Thus, SATTB never again competed in ITTF events until the end of the apartheid era; the view of Ivor Montagu regarding the 1957 visit to Stockholm was that protocols were perhaps accidentally not noticed.

Nevertheless, efforts to accommodate South Africa continued. In 1967 an amendment to the ITTF constitution was passed stating that if an association met ITTF principles, but through factors beyond its

control could not govern the sport throughout the whole territory, they would be eligible for membership. Therefore, with a slight change to the name, the South African National Table Tennis Board was accepted.

Accepted but seemingly the decision was not fully understood by certain sections of the media. In 1971 it had been recorded that South Africa would be expelled from the Nagoya World Championships; with the benefit of hindsight, it is ironic that of all the World Championships on which the focus was on exclusion, it was the one that sparked "Ping Pong Diplomacy"!

It was that report which prompted Ivor Montagu to publish his views in Table Tennis News. He made it clear that the South Africa Table Tennis Board was eligible to enter players.

"Its failure to compete at the World Championships in Nagoya will be due to no ITTF prevention but to the fact that once more, as on many previous occasions, the South African Government has refused the grant of passports to players for their participation."

Attracted Activists

Eligible but not able to compete, the situation attracted the attention of notable activists. Classified as coloured, Dennis Brutus was most vocal. Resulting from his outspoken

views against apartheid, he was sent to prison in Robben Island for 16 months, five in solitary, he occupied the cell next to Nelson Mandela.

He stated: "...some sharp clashes have taken place in various branches of sport. The most notable, since it resulted in victory for the non-white body – on the grounds that its constitution is open to all South Africans – was that in table tennis". Perhaps the word "victory" was somewhat an exaggeration, but Dennis Brutus had displayed the fact table tennis was a non-racial sport.

Likewise, fellow campaigner, Mary Corrigan, in her 8,590 word report to the 1971 United Nations recognised the role played by table tennis in its effort to promote unity.

"In 1956, the first victory against apartheid sport was won in the field of table tennis. The International Table Tennis Federation removed the all-white South African Table Tennis Union from membership and recognised the non-racial South African Table Tennis Board as the sole controlling body in South Africa. Although the non-racial body was not able to send representatives to international competitions, because of Government action in withdrawing the passports of its players, this decision encouraged other sports organisations to take similar initiatives."



Ichiro Ogimura

Arguably stating that SATTU was removed from membership was inaccurate, it was never accepted. The important factor was she saw SATTB as an example for equality. Worthy personalities but speaking positively in support of the International Table Tennis, arguably the worthiest of all was Albert Luthuli, President of the African National Congress (ANC) from 1952–1967 and winner of the 1960 Nobel Peace Prize for his role in non-violent struggle against apartheid.

Speaking in Natal in 1956, he was adamant that progress was being made to end segregation.

"The fight equally is being fought on every front. The fight has been won by the S.A. Table Tennis Association, which has gained international recognition. It is raging furiously between the S.A. Soccer Federation, a non-colour-bar body,

and the S.A.F.A. which is for Whites only. We congratulate our sportsmen for upholding the dignity of the Non-White peoples of this country."

Legislation Repealed

Setting an example, equally table tennis provided a respite for the incarcerated ANC members. Following the end of apartheid, England's Stuart Sweeney visited the museum in Robben Island; one artefact was an inmate's account that an overseas charity had provided a table tennis table and a book on how to play the game. Pride of place in his cell was a handcrafted certificate recording the fact he was runner up in the prison tournament.

A continual fight to end segregation; sadly in 1984 Ivor Montagu passed away but the policies of the ITTF remained unchanged regarding South Africa. Between 1987 and 1993, the National Party entered into negotiations with the African National Congress. In 1990, prominent ANC figures such as Nelson Mandela were released from prison, apartheid legislation was repealed on Monday 17th June 1991, multiracial elections were organised in April 1994.

Soon after the repeal, on Sunday 21st July, members of SATTB and SATTU signed a declaration to the effect that SATTB would become the governing body for table tennis. Proceedings were ratified



George Segun

by Hans Giesecke (ITTF Executive Committee Member – Finance), George Segun (President of the African Table Tennis Federation) and Fikrou Kidane (Special Advisor to the International Olympic Committee on Africa Affairs).

South Africa returned to international sport. At the Barcelona 1992 Olympic Games, the ITTF awarded wild cards to Louis Botha, an SATTU member and Cheryl Roberts from the SATTB. Each finished in fourth place in their initial stage groups. In the men's singles Botha concluded matters behind Poland's Andrzej Grubba, Brazil's Claudio Kano and Czechoslovakia's Roland Vimi. Similarly, in the women's singles, Cheryl Roberts who had started to play table tennis in a neighbour's garage, having been excluded from a "whites only" tennis club, finished next in line to China's Qiao Hong,



Hans Giesecke

Italy's Alessia Arisi and Germany's Elke Schall.

Later, in 1994, the International Olympic Committee, recognising Ping Pong Diplomacy, invited Ichiro Ogimura, the ITTF President at the time and representatives from SATTB to attend the IOC Centennial Olympic Congress in Paris; the theme "Olympic Movement and International Understanding".

The invitation acknowledged the efforts of the International Table Tennis Federation in the stance against segregation. Suggesting that table tennis was responsible for massive changes in South African life would be gross exaggeration but most certainly the sport played its part, in certain respects it led the way.

