

**SAFE HANDS**  
PETRA SÖRLING

# AIDA DAHLEN

## ABANDONED TO ADMIRED

**BELIEVED MISSING, 50 YEARS LATER REUNITED**  
**STARS CROWNED, STRIPES EARNED**

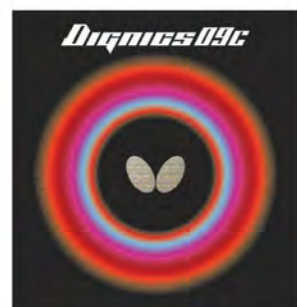




“DIGNICS 09C has a perfect combination of spin and speed”

– Fan Zhendong (China)  
Champion at 2021 WTTC Finals Houston  
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**DIGNICS 09C**



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**FROM THE ITTF GROUP CEO**

2022 has been a fast-moving year and one where we slowly and cautiously emerge from the COVID crisis. Fortunately, the ITTF Group has emerged relatively unscathed. We now enter a period where our confidence starts to return. 2021 saw the Olympic and Paralympic Games in Tokyo, the World Table Tennis Championships in Houston and the start of World Table Tennis events. With their success, we slowly started to see some light at the end of the tunnel. With the success of the first-ever WTT Grand Smash, we now start to feel on track again for the rest of this year, and ambitious for our projects. Today we are proud to re-launch our magazine. We hope you enjoy it, and we look forward to more contributions, more great Table Tennis stories and more content in the future which adapts to the new digital generation.

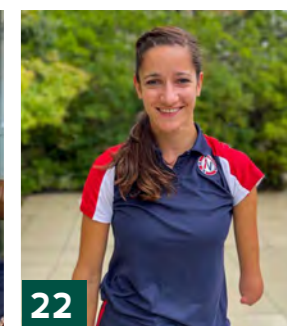
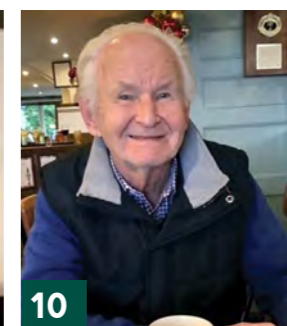
Steve Dainton

**CONTENTS**



**IN THIS ISSUE**

4 News	60 The model of reliability
8 Safe hands	64 Fortitude, fourfold
10 Believed missing, 50 years later reunited	68 It is good to be crazy
18 Heart of gold	72 Cuba’s long wait ends
22 Abandoned to admired	74 Delightful innocence
26 Great Britain reciprocates	76 10 out of 10
32 Let’s play pingpong	78 A year to remember
36 The next challenge	82 Santiago, Santiago bound
40 The now generation, now retired	84 Australia opens doors, Liu Yangzi walks through
42 Perfect record	86 Promise rewarded
44 Defending Greek honour	88 Valuable experience
46 Champion returns	90 Events
48 Stars crowned striped earned	92 Podium Places
50 Fan Zhendong reflects	94 Hitting the headlines
54 New look in Vila Nova de Gaia	96 We Remember
56 Swedes at the double	





### Executive Committee meets

Gathering in Singapore on Tuesday 15th and Wednesday 16th March, the ITTF Executive Committee announced that the 2022 Board of Directors meeting would be staged on Sunday 2nd October, ITTF Annual General Meeting (AGM) on Tuesday 4th October in Chengdu.

It was agreed that the AGM should be held as an event in its own right, not as traditionally on the occasion of a World Championships.

Agreement having already been made with the local organising committees of Durban 2023 and Busan 2024, it was decided that the hosting rights for the 2025 AGM will be open for application.

A bidding process for member associations wishing to host the AGM will be published in due course. A member association delivering a World Championships may bid to host the AGM in the same year but not during the period of the tournament.

Additionally, the Executive Committee agreed efforts towards sustainability should be accelerated, the importance of reducing a negative environmental impact being stressed.

Therefore, the ITTF will align its sustainability objectives with the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the UN Sustainable Development Goals (UN-SDGs). Moreover, a new position will be created to focus on sustainability within the ITTF Group and support the implementation of the UN-SDGs.

Equally, the ITTF continues to work towards a more a gender-balanced representation. The Executive Committee decided Athletes' Commission nominations must be made in pairs, one male, one female. Following this year's elections, two members of the Athletes' Commission, from different genders, will sit on the Executive Committee.

Meanwhile, with the introduction of World Table Tennis, the Executive Committee is considering reviewing the current limit of 40 teams for the World Team Championships Finals. It will open discussions with the Busan 2024 Organising Committee, the item will be included on the next Board of Directors' meeting agenda.

## Executive Committee & Responsibilities



Petra Sörling, President  
Strategic Plan, Human Resources, Sustainability, Olympic and Paralympic Games, Academies, External Relations, Member Relations, Diversity



Khalil Al-Mohannadi, Executive Vice President  
Continental Council, Events, World Championships



Masahiro Maehara, Executive Vice President  
Health, Innovation, Para Table Tennis



Alaa Meshref, Executive Vice President  
Commercial (World Table Tennis), High Performance, ITTF Museum



Wahid Oshodi, Executive Vice President  
Entourage, Home of Table Tennis, Sport Science



Liu Guoliang, Executive Vice President, Athletes, Development, Information Technology, Digitalisation



Roland Natran, Executive Vice President - Finance  
Finance, Veterans



Alaor Azevedo, Executive Vice President  
Communications & Protocol, Governance, World Ranking



Graham Symons, Executive Vice President  
Clean Sport/Integrity, Equipment, Sport for All



Zoran Primorac, Chair Athletes Commission  
Athletes Commission (alongside Alaa Meshref)



Ryu Seungmin, IOC Member  
Olympic and Paralympic Games (alongside Petra Sorling)



### Ukraine

Held on Tuesday 1st March, the Executive Committee took the decision to follow the recommendations made by the International Olympic Committee Executive Board.

Thus, until further notice, no Russian or Belarusian players and officials will be invited or allowed in events hosted by the ITTF Group. Additionally, no Russian or Belarusian national symbols, colours, flags, or anthems will be displayed.

Furthermore, a Task Force has been formed to monitor the situation and coordinate efforts to allow Ukrainian players to continue participating at international events. Members of the Task Force comprise Petra Sörling, ITTF President, fellow Executive Committee colleagues, Khalil Al-Mohannadi and Wahid Oshodi, alongside Zoran Primorac, Athletes' Commission Chair, and Steve Dainton, ITTF Group Chief Executive Officer.

### The ITTF Continental Council

Initiated following the 2021 ITTF Annual General Meeting, the ITTF Continental Council, the mandate to provide input and strategic guidance to the ITTF leadership, held its inaugural meeting on Sunday 16th January. The group comprises members of the Executive Committee and the Presidents of the continental federations; an annual report will be presented.

A further meeting was held at the WTT Singapore Smash 2022 tournament on Thursday 17th March. Qualification systems for both the Olympic Games and World Championships formed the agenda.

The working group, tasked with formulating qualification procedures for the Paris 2024 Olympic Games, presented proposals for review. Similarly, the Continental Council received an update regarding the 2023 World Table Tennis Championships Finals in Durban.

### New format for Paris 2024 Paralympic Games

Scheduled for Wednesday 28th August to Sunday 8th September, men's doubles, women's doubles and mixed doubles will replace men's team and women's team events at the Paris 2024 Paralympic Games.

There are four classes in each of the men's and women's doubles competitions, two for mixed doubles. Class 11, which is for players which an intellectual impairment, is not included in the doubles events. A maximum number is set for the categories in each doubles event; that number is determined by adding together the class numbers of the two players concerned.

### Men's Doubles

Class 4: Wheelchair (classes adding to maximum 4)

Class 8: Wheelchair (classes adding to maximum 8)

Class 14: Standing (classes adding to maximum 14)

Class 18: Standing (classes adding to maximum 18)

### Women's Doubles

Class 5: Wheelchair (classes adding to maximum 5)

Class 10: Wheelchair (classes adding to maximum 10)

Class 14: Standing (classes adding to maximum 14)

Class 20: Standing (classes adding to maximum 20)

### Mixed Doubles

Class 7: Wheelchair (classes adding to maximum 7)

Class 17: Standing (classes adding to maximum 17)

Changes but the singles events remain the same.

### Men's Singles

Wheelchair: Class 1 – 5

Standing: Class 6-10

Intellectual Impairment: Class 11

### Women's Singles

Wheelchair: Class 1/2 – 5

Standing: Class 6-10

### Intellectual Impairment: Class 11

There is an increase of four female athletes in the overall quota.

### Announced on Thursday 27th January, Ai Fukuhara will lead the strategic development of World Table Tennis in Japan.

### New date for World Team Championships

Originally scheduled for April, owing to the spread of the Omicron Covid-19 variant, the Chengdu 2022 World Team Table Tennis Championships will now be staged from Friday 30th September to Sunday 9th October.

### Galia Dvorak appointed Goodwill Ambassador

On Thursday 24th March, the ITTF Foundation appointed Galia Dvorak as a Goodwill Ambassador to facilitate communication with the Ukraine table tennis community.