Thanks to Chuck Hoey (ITTF Museum Curator), Stuart Sweeney and Table Tennis England in the production of this article



Muscat Reunited

The 20th edition, staged from Sunday 15th to Saturday 21st January, it was the first time the World Veteran Championships had been staged in the Middle East and the first time organised by the International Table Tennis Federation as opposed to the Swaythling Club International.



Venue

94 competition tables
40 practice tables

Entry

65 ITTF member associations represented
1,087 players
811 men's singles
276 women's singles
414 men's doubles pairs
143 women's doubles pairs
247 mixed doubles pairs

SMS Service

1,041 players registered
26,893 messages sent

Matches

3,985 matches completed
14,146 games played
249,684 points contested

Match Results

2,390 (3-0), 999 (3-1), 596 (3-2)

Games Results

96 (11-0); 398 (11-1); 659 (11-2); 1,021 (11-3); 1,445 (11-4);
1,668 (11-5); 1,837 (11-6); 1,832 (11-7); 1,809 (11-8); 3,381 (11-9
or 12-10)



Alfred Ludwig and Penti Niukkanen, ever present



Claude Bergeret and Reto Bazzi represented the Swaythling Club



Hyun Youngja and Yasu Watanabe both over 90 years old

Podium Men's Doubles



Podium Men's Singles



Podium Mixed Doubles



Podium Women's Singles



Podium Women's Doubles



Muscat 2023 World Veteran Championships: Podium Places

Muscat 2023 World Veteran Championships: Full Results

Impact of Table Tennis on Seniors

by Miran Kondrič

Table tennis is not only one of the five most popular sports in the world; also, it is also one of the most popular ball sports among elderly people. It is possible to play table tennis at different levels of engagement at all stages of life. Playing table tennis is particularly suitable due to the extremely low chance of injury. An easy form of recreation, it is recommended by many doctors, physiotherapists and others who take care of recreational activity for the elderly, or as an exercise for rehabilitation after an injury. Table tennis tables can be found in almost all rehabilitation centres around the world.

Always from medical staff, you will hear that prevention is better than cure. Unfortunately, many people who play sport are not aware of what good fitness means and how to avoid injuries the easiest way; this is especially true for recreational players and elderly people.

Psychological processes of ageing appear already in the twenties and thirties. In addition to the decrease in the capacity of the cardiovascular system, there is also a decrease in the skeletal musculature. In the area of the locomotor apparatus, we notice a deterioration of mobility. For example, only eight per cent of 20 year olds have degenerative joint damage, while this percentage is as high as up to 90 per cent for 65 year olds; most injuries in this age range relate to the knee and pelvis.

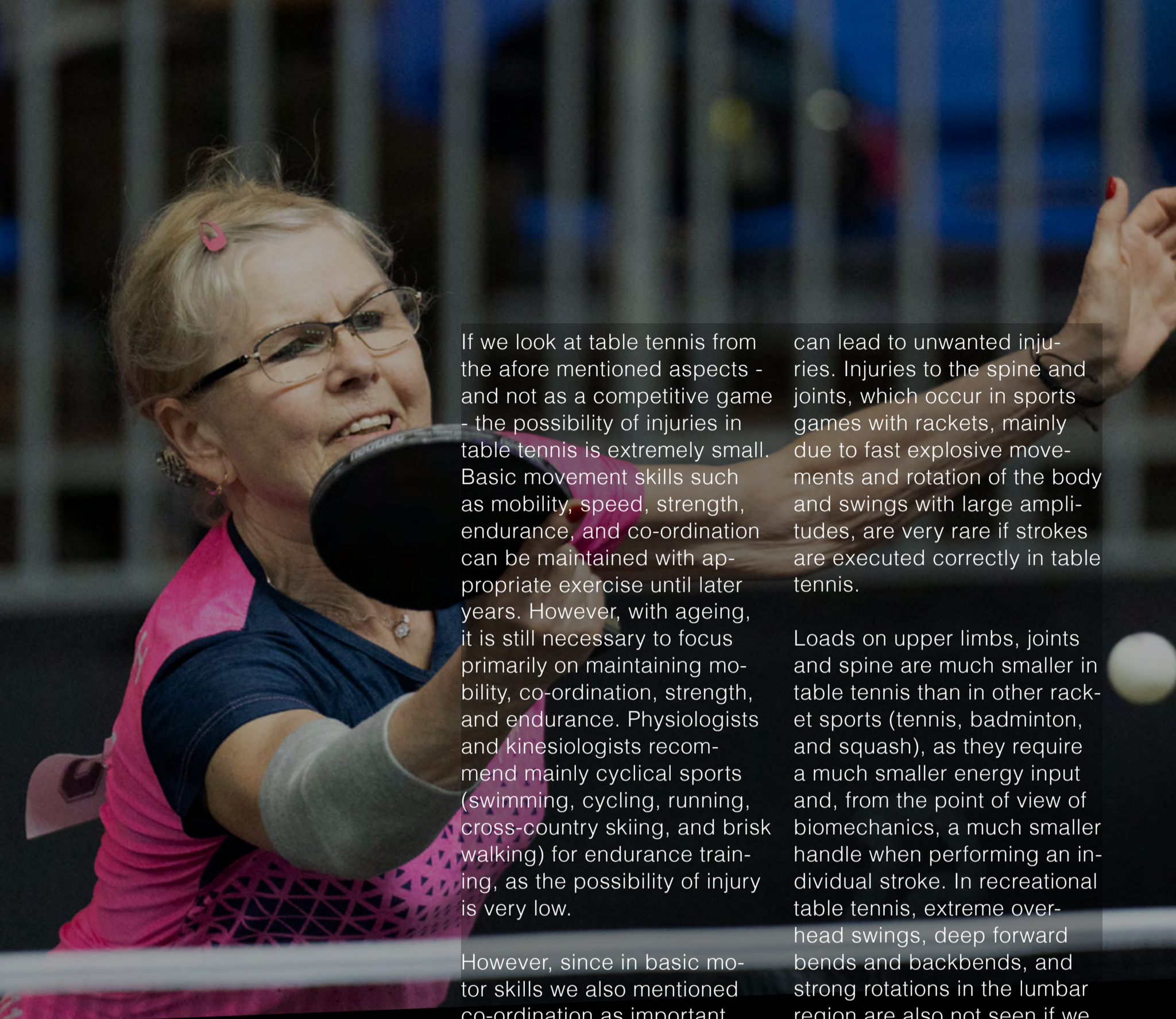
The importance of health must always be evaluated from the point of view of the type of sporting activity. Namely, medicine and other frontier sciences increasingly emphasise the complex connection of playing sport, especially from the physiological, psychological, sociological and pedagogical aspects. Modern man puts material goods more and more