Born in Kyiv before moving to Spain when she was two years old, Galia Dvorak hails from a table tennis family; both parents Vladimir Dvorak and Flora Khasanova

played internationally. Commencing in 2008 in Beijing, she has been ever present at the Olympic Games; in addition, she is Deputy Chair of the ITTF Athletes Commission and the ETTU Special Projects Operations Manager.

Four Ukrainian players participated in the WTT Star Contender Doha 2022 tournament: Tetyana Bilenko, Ganna Gaponova, Margaryta Pesotska and Yaroslav Zhmudenko.

### World ranking regulation changes

A player's ranking comprises the sum of the points of the eight non-expired results which possesses the highest number of points. In order to adapt to the World Table Tennis structure, in 2020 "initial points" were introduced, a fixed number of points being added to the best eight results. The initial value was 80 per cent of a player's total points in December 2020; from September 2021, that figure was reduced to 50 per cent.

Meeting on Saturday 29th January, the Executive Committee voted to reduce the "initial points" from 50 per cent to 20 per cent. Reducing the "initial points" refreshes the World Rankings and allows players who performed well in 2021 to climb the listings and access higher tier events.

### Product numbers: 1st April 2022

Racket Coverings: 1,607 rubbers authorised of which there are 48 new coloured rubbers, blue, green, violet or purple/pink. Overall, it is an increase of 36 actual new rubbers in the three month period since 1st January 2022 when the total read 1571.

Balls: 78 balls approved. It is fall of five since 1st January 2021, when 83 makes were valid.

Tables: 167 tables approved, an increase of nine since 1st January when it was 158. Adding the colours black and grey to blue, green and purple, the number rises to 249 tables.

Flooring: 24 floorings approved, an increase of five since 1st January 2021 when it was 19 in total. Include the full colour range – blue, green, purple, red, black – it is 30 floorings overall.

Nets: 54 net assemblies approved; an increase of three since 1st January 2021 when there were 51 such items. Include the colours - blue, green or black net mesh – the number rises to 91 in total.





**PETRA SÖRLING**  
ITTF President

# SAFE HANDS

One global crisis supersedes another; that has been the situation throughout history, but has it ever been more acute in modern times than the welcome to office which has greeted Sweden's Petra Sörling, elected unanimously President of the International Table Tennis Federation at the 2021 Annual General Meeting.

Some six months after the gathering in Houston, the situation in Ukraine became headline news; the conflict has rather eclipsed the global pandemic which caused proceedings in the American city to be organised in a unique manner.

Equally, the 2021 United Nations Climate Change Conference held in early November in Glasgow has now rather disappeared from the headlines. News, however global, has a pecking order.

All are major concerns, in Houston, the words of Petra Sörling clearly reflected the fact that she is most acutely aware of all such happenings; she realises that sport goes far beyond the boundaries of just winning and losing.

"At the heart of the ITTF Group's vision is to make table tennis accessible to all, for life and for future generations", said Petra Sörling. "To achieve this, the sport must make it its mission to focus its efforts towards three key areas: people, planet and prosperity."

Current situations appreciated, Petra Sörling has not been slow to put words into actions. A Task Force, which she leads, has been formed to monitor the situation in Ukraine, humanitarian assistance via the ITTF Foundation for pandemic assistance has been afforded; policies have been

## The strategic pillars

**United ITTF family:** Unite the membership by bringing back peace, improve inclusion and engage in discussions with continental bodies and their leadership.

**Strengthen governance:** Clarify organisation, promote equity, and further strengthen the ties to the Olympic and Paralympic movement.

**Commercial growth:** Innovate event structure, drive a strategic digital transformation and initiate new revenue streams.

**A sustainable future:** Make ITTF a role model with the aim to inspire in the future IOC/IPC. In-line with UN development goals focus on increasing diversity and inclusion, decrease inequities, improve health, and aim for a more responsible manufacturing value process.

**"To achieve this, the sport must make its mission to focus its efforts towards three key areas: people, planet and prosperity."**

initiated to promote sustainability in every possible respect.

It has been a busy introduction to office for the Federation's first ever female to occupy the leading role, a fact on which some may dwell but, while applaudable as we seek a gender balance, it is not the prime factor.

The calm, caring and collected manner in which she conducts herself made her quite simply, male or female, the best person for the post; her efforts in recent years have meant she has gained the confidence of all. Moreover, those endeavours are not restricted to the table tennis hall, she holds several senior posts in the business world; that of Chief Executive Officer at Rosengård Fastighets AB being one of particular note.

In 2017 Petra was given the task by four

of the biggest real estate company owners to start a company from scratch, create a vision, devise a mission statement and employ the best team possible.

"I was the first in this new company. It has given me a great deal of experience; most importantly it is one of my achievements outside table tennis of which I'm most proud", explained Petra Sörling. "We have not only been very successful as an investment company, we have received awards in Sweden for customer satisfaction and proved that social sustainability is not only a corporate social responsibility tool, it is also a business plan."

Most clearly, the evidence speaks for itself; rest assured, the future of the International Table Tennis Federation is in safe hands.

### Profile

Date of Birth: 12th Jan 1971  
Family: married to Fredrik, son Primus, 15 year old  
Pets: owns two Westie dogs Spock and Bob

### Official Positions (Year of Appointment)

2003: Deputy Chair District of Skåne  
2003: Member of Board of Swedish Table Tennis Association  
2007: Vice President European Table Tennis Union  
2009: Deputy President Swedish Table Tennis Association  
2009: ITTF Executive Vice President  
2013: President Swedish Table Tennis Association.  
2017: Member of the Advisory Board International Affairs of Swedish Sports

### Awards

2017: European Table Tennis Union (ETTU) badge of Honour

### Medals

1987: Gold - junior girls' doubles at Nordic Championships  
1988: Bronze - junior girls' singles at Swedish National Championships  
1989: Bronze - junior girls' doubles at Swedish National Championships Partner: Åse Svensson, younger sister of Marie Svensson, not related to Åsa Svensson  
2018: Gold - World Veteran Championships - women's doubles 50-54 years (Partner: Pia Toelhøj)

### Swedish League:

Career began at Arlövs IK for whom she played 69 matches  
Sat 29th Sep 1994: debut in highest division  
Played 99 matches for Malmö FF from 1991 to 1997, from 1994 to 1997 in the highest division  
In 1997 Malmö FF emerged silver medallists, Petra played in the early rounds; her teammates were Natalia Bogatireva, Pia Finneman, Åse Svensson and Veronica Augustsson

### Danish League

Represented Hillerød GI, winners in both 2018 and 2019. In 2018 she lined up alongside Chen Yan, Pia Toelhøj, Tina Stochmal and Petra Gummesson; in 2019 Mie Skov and Nomin Bassan replaced Tina Stochmal.

### Professional Career

Master of Science Business Administration at Lund University  
Chief Executive Officer at Rosengård Fastighets AB  
Board member at Real Estate Association  
Board member at Intelligence Watch.



## Believed missing 50 years later reunited

Father thought son had been drowned at sea, son believed father was missing in action; 50 years later they were reunited, a number that has another meaning for the boy who was seven years old when war forced them to part.

In those intervening years, the table tennis hall has been the sanctuary for Hans Soova, first as a player then as a coach; when in 2004, Mary Fuller won the under 12 girls' singles title at the English Championships, she became the 50th player he had guided to become a national champion.

A landmark but at a time tinged with sadness; earlier in the year in February, his wife, Christine, had died of cancer. Always, he attributed his coaching success to the encouragement she afforded.

Hailing from Keighley in West Yorkshire, as Mary Fuller progressed, whatever the relevant age group in the English rankings, she occupied top spot, eventually gaining a place in the England senior team.

Instilling the ethics of attendance, attitude, ambition and attention, sound principles for anyone involved in any field of education, under his guidance no less than 24 players reached full international status, a total of 15 achieving top spot in their respective national age group rankings.

Most significantly all started their careers under his tutelage, they were his students from the beginning, not inherited from other sources.

It is just one fact that sets the highly respected coach apart; the other is his quite remarkable life story. They say truth is stranger than fiction, never was that more true, than in the life of Hans Soova.

Always known as Hans but in fact that is not his name; it is Heiki.



### Baltic States annexed

Born on Sunday 22nd July 1934 in Lilleküla, a district of Tallinn, the capital of Estonia, father, Eduard was a goldsmith, mother, Jadwiga a milliner. A time of peace but when only five years old in 1939 war broke out, one year later in June 1940 the Baltic States were annexed by Josef Stalin, Estonia came under Soviet Union control.

A major turning point, on Sunday 22nd June 1941 there was another; Germany invaded Estonia, the Red Army withdrew and enforced mobilisation; Eduard and his brother Efka were ordered to an assembly point on Sunday 27th July at the Hippodrome Football Stadium. Destined initially for Leningrad (now St Petersburg) Heiki and his mother Jadwiga went to the port in Tallinn to see the ship "Josef Stalin" depart.

They believed Eduard was on board and waved farewell. At the time Heiki was only seven years old, Jadwiga was six months pregnant with Arne. There was a mixture of sadness and excitement, the ship was too far away to recognise those on board; the excitement was because a woman in a white swimsuit kept swimming from the ship, back and forth to the quayside with letters in her mouth.

No letter arrived for Heiki and Jadwiga; that night neither slept, Jadwiga, who rarely showed emotion, sat near an open window, Heiki noticed she was crying, they were times of great uncertainty which we cannot imagine today. A few days later they received a hastily scribbled note from Eduard explaining he had been one of the last to leave, he had boarded the ship at midnight and was not on board when Heiki and Jadwiga were at the quayside. He told Heiki to be a good boy, obey his mother and he would write a longer letter later; no such letter was ever received.

Four months later, Arne was born, mother gained employment in a match factory. Soviet Union airstrikes were incessant, there were food

shortages, schools only opened when there were no air raids. Fortunately, in the summer of 1942, Eduard's parents Jakov and Magdalene invited Heiki to spend time in southern Estonia away from the danger; an enjoyable time but also, one of horror. He could see the railway, cattle trucks full of screaming people being transported to concentration camps.

### Tide of war turned

Jadwiga left the match factory, able to speak German, she began working at the headquarters of the German Baltic Fleet at Toompea. She worked as

a waitress and as an assistant in the canteen, many times she overheard conversations regarding the current situation. In 1944 news arrived of the German defeat at Stalingrad.

The tide of war had turned, the Red Army was approaching Tallinn, Jadwiga decided the only option was with her two sons to escape to Germany; having worked for the Germans she feared being labelled a collaborator and would be exiled to Siberia. Horse and cart, the mode of transport, a 13 mile journey, Jakov and Magdalene returned the boys to Tallinn, they bid a tearful

farewell, explaining they were too old to leave, knowing in their hearts they would never see their grandchildren again. They would wait in hope for their son Eduard to arrive home.

Meanwhile, Jadwiga had befriended a senior naval officer who helped them to obtain the documents they needed to escape. On the morning of Thursday 21st September 1944, Jadwiga, Heiki and Arne departed on a small German warship, after three weeks, the vessel being attacked by aircraft gun fire and avoiding mines, they arrived in Pillau. At the time, the city belonged to Germany, now known as Baltiysk, it is part of Russia. A difficult journey but a wise move; on arrival, they learnt that the day after their departure, the Red Army had taken Tallinn.

Also, on the day Jadwiga and the boys departed Tallinn harbour, many refugees were trying to escape. The largest of the ships was the Moero, the next day it was attacked near Ventpils and sank. Various records state that the ship had 3,000 to 3,500 wounded soldiers and civilians on board of which only 500 to 600 were rescued. Owing to the hasty departure there were no records, Heiki's grandparents concluded that Jadwiga, Heiki and Arne had drowned when the Moero sank.

Pillau became a battleground, bombing raids, Jadwiga and the boys left fearing for their lives and caught the train to Erfurt in Thuringia. They lived in nearby Gera where they had the top floor of a farmhouse, they were made welcome. War over, rumours spread that Germany was to be divided between four sectors: France, Great Britain, the United States and the Soviet Union. Thuringia was to be assigned to the Soviet Union.

Again, fearful that the Soviets may consider her a collaborator, no money, she requisitioned the farmer's handcart to provide somewhere for Arne to sit. She left the farmer a note as she had been unable to ask permission, she had kept her plans secret for fear locals might stop them.



The Soova family in 1935: Uncle Efka stands behind mother, Jadwiga, and her sisters Manja and Beate. Next is his father Eduard holding Heike. Uncle Felix completes the group. Only Eduard of the three men survived World War Two.



## Freedom

Eventually, bedraggled having had to beg for food on the long walk, they arrived at the bridge which would take them to the American sector and freedom; they were too late, the border restrictions had been put in place, there was a long queue.

She told Heiki that they could not go through passport control because they were Estonian and they would be sent back, she stressed to Heiki she would not let the Soviet soldiers arrest them and send them to Siberia. They moved out of the queue, the soldiers sitting behind the table were engrossed checking documents; they moved across the bridge walking at a fast pace, but they were spotted. A Russian soldier screamed at them in German, telling them to stop immediately or he would shoot. He repeated his order. The commotion attracted the attention of the United States soldiers at the other end of the bridge, one of whom ran towards them. They were in the middle of the bridge; the Soviet soldier still threatening them, thankfully shots did not follow.

The American soldier could not understand why they wanted to escape the Soviet sector, in World War Two, the two countries had been on the same side. Jadwiga explained why she did not want to return to the Soviet part, fearful of deportation to Siberia; the United States soldier spoke to his counterpart at the other side of the bridge. They were allowed to stay, freedom.

"Many years later I would remember the many kind actions of the US soldiers, the food parcels, the Christmas parties, my helping out at their baseball matches, having fun with them, the sweets and the oranges they would throw from their vehicles", reminisced Hans Soova. "But also, I will never forget the words of the Russian guard: "fraulein, halt ich werde erschiessen dich", (miss, stop I will shoot you) as mother urged me on telling me to walk faster and not to look back!"

Freedom but there was a problem which turned out to be

somewhat of blessing in disguise. All their documents had been lost; aware there was a distrust of eastern Europeans, wishing to sound German, Jadwiga changed her name to Hedwig, Heiki to Hans; ever since, apart from official documents, that is how they were known.

## Enthralled

Eventually, organised by the International Refugees' Organisation, after being moved from one camp to another, they arrived at the camp in Darmstadt. One day Hans saw a large number of people in the big room used for indoor

sports; too small to see what was happening, he crawled under the legs of those watching and witnessed a table tennis match. It was his introduction to the sport, he was enthralled, dumbfounded. The next day he returned to the room hoping to play but no success, sport was only for adults.

Undeterred, no money, he made his own table tennis racket using the wood from the crates supplied by the Red Cross in which came food supplies and Christmas presents. The adults had rackets covered with sandpaper, Hans had no such luxury, so he painted his racket black and was ready to play. Also, any broken balls that came his way he repaired with tape.

However, being Christmas, everyone was advised the room would be closed; Hans was not deterred, on leaving the hall, he left a window unlatched, the next day accompanied by a friend, the boys climbed through the window and started to play using a discarded metal chimney for a net.

News spread that the boys were playing; the responsible person for the premises arrived and thus, apologising profusely, they had to leave. Disappointed but the efforts of Hans and his friend had an impact; later in the week it was agreed that children could play table tennis in the room for an hour a day.

"I used to look for someone to train with; it was a great thrill to play on a full size table", explained Hans Soova. "New table tennis balls were hard to come by; they were only available on the black market for an exchange rate of one tin of Carnation milk or a bar of Palmolive soap!"

Ingenuity and there was more; he made full use of the decorations that adorned the Christmas tree.

"I feel terribly guilty about what I did, and I still do when I think back to those days", he said. "I noticed that the tree one Christmas was dressed in coloured baubles, so when Christmas was over, I took several

of them, any that were damaged, I repaired with sticky tape and we had table tennis balls!"

Guilty, Hans Soova is totally exonerated, he was putting to good use items that would surely be thrown away in a time of scarcity.

"In those days table tennis balls were like gold dust", stressed Hans Soova.

One day he heard that a shop in the town was selling brand new table tennis balls. He didn't have any money, so he took some cigarettes and soap from home but didn't tell anyone where he was going; it was about 9.00 am when he left, the town was about seven miles away and was much further than he realised.

Mother and friends had no idea of his whereabouts, time passed, they became really concerned; after he had been missing for some five hours, in the afternoon they organised a search party and called the police. It was more than understandable, the camps were not safe places, many nationalities, often arguments arose, fighting and beatings were a daily occurrence.

Nonchalantly, oblivious to the problems he had caused, Hans strolled back at about 4.00 pm; his three prized table tennis balls in his jacket pocket. He received the biggest telling off in his life; the police were angry for having wasted their time, his mother and friends refused to talk to him for being so selfish. Meet Hans Soova and you will witness the exact opposite, he is the most kind and caring person walking planet Earth. He was confined to quarters for two weeks, and banned from table tennis, he behaved impeccably and thankfully returned to enjoy the sport to which he has given so much.

Later in 1948 they were moved to a camp in Dieburg; it was there he received his first table tennis lesson, at the home of a German builder on a gravel based drive.

"The table was made from rough boards; if you touched



Hans with son Markus

it, you were often faced with having to dig out splinters from your hands", explained Hans Soova. "The conditions were far from ideal and I paid dearly for the lessons or should I say my mother did!" Payment was by cigarettes his mother bought on the black market.

Moreover, it was a time when there was always a price to pay; for example, the asking price for a table tennis lesson in Germany at the end of World War Two was one cigarette for ten minutes and two cigarettes for half an hour!

Improvisation was the order of the day, Hans practised diligently and enjoyed the taste of success, literally! "The first prize I won was twelve Mars Bars for being successful in a camp tournament", smiled Hans Soova.