in the foreground, forgetting that money and wealth cannot replace the quality of life he achieves through participation in sport. Even the excessive commercialisation of sport does not bring the effects for which individuals would like to compensate in the shortest possible time. Additional to other sports, table tennis is no exception. Doubtful advertising messages about quickly stopping degenerative changes are in most cases written only on the skin of sellers, and significantly less so on the skin of consumers or recreational users.

In its competitive form, table tennis places high physiological and psychological demands on players, as a recreational sport, it can be relaxing and interesting even in later years. The small playing surface of table tennis does not require great physical effort from the elderly, as is the

case, for example, with other sports games with rackets. However, even in activities that harm the locomotor apparatus (competitive or elite level), table tennis does not have a degenerative effect on the joints and spine. Practically nowhere in the medical reports do we find that doctors forbid playing table tennis on a recreational level. Even more, table tennis can be found in most rehabilitation centres worldwide; with a slightly larger ball (40 mm), the International Table Tennis Federation has also ensured better control of the table tennis game at all levels of play. A slower ball allows a greater number of strokes to be exchanged as well as better control. In some countries, you can find also practise with "big ball"; in Japan there are 44mm ball tournaments.





If we look at table tennis from the afore mentioned aspects - and not as a competitive game - the possibility of injuries in table tennis is extremely small. Basic movement skills such as mobility, speed, strength, endurance, and co-ordination can be maintained with appropriate exercise until later years. However, with ageing, it is still necessary to focus primarily on maintaining mobility, co-ordination, strength, and endurance. Physiologists and kinesiologists recommend mainly cyclical sports (swimming, cycling, running, cross-country skiing, and brisk walking) for endurance training, as the possibility of injury is very low.

However, since in basic motor skills we also mentioned co-ordination as important in table tennis, compared to other sports games with rackets, table tennis is certainly an ideal sport for older participants. Mainly due to the small playing area, the participants do not have to perform fast and explosive movements that

can lead to unwanted injuries. Injuries to the spine and joints, which occur in sports games with rackets, mainly due to fast explosive movements and rotation of the body and swings with large amplitudes, are very rare if strokes are executed correctly in table tennis.

Loads on upper limbs, joints and spine are much smaller in table tennis than in other racket sports (tennis, badminton, and squash), as they require a much smaller energy input and, from the point of view of biomechanics, a much smaller handle when performing an individual stroke. In recreational table tennis, extreme overhead swings, deep forward bends and backbends, and strong rotations in the lumbar region are also not seen if we use the correct hitting technique and proper footwork.

The small possibility of injuries and overloading during the game of table tennis places this sport among the so-called recreational sports in terms of

injury prevention associated with short and less energetically demanding movements. To reduce the chances of injury and overload during senior exercise, we recommend the following - learning and perfecting the appropriate technique (depending on the age and prior knowledge of the trainee):

- general and balanced exercise
- suitable gymnastic exercises and stretching for relaxation of muscle tone
- avoiding overloads and strenuous exercise
- correct dosing of loads in the training process
- a suitable base and a suitable selection of sports shoes for practising table tennis
- complete rehabilitation after an injury or surgery, before starting to practise table tennis again
- sports medical control after the age of 35 (preventive medical examinations).

Elderly people must enjoy the game; the game itself must be

at such a level that it excludes the possibility of injuries and overload to the greatest extent possible. Nevertheless, even in table tennis, it is possible to achieve results in mature years (between 30 and 45 years of age). A good example of this is former world-class players like Jan-Ove Waldner, Jörgen Persson, Zoran Primorac, and others who at the age of 40 still beat players half their age.

Regular training and a sporty lifestyle allowed them to constantly improve and utilise their movement skills in the game. In addition, it should be noted that with many years of practice, and thus also with age, some movements are automated and rationalised, this makes it more economical to use strength and energy in the game.