## Immigration

War over but there was the continual movement between refugee camps. Mother met Heinrichs Subris, born in St Petersburg but with parents who had strong Latvian connections. Eventually they decided to live together and had a son Awo. Soon after in 1951, the family moved to England to live in Bradford.

"We applied to emigrate; we were given the opportunity of going to the United States, Canada or England, we chose England because it was the nearest; we had hoped we could return to our own country but that was not possible", explained Hans Soova. "We arrived in England in the early 1950s, not that long after the war had ended, having the German name of Hans was

probably not one of the best names to have chosen; in broken English I had to keep explaining that I was definitely not German, and my father hadn't died killing English soldiers. I had no evidence, but I was sure he had died fighting the Germans at Stalingrad."

Hans went to work in the local textile mill with one of the conditions of his employment being that he had to remain in the job for five years, he did.

"It was just as well; at the time I could hardly speak a word of English", smiled Hans Soova. Quite possibly, he could be the only Estonian who speaks English with a Yorkshire accent!

Settled in Bradford, Hans joined the local works table tennis team and became one of the best players in the area; he married a local girl, Christine, eventually he joined the YMCA (the Young Men's Christian Association) and in 1967 started coaching.

"Coaching started quite accidentally", explained Hans Soova. "The local coach emigrated, they offered me the job and I've been coaching ever since!"

The first to gain international honours from the coaching skills of Hans Soova was Melody Ludi, in 1979 women's singles bronze medallist at the Commonwealth Championships. It was an era when long pimples, anti-spin and other such racket coverings were hitting the market. Some coaches saw the use of such materials as a quick road to success, this was not Hans Soova's style; good basic technique, long term development were his goals and of course he is correct.

Melody Ludi set the standard and provided a goal for Hans Soova when, following the 1977 World Championships in Birmingham, he became the head coach at Regional Centre of Excellence in Leeds. It was from that centre a whole host of players progressed to compete at schools, county, national and international level. Most



Hans and Christine, his wife, in 1951





Yorkshire Club champions in 1959 with the Challenge Shield and Burton Cup - Les Forest, Maurice Pitts and Hans Soova

notably at the 1986 European Youth Championships in Louvain-La-Neuve Michael O'Driscoll and Chris Oldfield won the cadet boys' team title; later in the tournament, O'Driscoll emerged the cadet boys' singles silver medallist.

The years rolled on, Hans was most content, Bradford, the county of Yorkshire was his home, the days in Estonia and Germany were from a different life. He had progressed from player, notably combining with Maurice Pitts to form a most worthy men's doubles partnership, to the status of highly respected coach.

Significantly, the wheel was turning full circle, players once under his charge, had progressed to become high level coaches in their own right. Sally Shutt, the former Sally Midgley, who in 1978 won the mixed doubles title at the World Schools' Games in Turkey partnering Malcolm

Green, became a member of the England national coaching team. Moreover, Heather, her daughter, became the 21st player coached by Hans Soova to gain international honours, when in 1999, she represented England.

Very much the same applied to Sylvia Worth, perhaps better known as Sylvia Broadbent; additional to international duties, she coached for many years alongside Hans Soova at the Centre of Excellence. In fact, "Hans and Sylv" became a most celebrated coaching team; the traits of the hardship he suffered as a young boy, when table tennis balls were a precious commodity, sometimes coming to light.

"He was not very happy when we did multi-ball, and someone trod on a ball!" smiled Sylvia Worth. Nowadays, help from his esteemed friend tends to be more appreciating how to turn the light off on an iPhone rather than how to execute a



Butlins Skegness holiday camp in 1968, Jack and Elsie Carrington, England national coaches, with Alan Fisher and Hans Soova



In 1980 with Melody Ludi, Martin Firth, Helen Shields, David Rook and Sally Shutt, at the time, all in some capacity all national champions



The 1980s, Hans Soova (far left) and (front right) Sylvia Worth with Centre of Excellence players

forehand top spin stroke with nimble footwork.

Nevertheless, gradually, he is becoming more confident at using the device and can now add "App" for application to attendance, attitude, ambition and attention to detail.

"Sylvia's loyalty to table tennis is just amazing", stressed Hans Soova. "I have been very lucky with all the talented people and friends who have been

around me."

Likewise, from a more recent generation Mark Smith who hails from Bradford, is now coaching in the Netherlands, he appreciates the support and help he gained from Hans and Sylvia. He is moving mountains at Ping Pong Alkmaar; his efforts having gained high praise from the ITTF Foundation.

### Remarkable events

Set in his ways, no-one could possibly have foreseen the events that were to unfold. In 1990, Anna, a young lady from Tallinn, visited England and stayed with a family in Oakworth near Keighley, a town not many miles from Bradford. She stayed near to the home of Hans' mother; the family with whom she resided asked Anna if she would like to meet Hedwig, whom they knew was from a foreign country but not sure which one!

Anna and Hedwig met, exchanged stories about Tallinn; Hedwig naturally mentioned the names of her sons, Heiki and Arne. Anna duly returned to Estonia, went to the Register Office in Tallinn and mentioned the names Heiki and Arne; the conversation was overheard by Mrs Tiiu Thorn who worked in the office and thought she recognised the names of the two boys.

Hedwig, Hans and Arne believed that father, Eduard, had been killed in the Second World War. He had joined the Red Army and was a member of the 249th Estonian Rifle Battalion. During armed conflict on Friday 18th December 1942 at the Battle of Velikiye Luki, he had received an ankle wound, eventually being rescued after almost freezing to death. He never returned to the front line but joined the logistics battalion, supplying equipment to the men on the front line.

Eventually discharged, Eduard returned to Estonia to see his family and his newborn child. He did not know whether Hedwig had given birth to a boy or girl. It was just before Hedwig and the boys were preparing to leave Tallinn; they missed each other by hours!

Eduard remarried and had a son Henri; he told his new wife and son about Heiki who he believed to have been drowned. Henri married Liivi and he told her about father's former family, in turn Liivi told her very good friend Mrs Tiiu Thorn about the family who



The reunion in Valga after 50 years with father Eduard and Henri

had died in the shipwreck.

Mrs Tiiu Thorn checked the records in the Registry Office and found that Eduard did have two sons by a former marriage. Knowing the family was happy she did not wish to upset anyone; it took her some time to find the courage to tell Liivi that her husband's brothers could be alive in England.

Henri did not tell his father who was now 83 years old. However, he traced Anna who remembered an address of another Estonian family in the Bradford area and wrote to Hans. The letter was addressed to Heiki Soova, but Hans was sceptical because it had arrived at another person's address.

Hans was reluctant to collect

the letter but urged on by his late wife Christine, he agreed. He replied to the letter and the stories confirmed that he had found his father.

### Reunited

In 1991, Hans and Christine travelled to Estonia, at Tallinn airport they were met by Henri, his wife and two daughters; the next day they travelled to small village of Valga where Eduard lived. Henri had prepared matters in meticulous detail. Hans walked alone through the garden gates and saw his father walking towards him, he hugged his long lost son, the whole family stood in a circle around them; there was not a dry eye to be seen.

On Sunday 27th July 1941, Eduard had been deported to Siberia, on Thursday 8th August 1991, after half a century father and son were together again.

A neighbour passed by and asked who had died, the father replied: "No-one, we've just met for the first time in 50 years."

It is a truly remarkable story for a man who throughout his life has been required to show strength of character; his only son, Marcus was just one year old when he died as a result of a tragic accident; in his more senior years, in 2012 when 77 years of age, Hans underwent a seven hour operation for pancreatic cancer; then months of chemotherapy followed. Throughout this time, he lived alone.

Most recently, in September 2021, there was another life threatening incident. He suffered a massive heart attack; he was rushed to Leeds Infirmary where they performed an emergency operation and fitted a "stent". Now, he is back driving and that means back to table tennis, back to a normal life; a phrase that is difficult to define but for Hans crystal clear; it means back to coaching five times per week!

At the moment as 2022 dawns, he coaches twice a week, but he yearns for more. Despite all the trials and tribulations, he remains positive, his motto: "you grow old, think, stay young, play table tennis".

The phrase sums up Hans Soova as do the notes made by the nurse who in the weeks following his discharge from hospital visited his home, aptly assessing her patient: "he is the most impatient patient I have ever come across".

Quite simply the lure of the table tennis hall is still as strong as it was all those years ago in Darmstadt.

"Everyone is very supportive", explained Sylvia Worth. "We make sure that he doesn't get carried away!"



**Honours**

Dedication to duty, deservedly in 2013, Hans received the British Empire Medal in the Queen's Honours List, more recently, prior to his heart attack in 2021, he won Table Tennis England's Pride of Table Tennis award.

Sadly, mother, father and stepfather never lived to witness the accolades being bestowed. Eduard died in 1993, Heinrichs in 1997, Hedwig in 2008, Awo passed away later in 2018. Arne is still alive but extremely ill, having contracted multiple sclerosis and requiring the full-time attention of carers.

An incredible story and one which captured the imagination of a young relation living in Estonia. Elli-Rin Luuk, as part of a school project "Estonia in the World, the World in Estonia" faced the task of writing about anyone from Estonia who had made a difference in the world.

There was just one choice: "The Biography of Heiki Soova, Estonian Table Tennis Virtuoso from England", it took two years to complete. In 2020 the book was entered in the National Schools' competition. She won the top prize, the gold medal, the award presented by Kersti Kaljulaid, the President of Estonia; soon after the book was included in the Estonian National Olympic Museum, the theme of the display being "Great Estonians".

It is now a far different world for the octogenarian than in his childhood days when sheltering from air raids, risking life and limb to escape deportation meant an uncertain future.

"They were miserable days", concluded Hans Soova. "I am eternally grateful to everyone who did their best to give us some enjoyment in the camps."

The gratitude is genuine, he seeks no personal reward, no reflected glory but deep inside he is proud of what he has achieved; thanks to his efforts, his dedication, young people have not only become high level table tennis players; they have become much more, simply good people.

It is the legacy of Hans Soova.



Headline news in 2013



Official confirmation of British Empire medal



The official British Empire Medal invitation in 2013 which Hans Soova thought was a hoax and was ready to throw in the bin!



1983, 10 year old Michael O'Driscoll



Melody Ludi and Sally Shutt (back row left), both former pupils became assistant coaches in the late 1990s



Bayer Bradford, British League Team in the 1990s - Martin Kinsella, Denis Neale, Mark Stephenson and Michael O'Driscoll with Hans Soova



Early 2000s with Mary Fuller and Kevin Beadsley



Arriving at Buckingham Palace in 2014 to receive the British Empire Medal



Hans Soova in 1957



Dame Ingrid Roscoe presents Hans with his BEM Award on behalf of Queen Elizabeth II.



On Saturday 5th June 2021, Hans Soova received the prestigious Pride of Table Tennis Award for a lifetime contribution to the sport

**Awards**

1991 Sports Council (Yorkshire region): second place "Coach of the Year", a total of 67 nominations.

1996 Yorkshire: second place "Contribution to Sport".

2005 Bradford: winner "Be Active Award", a recognition of over 40 years continuous service to the health and well-being of people in Bradford.

2012 Beckfoot School Sports Academy: award for "Outstanding Achievement in Sport", the academy is a high profile organisation noted for developing international athletes in a range of sports.

2013 British Empire Medal: the first table tennis coach and first Estonian from any discipline to receive the award.

2015 Yorkshire Table Tennis Association: the Leslie Forrest Memorial Trophy in recognition of 50 years' outstanding service to table tennis.

2017 Bradford Sports Award: "Coach of the Year", a special award for over 50 years' service.

2021 Table Tennis England: Pride of table tennis award for a lifetime contribution to the sport.





**In 1966, Jane Pinto - known as Mama Kibiriti, she who gets things done – alongside her husband Felix, decided to start a small safari company; Micato Safaris is now a world leader, the list of accolades received over the past 50 years endless. Nowadays for the founders it is retirement; the business passed down the family, daughter Anastasia is the Executive Director, son Dennis, the Managing Director.**



Flanked by their team of directors is Jane Pinto's son Dennis Pinto, and her daughter-in-law Joy Phelan-Pinto, Executive director



# HEART OF GOLD

Born in Kisumu on the shores of Lake Victoria, like most the interest in table tennis started as a player. In the early 1970s she won the women's singles title at the Kenya National Championships and at the East African Championships, a long journey by bus of some five hours was not unusual.

Arduous travel underlined her determination to succeed, the reward being that in 1973 in Sarajevo, she made her World Championships debut.

Later, in 1980 she turned her attentions to officialdom; for over 40 years occupying high ranking positions within the Kenya Table Tennis Association, the African Table Tennis Federation, the Commonwealth Table Tennis Federation, and the International Table Tennis Federation.

In her own country she played a major role in developing the sport and in the training of the next generation of administrators; most notably Jane promoted the female cause for which she is the perfect example. She believes strongly that gender should not limit a sporting career, ability is what counts. Furthermore, she believes women can also achieve high office, in a sport being dominated by male officials.

The smile was gracious tinged with an air of nostalgia, as she responded by video link to being named a Personal Honorary Member of the International Table Tennis Federation; the occasion, the Annual General Meeting staged on Wednesday 24th November, hosted at the Houston 2021 World Championships Finals.

One overriding characteristic shone through; that of kindness, for Jane Pinto achieving is important but even more important is enriching the lives of others. It is apparent in every walk of life, whether promoting the sport of table tennis, supporting the underprivileged or directing a trip to a game park where you behold the wonders of wildlife.



Jane Pinto receives the ITTF Merit Award from Xu Yinsheng at the 1997 World Championships





Felix and Jane

**Celebrities**

The outcome, Jane Pinto is an icon, a celebrated sporting personality; a fact underlined by listing the names of those with whom she has rubbed shoulders.

Notably at the 50th celebrations of the Kenya National Olympic Committee in 2005, she was recognised for her contribution to sport by two most illustrious personalities. Present to offer their congratulations was Jacques Rogge, the President of the International Olympic Committee alongside Kip Keino, President of the Kenya National Olympic Committee, one of the most distinguished athletes of all time. He is most famous for his 1500

metres gold medal at the Mexico 1968 Olympic Games, he finished 20 metres clear of the field, the largest margin in the history of the event.

Recognised in her own country and outside. At the 1997 World Championships in Manchester, Jane Pinto received the ITTF Merit Award. Later, in 2010 the Achievement Diploma Award in Women and Sports by the International Olympic Committee was bestowed; the accolade in recognition of her outstanding contribution to performance, development and participation of women in sports.

**World leader**

Acknowledgement in the table tennis world but that is only half the story, alongside husband Felix, a highly respected farmer and businessmen, she is the founder of Micato Safaris, a global leader.

Amongst a host of accolades, the company has won the Travel and Leisure award for being the very best in the industry on no less than ten occasions. No other such organisation has won more than once!

Significantly, all Micato safari directors have attained the prestigious gold or silver level certification awarded by the Kenya Professional Safari Guides Association.

Additionally, Micato Safaris has been acclaimed by the New York Times, Forbes, and Condé Nast Traveler for its meticulously planned safaris, personal service and superb accommodation. The stated company policy is clear: "We don't simply want to respond to a guest's request; we want to anticipate their needs. We want to make them feel at home when they are thousands of miles away; to take above and beyond higher and farther. This is our commitment, how we think a luxury safari ought to be, and it can be seen in the actions of our staff every day, on every safari."

Second-generation Kenyans, their parents came to Africa from Goa, India; Jane and Felix married in 1954. They lived on a farm off Bogani Road, in the Nairobi suburb of Karen; now they reside in Lavington House just outside the city where they entertain Micato Safaris visitors. Also, they have a house in Cape Town. They have three grown up children, Dennis, Anastasia, always known as Anna, and Fiona.

Opened in 1966, over the years Micato Safaris has blossomed, gaining a preeminent position in the travel industry. It is the successor of their initial endeavour, Mini Cabs and Tours, the business from which the name derives; note the first two letters of each word in the title.



Jane Pinto with Jacques Rogge and Kip Keino



Micato Safari guests



Invitation Card



Micato Safari Directors



**Philanthropy**

Nowadays, the company is based in three continents.

New York is the main office being opened in 1984 by Dennis Pinto, who is responsible for the management of Micato Safaris. Married to Joy, it is the city in which the family resides; Jane's grandchildren, Sasha, 23 years old and Tristan, 22 years of age, are no mean table tennis players. Meanwhile, Anna Pinto heads Micato's multi-continental sales from Los Angeles.

Later, in 1990 the company opened offices in New Delhi in order to meet the needs of the United States cruise industry; then when apartheid ended, offices were established in Cape Town.

Profitable business organisations but in true keeping with Jane, there is the philanthropic element, the non-profit making Micato-AmericaShare.

Founded in 1986, the organisation educates children from impoverished families in East and Southern Africa, relieving the financial burden. Under the Micato One for One Commitment, Micato educates one child for every person who travels with the company, organising wide ranging programmes.



# ABANDONED TO ADMIRIED



Born as war clouds gathered over Rogatica, a small town in Bosnia, just over 30 years later, Aida Dahlen was on cloud nine. She stood proudly on the third step of the podium, a bronze medallist in women's singles class 8 at the Tokyo 2020 Paralympic Games.

A medal in a category that has one of the most dominant athletes in Para sport, China's Mao Jingdian, a player who made her Paralympic Games debut in 2008 in Beijing and has always struck gold. Compared with able bodied sport, she is a Deng Yaping or Zhang Yining equivalent in terms of playing stature. It was Mao Jingdian who ended the progress of Aida Dahlen in the Tokyo semi-final.

In fact, Aida Dahlen is one of the very few to ever beat Mao Jingdian; at the 2019 Thermana Lasko Slovenia Open, she prevailed in their penultimate round encounter.