Finally, club activities in table tennis. The fact is that most clubs pay too much attention to competitive table tennis whilst forgetting the other categories that allow the club

to survive. Even at the level of the association, the category of older competitors is neglected, even though table tennis is considered a sport that can be played until a late age. For the most part, elderly people, who want to play table tennis, organise themselves and find suitable places and opportunities for spending their free time in a better way.

All of them agree that this is their hobby and fun, but most of them are still eager to fight, compete and, of course, succeed. They say that when playing a match, a person is simply more concentrated and pays more attention to the game itself. Of course, socialising and taking care of one's health is still the priority, which in the fast-paced social life has simply become too fast even for the elderly people; when we play table tennis, the player must feel good. Satisfaction hits made without excessive effort and regeneration after daily stress are elements in table tennis that play an important role in the quality of an individual's free time

Jochen Wollmert, Integrity First

Competing internationally, winning is the goal, it was the same for Germany's Jochen Wollmert throughout a career that spanned over three decades, eventually concluding in June 2022 at the Copa Cristina Hoffmann in the Mexican city of Cancun.

However, for the three times gold medallist at both the Paralympic Games and World Para Championships, six times the European champion, there was always one element more valued, the integrity of the sport itself.

"The most important thing for me was always to be fair, even if it's about titles, success and maybe money; always, I fought for every point but always with respect for my opponent", stressed Jochen Wollmert. "Also, I demanded this from my opponents; if you look back, I can rightly say this was the situation on most occasions; there were one or two discussions, perhaps even some heated exchanges but the important thing is that at the end of the day we could look each other in the eye with appreciation. I have always turned over any decision incorrectly made in my favour, I could never have lived with taking advantage of a wrong decision."



Always total commitment, give your best and you can have no recriminations; for Jochen Wollmert it is an attitude that has had a far-reaching effect and not just in the table tennis arenas of the world.

"Setting goals and pursuing them meticulously is something I learnt in sport; this also helps me in my job and with my family", added Jochen Wollmert. "Competing against players from other nations, then sitting together at a table at the end of the day has enriched my life greatly and has always been a lot of fun."

Goals set, goals achieved, but above all it is the example he set. Ask any player and they have the utmost respect for Jochen Wollmert, none more so than Great Britain's Will Bayley, the player he beat in the London 2012 Paralympic Games final and whose prized possession is his hero's shirt!

"He is just a special talent and for me the greatest Paralympic table tennis player I have ever seen and I'm not just saying that because he is class 7, the things that he can do on the table I've never seen anyone do", said Will Bayley. "I've trained with him, and I've never seen anyone play like he does and that is why I think he is the most special player I've ever played."

A well merited accolade from the Brit, who was to win gold four years later in Rio de Janeiro, sums up in a nutshell the character of Jochen Wollmert; the friendship will continue but with international play now resigned to history, it will be different.

"I will miss the fight during the day and in the evening to talk or to do something together; I formed many friendships, I will miss not being able to maintain them", sighed Jochen Wollmert. "I have been playing table tennis for 41 years; of these, 33 years internationally; I will continue to play table tennis in my able-bodied club TTC Bärbroich; no longer with the intensity as before, but still with the aim to win matches for the team."

Vast experience and in the foreseeable future that knowledge may well be put to good use.

"I would like to give tips to the younger players in my disabled sports club, TSF Heuchelheim, and also in Hesse so that they can make it to national team, play in European Championships, World Championships or Paralympics", added Jochen Wollmert. "It is simply an indescribable feeling to be allowed to play for Germany with the eagle on the chest. It gives me goose bumps!"

Equally, the role of an official may well be on the horizon; Jochen Wollmert is aware of a player's needs; perhaps that of a Technical Delegate or Tournament Director beckons?

"I want to establish a world ranking tournament in Hesse; I would be available in an advisory capacity, the athletes are in the foreground", explained Jochen Wollmert. "I have three sports-mad children with my wife Steffi, whom I met during the 2008 Paralympics in Beijing; that requires a lot of time, but I'm very happy to spend it. It's unbelievable fun to see how something develops; family time is the best thing you can have anyway."





Early Career

Sport for Jochen Wollmert has always been a fascination, in his younger days he played soccer, tennis, badminton, cycling, volleyball, handball and mini golf; table tennis was added to the list in 1981, when 17 years old, at the Borussia Wuppertal club. Soon he caught the eye, a classmate asked him if he could join the youth team, two players had left, replacements were urgent.

“I decided to do go ahead, at least for a short period of time”, reminisced Jochen Wollmert. “Somehow table tennis grabbed me, despite my handicap I could keep up with athletes without disabilities at my level; accepted it was the lowest division.”

Determined, Jochen improved; at the end of 1985, he searched the phonebook and contacted the local sports office, no Google in those days, to find where people with disabilities could play sport in Wuppertal. Six months later he secured a contact and in June 1986, representing VSG Wuppertal, he made his de-

but at the German Para Team Championships. One year later he qualified for his first German Para Individual Championships; he finished in fourth place.

Motivated, a podium finish was his goal; in 1988 he was the runner up, in 1989 in Hamburg, national champion for the first time. Selection for the national team, established as a class 7 athlete, in the same year in Vienna, he made his European Para Championships debut, winning the men’s singles and with Klaus Mueller, the men’s team event, his first ever international titles. The successes sparked his international career, support ensued from the National Olympic Committee and German Disabled Sports Association, but table tennis has never been full time. Always he has had a full-time job, a press officer and event manager for a German health insurance company; table tennis was a hobby, playing either before or after work.