Arguably in Tokyo, Aida was in the tougher half of the draw, the penultimate round an outstanding achievement, a major target realised. Was there just a tear of emotion in the eye as the presentations were made? Most certainly as she walked back around the perimeter of the arena, there was a beaming smile, sufficient to light the whole Municipal Gymnasium.

"Standing on the podium, the feeling of achieving my goal became real in that moment; it did not matter to me there were no spectators; I was just relieved I was able to participate in Tokyo after everything that had happened in the last year", said Aida Dahlen. "Everybody was so happy for me. Many knew Covid-19 had imposed limitations, tournaments cancelled and trying to find practice partners had been tough to handle mentally."

Notably, as a direct result of her efforts in Tokyo, in 2021 Aida won the Norwegian Women's Para Athlete of the Year award at the Sports Gala South; it's a title she owns. She won for the seventh time in succession!

## CAREER HIGHLIGHTS

### Paralympic Games

2020 Tokyo: bronze WS class 8

### World Para Championships

2018 Lasko: bronze WS class 8

2014 Beijing: silver WS class 8

### European Championships

2019 Helsingborg: bronze WT class 6-8 (Nora Korneliussen)

2019 Helsingborg: bronze WS class 8

2017 Lasko: bronze WT class 6-8 (Nora Korneliussen, Merethe Tveiten)

2017 Lasko: gold WS class 8

2015 Vejle: gold WS class 8

2013 Lignano: silver WS

2011 Split: bronze WS

### International Titles

2019 Czech Republic: WS class 8

2019 Poland: WS class 7-8

2018 Jordan: WS class 7-8

2018 Spain (Almeria): WT Class 6-8 (Merethe Tveiten)

2018 Spain (Almeria): WS class 8

2018 Spain (San Cugat del Valles): WS class 8

2018 Slovenia: WS class 8

2018 Lignano: WT class 6-10 (Nora Korneliussen, Nozomi Takeuchi)

2017 Belgium: WS class 8-10

2016 United States: WT class 6-10 (Nora Korneliussen)

2016 Romania: WT class 8-10 (Nozomi Takeuchi)

2015 Lignano: WS class 8

2015 Hungary: WS Class 8

2014 Cote d'Azur: WT class 6-8 (Merethe Tveiten)

2014 Spain: WS class 6-8

2013 Czech: WS class 7-8

2013 Bayreuth: WT class 6-8 (Zsofia Arloy)

2013 Slovenia: WS class 8

2013 Slovenia: WT class 8-9 (Zsofia Arloy)

2012 France: WT class 6-8 (Wendy Schrijver)

2012 Slovakia: WS class 8

2011 Great Britain: WS class 8

2011 Great Britain: WT class 8 (Sylvie de Jonckheere)

2011 Brazil: WS class 6-8

2011 Romania: WS class 8

2011 Jordan: WT class 6-10 (Sylvie de Jonckheere)

2011 Jordan: WS class 8

2011 Lignano: WT class 8 (Sylvie de Jonckheere)

2010 Chinese Taipei: WT class 6-8 (Sylvie de Jonckheere)

2010 Slovakia: WS class 8

2010 Lignano: WS class 8



Aida Husic Dahlen  
Born: 5th Oct 1990  
Residence: Oslo  
Equipment Sponsor: Stiga  
Racket: Stiga Clipper  
Rubber: Stiga DNA on both sides.



**Bosnian War**

Aida Dahlen has a congenital limb anomaly, no left forearm or left foot; also, she has a smaller right foot. She was born two years before the outbreak of the Bosnian War, abandoned in the delivery room in Sarajevo, she spent two years in an orphanage before moving to an institute for war-injured children in neighbouring Montenegro.

Time and again children would arrive and then leave having been adopted, for Aida there was a long wait, it's a time she has blanked from her mind. The wait ended when Lars Dahlen arrived on a humanitarian mission, Norway was supporting the centre. Aida cannot remember their first meeting but recalls an occasion when she was ill, Lars threw sweets through her window. Recovered, Aida was given permission to visit the room where Lars was working at his computer, she jumped straight into his lap.

Later, Lars arranged for Anne Tove, his wife and daughter Maria to visit Aida; all in agreement, the long journey to Norway followed. Soon after arrival in the northern European country Aida could see her new mother emotional, in tears. Aida took her by the hand, walked outside, looked at the house and nodded. A new life had begun.

**Opportunities**

Most importantly, she had a caring family, more opportunities in life, in particular the chance to play sport.

"I played both handball and football, in the end I knew it wasn't the right fit for me", explained Aida Dahlen.

Owing to her disability, sports that involved a great deal of running were not ideal; table tennis provided a more suitable option.

"I started when I was 12 years old, after a friend of the family suggested I try table tennis. After the first practice I knew I would like this sport and that I could thrive at it", stressed Aida Dahlen. "It is a fast sport which means you must react accordingly. I like that there are so many different things to work on. Either tactical, technical, or mental, I like the fact that it is a sport that challenges on

Tokyo 2020

those levels. There is always the potential to become better."

Challenges, that is where Aida thrives, finding an answer is her great reward, she sees such a result as a major accomplishment. After moving to Norway, she attended the local kindergarten, refused the help of interpreters, learning Norwegian within months. Later at school, she experienced difficult times because she was different, unkind comments but making a close friend, having home support, Aida emerged the stronger.

"I have always loved a challenge. If I got a difficult one, like for example knitting, I tried different possibilities till I mastered it, and I did", explained Aida Dahlen. "Putting my hair in a hair tie; that was difficult at first, but I did not give up, and managed to learn a way."

Unquestionably table tennis proved a motivating force, in fact it proved more than just a sport.

"Table tennis made me feel confident. I wanted to see how far I could go. It has also made me stronger physically and opened my eyes, to be hungry for more knowledge, to evolve as a player", continued Aida Dahlen. "It made me the person I am today. I am very grateful for all that it has taught me."

**Success**

Determined, Aida won her first table tennis title at the Norwegian Championships in 2008, succeeding in a junior girls' doubles event; it was the start of a journey that has seen her travel the globe.

"I love travelling, both in



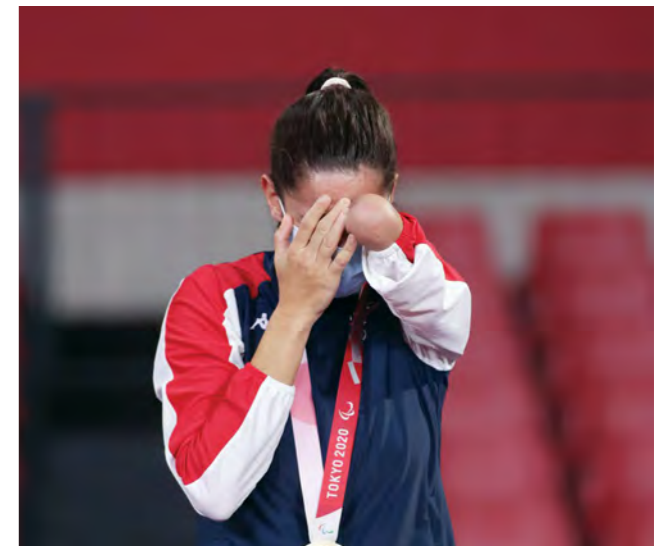
Aida Dahlen and family



Five years old with Lars in Zanjice



Tokyo 2020



private and with the table tennis group", explained Aida Dahlen. "Experiencing new places is so much fun. I want to travel a lot more in the future."

Competing in class 8, in the same year in October, she made her international debut in Wladyslawowo-Cetniewo at the Polish Para Open, she won bronze. Later in March 2010, she secured her first gold, she prevailed in Lignano; the following year at the European Para Championships in October in Split, it was bronze.

A semi-final finish in Split, in 2015 when Vejle hosted the European Para Championships, it was gold; two years later in Lasko, the title was successfully defended.

"The feeling I had when I won in Vejle was incredible. The last point during the final was the best feeling I had experienced in a while at that time; the support team I had from Norway, looking at the match and rooting for me, was so special. I'm very grateful for that", reminisced Aida Dahlen. "In Lasko, I felt there was bigger pressure because everyone was talking about it. Would I be able to win again? For me it was important to play for myself and do everything I could to at least try and win again. I was pleased to see that I did manage it."

Success in Vejle came after at the 2014 World Para Championships, she had won silver in Beijing and bronze in 2017 in Lasko.

"In Beijing, my first World Championships, I beat Thu Kamkasomphu in the semi-final", recalled Aida Dahlen. "It was the first time I had beaten her!"

Make no mistake that was a most notable win, Thu Kamkasomphu has two World Championships gold medals to her name. She won women's singles gold in class 9 in 2000 in Sydney and the same in class 8 in 2008 in Beijing.

Very much that win epitomises Aida's character, a challenge had been faced and overcome; she had tested her skills, that quality of facing life head on is very much in evidence when on many occasions she plays against able bodied players.

"I want to play against the best players in Norway to become a better player, meeting able bodied players helps me evolve", stressed Aida Dahlen. "My backhand topspin is my strongest move, but my movements are restricted; it's a little more difficult for me when I receive from the middle and deep in my backhand."