Most Memorable

Gold in men’s singles and men’s team in Vienna, at the

World Para Championships in 1990 in Assen and in 2006 in Montreux, it was the same.

“Montreux with the view of Lake Geneva from the hotel rounded off the 2006 success”, recalled Jochen Wollmert. “We performed as a true team in Switzerland in class 7; Dieter Meyer, my teammate, fought as hard as I did for the wins, everything was together.”

Stand out memories from the World Para Championships, for the Paralympic Games, all seven, commencing in 1992 in Barcelona are precious.

“I always like to talk about the Paralympic virus that gripped me every four years; that’s why I can’t really single out any of them”, reminisced Jochen Wollmert. “There was the atmosphere in Beijing, the number one table tennis country, 400 million Chinese play table tennis; in London, we were not only called superhumans but were also celebrated as such, it was unique. My first in Barcelona sticks in the memory, as well as the many successes at the other Paralympics, a total of 10 medals including five golds.”

Just as with every athlete you meet, the Paralympic Games is different from all other sporting occasions, it is special, it is the one competition where for the vast majority it is the taking part that counts; forever more you are a Paralympian, you have competed at the

highest possible level, you have achieved.

“The interest from the visitors and spectators, was for me an incredible experience and appreciation of our sport; in Rio, the spectators created an insane atmosphere, you couldn’t hear the ball bounce on the table during a rally”, recanted Jochem Wollmert. “In Sydney, as an athlete, in addition to the inquisitive visitors and residents of the city, most sports venues were on Olympic Boulevard; outstanding, just short distances, not long distances to different sports venues.”

Difficult to choose a Paralympic Games that stood out above all others; similarly, when considering open international tournaments, identifying the very special moments is no easy task.

“Lasko in Slovenia I attended the most; Mexico was a great world ranking tournament for me, that’s why I visited again in the year of my final tour in 2022, to give my appreciation and recognition; also, to see how you can host a well-functioning tournament with little money,” explained Jochen Wollmert. “Buenos Aires is worth mentioning. I have always felt well taken care of at all my tournaments and would also like to express my sincere thanks for the efforts of the many helpers who have contributed to the success of these tournaments.”

Memories abundant in Para events, perhaps slightly less stunning are the recollections from able bodied sport; however, one period during his career remains vivid.

“I played in a high league in Baden-Württemberg, the Oberliga, from 2010 to 2013”, he explained. “At the time, this was the fourth highest league in Germany.”

Professional

A long and distinguished career, one that in Para sport has seen a host of changes; undoubted progress.

“Tournaments have become much more professional, the accommodation more comfortable, food catering to the appropriate requirements of the athletes; streaming is part of almost every tournament, results are available online very quickly”, said Jochen Wollmert. “However, tournaments are very expensive, you can’t get anything for less than 600 Euros and in some places the prices go up to 1,000 Euros.”

Also, Jochen Wollmert has views on inclusivity, a buzz word in recent times; commencing in 2018 in Gold Coast, Para table tennis events have been included in the Commonwealth Games. Jochen Wollmert would like to see the concept move a stage further.

“I would also like to see the European Championships

and World Championships for all, taking place together”, stressed Jochen Wollmert. “No matter whether disabled or able bodied, that would be a clear sign that table tennis is serious regarding inclusion.” Food for thought, is Jochen Wollmert thinking ahead of his time, or if we look into the crystal ball, one wonders, could it be his legacy?

Major Titles

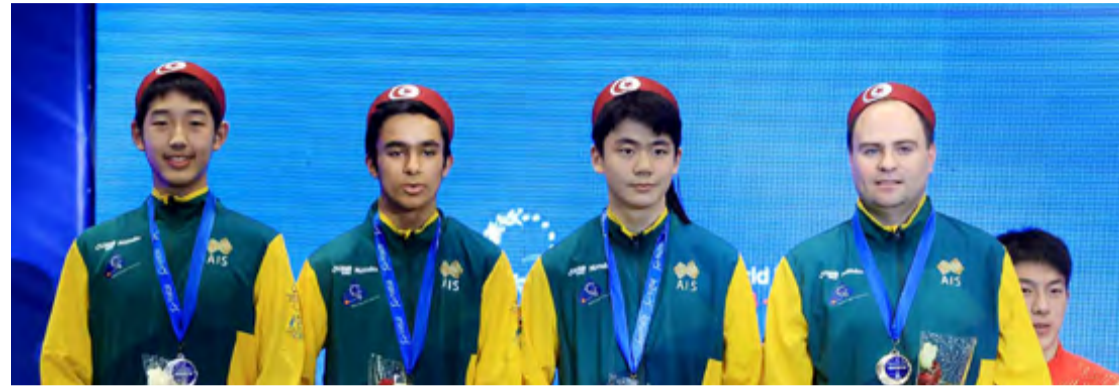
- Paralympic Games: Men’s Singles (2000, 2008, 2012)
- Paralympic Games: Men’s Team (1996, 2004)
- World Championships: Men’s Singles (1990, 1998, 2006)
- World Championships: Men’s Team (1990, 2002, 2006)
- European Championships: Men’s Singles (1989, 1995, 1997, 1999, 2001, 2005)
- European Championships: Men’s Team (1989, 1991, 1995, 1997, 2003)
- Open International Tournaments: 29 Men’s Singles titles
- Open International Tournaments: 26 Men’s Team titles
- Six times (1992, 1996, 2000, 2004, 2008, 2012): Winner of Silver Laurel Leaf
- 2010: Inducted into the ITTF Hall of Fame
- 2012: German Olympic Sports Confederation Fair Play Award.
- 2012: Sportsman with Heart Award presented the German Sports Journalists.

Landmark for Australia

On Tuesday 6th December at the 2023 World Youth Championships in Tunisia, Australia stood proudly on the second step of the under 15 boys' team podium; other than in para tournaments, a first ever medal of any colour at a world title event organised under the auspices of the International Table Tennis Federation.

John Murphy at the helm, the line-up comprising Aditya Sareen, Chulong Niu and Won Bae exceeded all expectations. A quarter-final 3-1 success against the Tunisian outfit comprising Youssef Aidli, Wassim Essid and Mohamed Khaloufi was followed by the same margin of victory when facing the French trio formed by Flavien Cotton, Nathan Lam and Antoine Noirault. Underlining the level of the performance, both Niu Chulong and Aditya Sareen beat Flavien Cotton, the young man who later in the proceedings was to win the under 15 boys' singles title.

A place in the final, it was a 3-0 defeat at the hands of China's Huang Xunan, Kang Youde and Wen Ruibo; silver the colour of the medal, a landmark for Australia.



John Murphy, the coach on duty, reflects on a landmark success.

We had good preparation; before the tournament the whole team was in Europe. We played in WTT Youth Contender events in Italy, Slovakia and Hungary, before going to Portugal for an ITTF organised training camp and a Youth Star Contender tournament. Arriving in Tunisia we attended another training camp; everyone was positive. Throughout the whole tournament our team spirit shone through.

Aditya Sareen

In Portugal, in Vila Nova de Gaia, he had been runner up in the under 15 boys' singles; he arrived in Tunisia full of confidence. He is very strong from the backhand, a dangerous player; above all else, it was his spirit that shone through, full of energy, he played for the team, he was inspirational.

Won Bae

At the 2019 Hopes Week in Oman, he had finished in seventh place and was eligible for 2020 but missed out because of the pandemic, very unfortunate; his parents are Korean, so he went back to Korea in May to prepare. He has a good feeling for the ball, good when playing short, an all-round player with many options; he likes to compete at a high tempo.

Chulong Nie

He plays close to the table, just like Sweden's Fabien Ak-erström, long pimples on the backhand; after making a return with the pimples rubber, he looks to play his very powerful forehand. He is very positive, difficult to break down; his special style makes him very dangerous. At the semi-final stage he caused a big surprise by beating Flavien Coton.



Aditya Sareen

Date of birth: 28th April 2008.

City of birth: Mitcham, Victoria.

Residence: West Windsor, New Jersey, USA.

Family: brother Varun, parents Rahul Sareen and Mukta Malhotra.

First played table tennis: nine years old at Princeton Pong, New Jersey USA.

Racket blade: Butterfly Timo Boll ALC FL.

Forehand rubber: Butterfly Dignics 09C Black 2.1 mm.

Backhand rubber: Butterfly Dignics 05 Red 2.1 mm.

Other sports: soccer and basketball.

Supporter: Oklahoma City Thunder basketball team.

Favourite sporting personality: Rafael Nadal.

Weekly training: six days a week, three hours per day.

Reasons for success at World Youth Championships: a positive attitude, feeling proud to represent Australia; good preparation in addition to the encouragement, guidance and support provided by teammates and coach.

Best match at World Youth Championships: beating Flavien Cotton and Nathan Lam in the team semi-finals against France.

Playing strength: backhand topspin and block
Areas for improvement: speed, service variations and returns, improve physical strength.

Most important lesson learnt from the World Youth Championships: the importance of teamwork, mental strength and a positive attitude. We reached the final because we believed in our ability. John Murphy, our coach, helped a great deal so we could execute our best game without worrying about the level of our opponents.

Immediate goals: to win more international medals for Australia, work hard and learn from every opportunity.

▶▶ ITTF World Youth Championships



Won Bae

Date of birth: 12th July 2008.
 City of birth: Sydney, New South Wales
 Residence: Sydney, New South Wales
 Family: brother Hwan, parents Teddy Bae and Jay Kim.
 First played table tennis: six years old at Kim's table tennis club in Sydney
 Racket blade: Xiom An Jaehyun FL
 Forehand rubber: Tibhar K3
 Backhand rubber: Xiom Omega 7 Asia.
 Other sports: soccer and basketball.
 Supporter: Manchester United Football Club.
 Favourite sporting personality: Kobe Bryant.
 Weekly training: six days per week, three to four hours per day

Reasons for your success at the World Youth Championships: harmony with team coach and team players, well-organised training programme.

Best match at the World Youth Championships: against China's Kang Youde in the final.

Playing strength: strong forehand topspin.
Areas for improvement: backhand topspin and service variation.

Most important lessons learnt from the World Youth Championships?
 Never give up and keep challenging.
 Immediate aims: become 2023 under 15 world champion.