**Studying**

Undoubtedly, Aida has a full life, at the Fokus Club, she practises every day, between 20 and 30 hours per week, two or three physical fitness sessions being included.

Presently, she is studying Coaching and Sport Psychology at the Norwegian School of Sport Sciences, she is a model for Pierre Robert, an Oslo based clothing company. She enjoys watching the

Norwegian men's handball team and when time permits in the future, would like to own a dog.

Quite understandably, the first eight months of 2021 were focused on Tokyo, Marte Grutle Aasebø, her coach, maintaining a watchful eye.

"I was very lucky during the pandemic, because of my top athlete status in Norway and the fact that I was going to Tokyo, I was able to train a lot more than other people, both table tennis and strength training at the Olympic Centre", explained Aida Dahlen. "Marte has helped me a lot during the past year. We practised together almost every week on our way to Tokyo. She has been very important to me."

A place on the podium in Tokyo, to date the pinnacle; now Aida looks forward.

"I feel I'm improving every year, probably because I observe more and think better tactically, knowing what I need to do to improve; the biggest dream is to win a Paralympic gold medal", explained Aida Dahlen. "Other than that, I would like to get a job where I can help people, mostly in sport, perhaps helping people mentally."

Improving, it is a fact that is synonymous with Para sport as a whole, a fact with which Aida Dahlen concurred.

"Yes, I believe it is, and I think it's amazing", she said. "There are many people I know of who have problems getting there because the level is so high."

Standards rising and that describes Aida Dahlen, always

seeking to go one place higher, pushing back the boundaries but at the same time knowing her boundaries.

"Never give up. Always try and give all you have got, no matter what. It makes you so much stronger in every way", concluded Aida Dahlen.

A positive approach, one to be admired and emulated, the reason why Aida Dahlen not only enjoys success in sport but from devastating early years, enjoys life; most importantly, she enjoys life to the full.



## Great Britain reciprocates

Welcomed to China earlier in the year in April following the 1971 World Championships in Nagoya, eight months later in December, England reciprocated.

Arriving from Copenhagen in a Hawker Siddeley HS 748, a medium-sized turboprop airliner; on Monday 6th December, a 15 strong party of officials landed at the now defunct Hatfield Aerodrome, north of London.

They were met by Dr Roger Bannister, Chairman of the Sports Council, an athlete with a special place in the history books of sport; on Thursday 6th May 1954 at the Iffley Road Track in Oxford, he ran the first ever sub four minute mile.

Also present were prominent officials from the English Table Tennis Association, A.K. "Bill" Vint, the President and Charles Wyles, the Chairman. Fulfilling the role of genial host, Charles Wyles had travelled to meet the Chinese group in Gothenburg, where they had been competing in the Scandinavian Open, a tournament in which they had enjoyed notable success.

They finished men's team runners up, losing to Sweden; in the counterpart women's event they beat Hungary to secure the title. Later, in the men's singles, Diao Wenyuan, having overcome Hungary's Gabor Gergely in the quarters and England's Denis Neale one round later, experienced defeat in the final when facing the host nation's Kjell Johansson.

Similarly, in the women's singles, it was the silver medal. Zheng Huaiying, after accounting for England's Jill Hammersley and West Germany's Agnes Simon, experienced a final defeat at the hands of the host nation's Birgitta Radberg.

Silver for Zheng Huaiying, in the women's doubles and mixed doubles it was gold. In the former, partnering the redoubtable Li Li, the pair beat West Germany's Diane Schöler and Agnes Simon before overcoming Birgitta Radberg



Princess Anne listens to Chi Yuhua, team leader and Lou Tapeng, interpreter, watched by Charles Wyles and Derek Tremayne

and Swedish colleague, Lena Andersson to seal the title. In the latter, the top step of the podium was reserved at the expense of Czechoslovakia's Jiri Turai and Ilona Vostova, having in the penultimate round ended Swedish hopes by overcoming Stellan Bengtsson and Lena Andersson.

Success for China, there was also success for England, Peter Taylor, the younger brother of Trevor Taylor who was to play on the ensuing tour, won the junior boys' singles. Ending Swedish hopes, at the semi-final stage he beat Kjell Hellström, before securing the title at the final expense of Bo Isaksson.



Edward Heath arrives at 10 Downing Street

### Arrival in London

Safely transported to London, the party checked in at the Belgravia Royal Hotel, where, after a visit to the Department of the Environment to meet the Right Honourable Eldon Griffiths, the Minister for Sport, it was rest, an early night.

Proceedings were now very much handed over to Ken Mathews, the husband of Karenza, who was to play on the tour.

He had been asked by the English Table Tennis Association to organise the conduct of the matches at each of the venues, as well making sure that at least one of the two cars, loaned by the Ford Motor Company, was in the right place at the right time. The norm was to delegate proceedings to the local body but considering the status of the Chinese visit, safe and experienced hands were needed. In fact, in 1963, Ken had prepared a booklet detailing best tournament practice; thus,

he was the obvious choice.

Thanks to his diligence matters went smoothly. Notably, Derek Tremayne, the General Secretary of the English Table Tennis Association, fulfilled the role of Master of Ceremonies; Charles Wyles' daughter Evelyn, acted as chaperon and nurse.

Rested, the next day, the party departed the hotel at 8.00 am for the journey north to Manchester, arriving at Hawker Siddeley's Woodford Aerodrome at 10.50 am; the coach used by Manchester City Football Club and limousines transported the group to the Piccadilly Plaza Hotel.

Hospitality was provided by the North-West Chinese Society at the Ruby Restaurant in Princess Street, the premises being the home for an after match reception, the pre-match gathering being at Belle Vue. Walmsleys (Bury) Ltd, paper makers and engineers, sponsored the event.

A 2-1 win was the outcome for England in the women's match; in the men's the Chinese recorded a 6-2 victory.

Next stop on the itinerary was Wales. After attending a reception given by Lloyds Bank in King Street, when a plaque illustrating the bank's coat of arms was presented to Chi Yuhua, the group's leader, they departed Manchester on the trusted HS 748 at 3.00 pm arriving at Rhoose airport, now known as Cardiff airport, some 50 minutes later.

Assembled to greet the visitors was Philip Squire, Chairman of Glamorgan County Council, alongside George Edwards, Chairman of the Development Committee of the Sports Council of Wales and Roy Evans, ITTF President and President of the Table Tennis Association of Wales. In addition, a group of Chinese, resident in the principality, joined the welcoming party.

Pleasantries completed, it was a short journey to the Angel Hotel in Cardiff for tea, prior to later in the evening attending a splendid banquet at the County Hall.



The Chinese team arrives



Leaving the Belgravia Hotel



A welcome banquet



**Visits and presentations**

Rested, the next morning was occupied with visits; first to the University Hospital of Wales, which had been recently opened by the Queen, followed by an invitation to the Lord Mayor's parlour to sign the guest book; then it was first foot forward to the City Hall and a walk past Cardiff Arms Park, the celebrated rugby stadium. The tour completed; the local Chinese organised a splendid meal.

Ready for action, prior to the contest commencing, players from China, England and Wales being present, three national anthems were played. The Lady Mayoress of Cardiff presented commemorative plates to the Chinese, depicting the investiture of Prince Charles as the Prince of Wales. Dressed in national costume, the two small grand-daughters of Roy and Nancy Evans, presented dolls and ties to the English and Welsh players.

At the time it was fashionable for men to have long hair, certainly covering the ears; the locks of Chester Barnes, who was standing next to Jill Hammersley and Karenza Mathews reached his shoulders. Jane, one of the grand-daughters was told to give ties to the four male British players. Duly she made the presentations to Trevor Taylor, Graham Davies and Alan Griffiths but totally bypassed Chester Barnes. She awarded the tie to Bryan Merrett, the coach!

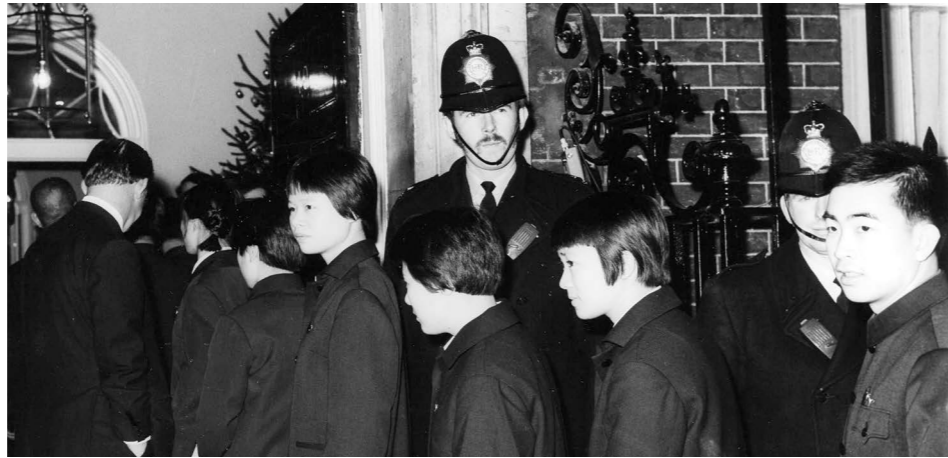
A 6-2 victory was the outcome in favour of China. Hosted by a most welcoming Alderman Ferguson Jones, the Lord Mayor, the day concluding in a very traditional style, a reception at Cardiff Castle complete with a Welsh harpist.