Chulong Nie

Date of birth: 14th October 2007
 City of birth: Jilin, China
 Residence: Sydney, New South Wales
 Family: elder sisters Nie Mingyao and Nie Mingxuan, parents Nie Hongpu and Wang Yiping
 First played table tennis: 10 years old in 2017 in Sydney
 Racket blade: custom made racket FL
 Forehand rubber: Doubles Happiness Hurricane 3
 Backhand rubber: Tibhar Grass D.TecS
 Other sports: skiing
 Supporter: Australia table tennis teams
 Favourite sporting personality: Ma Long
 Weekly training: six to eight hours each day

Reasons for success at the World Youth Championships: three months before, my coach, Zhang Shaoping, looked at most of the players that I would encounter; we analysed them; from that information, we knew which areas I needed to improve.

Best match at the World Youth Championships: at the semi-final stage against France when I beat Flavien Cotton.
Playing strength: I am able to control and create opportunities with the long pimples and thus make good openings for my forehand.

Areas for improvement: a better receive, then it will make it harder for my opponents to attack.
Most important lesson learnt from the World Youth Championships: the biggest lesson is that anything is possible as long as you believe.

Immediate goals: I want to win my age group in the national championships and qualify for the 2024 Olympics; also, to win the under 19 boys' singles at the Oceania Championships, and reach the semi-finals at the World Youth Championships.

Modest Goals Reap Major Rewards

Adrenalin flowing, hitting a hot streak, making strides; in the month of March no player fulfilled those attributes more comprehensibly than Izaak Quek, the 16-year-old excelled all expectations on home soil at the Singapore Smash 2023, before at the WTT Youth Contender Antalya, completing a clean sweep of titles on offer.

“It was a great honour to play in such an event as the Singapore Smash”, reminisced Izaak Quek. “I told myself play my best and try to learn as much as I could from the older and stronger players around me; I told myself to take it match by match and aim for small goals like winning one game.”

Improving by opposing more senior players, the teenager fulfilled that theory from the very first point. In the opening round, Izaak Quek faced one of the most seasoned competitors of all, India’s 40-year-old Sharath Kamal Achanta; responding to the occasion, Izaak Quek prevailed in straight games.

“I wouldn’t say it was very comfortable, Achanta is a

very experienced player, he changed strategies a lot during the match”, explained Izaak Quek. “I didn’t have any pressure going up against him; previously I had lost 4-0 to him at the Commonwealth Games, my goal was just to get a game. After winning the first game, I had no more pressure as I had already met my goal, I played with nothing to lose, I think that won me the match.”

Success against the reigning Commonwealth Games champion, next it was victory in opposition to the runner up at the Budapest 2019 World Championships, Sweden’s Mattias Falck, a contest in which it appeared the Singaporean was to be overwhelmed after comfortably losing the opening two games.

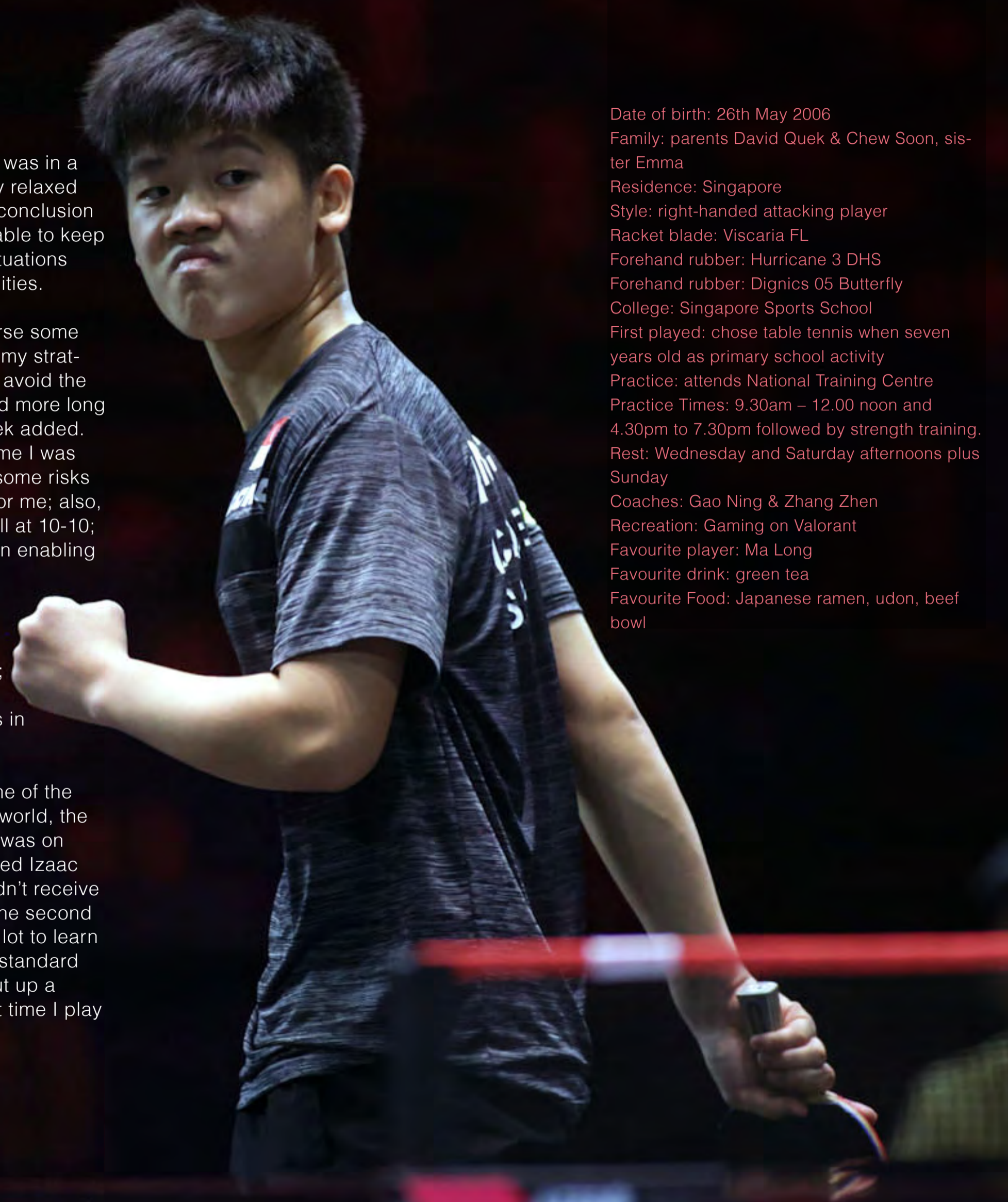
“During the first two games, I could really feel the standard of his shots and I felt really uncomfortable against his forehand side being short pimped rubber”, reflected Izaak Quek. “I didn’t think too much and just thought of strategies to overcome all the difficulties I felt during the first two games.”

Clearly Izaak Quek was in a focused but equally relaxed frame of mind; the conclusion being that he was able to keep calm in pressure situations and seize opportunities.

“There were of course some changes I made to my strategies, like trying to avoid the short game and add more long pushes”, Izaak Quek added. “During the last game I was losing 10-8, I took some risks which worked out for me; also, I got a lucky net ball at 10-10; luck played a part in enabling me to win.”

A place in the last 16; that was to be the end of the road; China’s Wang Chuqin ended progress in straight games.

“Wang Chuqin is one of the best players in the world, the quality of his shots was on another level”, sighed Izaak Quek. “Also, I couldn’t receive his service well in the second game; I still have a lot to learn from players of his standard and I hope I can put up a better fight the next time I play against him.”



Date of birth: 26th May 2006
Family: parents David Quek & Chew Soon, sister Emma
Residence: Singapore
Style: right-handed attacking player
Racket blade: Viscaria FL
Forehand rubber: Hurricane 3 DHS
Forehand rubber: Dignics 05 Butterfly
College: Singapore Sports School
First played: chose table tennis when seven years old as primary school activity
Practice: attends National Training Centre
Practice Times: 9.30am – 12.00 noon and 4.30pm to 7.30pm followed by strength training.
Rest: Wednesday and Saturday afternoons plus Sunday
Coaches: Gao Ning & Zhang Zhen
Recreation: Gaming on Valorant
Favourite player: Ma Long
Favourite drink: green tea
Favourite Food: Japanese ramen, udon, beef bowl



Worthy wins against the odds, in Antalya, it was a somewhat similar scenario; Izaak Quek was the eighth highest ranked boy on duty.

“I was pretty confident coming into this tournament, coming from good results in the Singapore Smash; however, I knew it was not going to be easy transitioning from playing a senior event to a junior event”, said Izaak Quek. “It had been a long time since I participated in a youth event; it was not any easier than playing in a senior event. I’m really happy I was able to get this result.”

Equally as difficult as playing at senior level? There is an air of modesty in the assessment. In Antalya Izaak Quek was never extended the full five match distance, in the under 19 boys’ singles, he dropped just two games, in the under 17 event, none at all!”

“The semi-finals and finals were definitely difficult matches”, explained Izaak Quek. “It is a different feeling playing the semis and finals compared to group knock-out stages; it was a really tough tournament for me having so many matches in a day.”

Singapore Smash

Men’s Singles

R1: Sharath Kamal Achanta 4,6,10

R2: Mattias Falck (SWE) -6,-3,7,9,10

L16: Wang Chuqin (CHN) -4,-6,-7

WTT Youth Contender Antalya 2023

Under 19 Boys’ Singles

SF: Amirmahdi Keshavarzi (IRI) 5,5,-10,7

F: Navid Shams (IRI) 11,5,8

Under 19 Mixed Doubles (partner Zhou Jingyi)

SF: Asu Ayca Senyuva/Arda Temel (TUR) 9,-11,10,11

F: Ugurcan Dursun/Zeynep Karaca (TUR) 8,2,7

Under 17 Boys’ Singles

SF: Benyamin Faraji (IRI) 3,5,12

F: Ugurcan Dursun (TUR) 8,4,3

Undoubtedly the performances suggest he is knocking on the door of a place in the Paris 2024 Olympic Games; significantly, he has proved himself a most adept doubles player. At the ensuing WTT Feeder Antalya 2023 tournament he won the men’s doubles partnering Pang Yew En Koen to add to his mixed doubles success alongside Zhou Jingyi at the Contender event.

“Zhou Jingyi and I try to communicate with one another during the match and also practise with one another as much as we can during training”, said Izaak Quek. “We still have a lot to improve on as a pair.”

Room for improvement, that applies to all, even the best on planet earth. However, Izaak Quek has matters in his favour, at his age progress can be made a rapid pace; a fact he proved in March 2023.



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