The Welsh leg of the visit completed, the next day at 3.00 pm, the party departed for Scotland, less than two hours later arriving in Edinburgh. Accommodation at the Barnton Hotel in Queensbury Road, a reception was held in the evening at the Meadowbank Sports Stadium, bagpipes and the Gay Gordons being the feature.

Once again it was success for the Chinese, a 5-3 margin of victory being the order of the day.

Sleep, then on Sunday 12th December, it was a flight to Dublin, arriving at 4.00 pm, the group being accommodated at Tara Towers Hotel in Merrion Road. A time for rest but then the busy schedule resumed; as with all hosts, the Irish maintained the best of traditions.

A visit to the Guinness factory started the day. Lunch followed and then the match, England's Chester Barnes making a guest appearance for the Irish. A win for the Chinese was the outcome, a dinner organised by the Irish Congress of Trades Unions at Liberty Hall ended the Dublin itinerary.



Arriving at 10 Downing Street



Chinese team welcomed to 10 Downing Street



Back row left: Tony Clayton, Bryan Merrett. Standing centre row: Li Li, Lin Meiqun, Huang Xiping, Karenza Mathews, Jill Hammersley, Zheng Huaiping, Hu Yulan. Kneeling front: Nicky Jarvis, Denis Neale, Diao Wenyuan, Chester Barnes, Xi Enting, Yu Changchun, Liang Geliang

**Return to England**

On Tuesday 14th December the party returned to Hatfield, a visit to the Gestetner factory in Tottenham, was followed by lunch and a return to the Belgravia Royal for a wash and brush up in preparation for a special reception.

Subsequent on the agenda was a visit to no.10 Downing Street and a welcome by Edward Heath, the Prime Minister; the visit lasted one hour, in a brief speech Edward Heath conveyed his good wishes to his opposite number, Zhou Enlai.

An official reception organised by the English Table Tennis Association at the Sportsman Club in Tottenham Court Road ended the day.

Undoubtedly an occasion for all to remember, the next day, the destination was Birmingham arriving at 10.30 am. A visit to the Joseph Lucas factory, a manufacturer of motor and aerospace industry products, was followed by lunch; then onward to the accommodation, the Albany Hotel in Smallbrook.

Notably present was Denis Howell, at the time he was the Member of Parliament for Birmingham Small Heath. Under the governments of Harold Wilson and Jim Callaghan, he held the role of Minister for Sport at the Department of Education and Science from 1964 to 1969.

Similar to Dublin, a 4-3 Chinese win was the result; reception at the Council Chambers followed by noodles at the Heavenly Bridge Chinese restaurant ended the day.

Little time to rest, at 10.00 am, the following day, the party left for the capital, for Regent's Park, where at London Zoo they were welcomed by Ivor Montagu, the first President of the International Table Tennis Federation and founder of the English Table Tennis Association. He assumed the role of tour guide.

Pursued by a host of photographers, the main attraction was Chi Chi, a giant female panda from Sichuan province who had arrived at London Zoo in September 1958. She became the star attraction.

She died in 1972 and is now a stuffed exhibit at the Natural History Museum in London.

In addition, there was a visit to the reptile house followed by a welcome afforded by the Members of the Society of Anglo Chinese Understanding. Later in the evening a reception was organised by the Charge d'Affaires of the People's Republic of China.

Venue for the matches staged on consecutive days was the Crystal Palace National Sports Centre, Dr Roger Bannister hosting a reception and buffet lunch. Honours were shared, both results being 4-3, the first in favour of China, the second for England.

Appropriately, organised by Jack and Elsie Carrington, at the time notable names on the English coaching scene, two trumpeters in household cavalry uniform were present to welcome the players.

Competition concluded, a banquet at the Li Ho Fook restaurant in Wardour Street, London, ended the tour.



Chi Chi the focus of attention



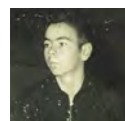
Visit to the Guinness Brewery



The Gay Gordons in Edinburgh



## Looking back


**Tommy Caffrey  
(Ireland)**

It was with trepidation that I went into the match against China back in 1971. I had just changed to a new Chester Barnes bat and wrestled with whether I should go back to my old bat or not. I loved the design of Chester's bat, being different in shape to every other bat on the market.

In a way I was back to where I started in Stamullen as a nine year old when I fell in love with the long green shiny table, the net and its posts but most of all the bat Paddy White was playing with. It had bright green rubber with a beautiful white handle. I desperately wanted the same but I'm afraid I had to settle with a rather dull brown rubbered one of which I wasn't overly proud. It was oval in shape unlike Chester's, which was big, bold and square shaped.

I walked into the playing arena of the National Boxing Stadium to play against my Chinese opponent and if I was not already nervous enough, the first face I saw was that of Austin Gaffney, one of the greatest baritone singers in Ireland at the time. He was seated in the very front row; I felt his eyes very heavily on me. My playing arm was becoming very heavy with my Chester Barnes bat in hand.

What can I say about my opponent? It was known as the "Friendship Tour"; I have to say my opponent was most kind!


**Karen Senior  
(Ireland)**

What excitement! A world class table tennis team coming to play against an Irish team; my first international call-up.

December 1971, the National Boxing Stadium Dublin, pretty packed as I recall, capacity about 2,000, reminiscent of the Christians against the lions! There was me, Kyra, Langan, Caffrey, Thompson, and the

honorary Irishman for the night Chester Barnes.

On the day of our match, some of us joined the visiting Chinese team for a tour of the Guinness brewery followed by lunch and the obligatory tourist photo under the Guinness sign. I have the photo and I remember the smell in the brewery!

Apart from the match my abiding memory and maybe it's an urban myth, is that Jimmy had seen that the Chinese were "throwing" one or two matches every night for good relations. "Friendship first, competition second", were words I remember hearing a lot during the visit! Jimmy reckoned as Irish no.1 he might be the lucky recipient, he had money on himself to win, and he did!

I had the dubious privilege of playing Li Li, I think she was ranked about no.4 in the world. I was so nervous, I was 15 years old, playing one of the world's greats, in front of the biggest table tennis crowd I had ever seen.

The atmosphere in the stadium was amazing. When it came to my match, I would love to say that I played wonderfully well, that I gave Li Li a run for her money, that I was not like a rabbit caught in the headlights, but sadly none of that would be true. She did her best for me, she tried to set the ball for me to hit, but I could hardly keep the ball on the table. The easier she tried to make it for me, the worse it got!

For me it was truly a baptism of fire, but you have to start somewhere!


**Nicky Jarvis  
(England)**

It was a fantastic experience playing some of the best players in the world in front of thousands of spectators. National newspapers were in abundance with many sports writers reporting the matches.

Initially it was nerve-racking, but I did get used to it as play progressed. Also, I was only 17 years old at the time and heavily influenced by those around the

tour. It was clear that everybody thought the Chinese were still unbeatable and if an English player won or did well against them they probably weren't trying, so I had mixed feelings about the experience.

The tour certainly created substantial interest in table tennis in England; the media at the time maintained an interest for a number of years after 71.


**Trevor Taylor  
(England)**

We got on really well with them, their team captain was very good, all their team members were very pleasant; it was a good experience.

They were coming back to international play after being away for some five or six years owing to the Cultural Revolution. Everybody was watching, wanting to see if they were as good as before. They played the same way, short pimples, pen-hold, attacking close to the table, during the period of their absence top spin to top spin play had developed. They had never really witnessed that style, the had never seen Dragutin Surbek play.

We played them at the Scandinavian Open just before they arrived in England; we had a really good chance to beat them. We played them in the first round.

Bryan Merrett was our coach, I played alongside Chester Barnes and Denis Neale. Denis and Chester didn't want to play against Li Furong and Zhuang Zedong, in the past they had been hammered by them; they suggested I play the two singles matches.

I was the youngest member of the team; Bryan didn't think that was fair on me. We lost 3-2; Denis beat Zhuang Zedong but lost to Li Furong, Denis and myself won the doubles against Li Jingguang and Zhuang Zedong. In the fifth match Chester lost to Li Furong, he had chances but had big problems returning service.

They had problems with top spin play but for sure they improved as the match progressed.


**Ken Mathews  
(Tour Organiser)**

In Cardiff we went out onto the pitch where several of us tried to explain

the game of rugby. The Chinese were totally unfamiliar with any sport that involved bodily contact; apparently it was alien to their culture. Trying to make them understand the principle of a game that involved an egg-shaped ball fought over by 30 men was made that much more difficult when we had to do it through an interpreter!

At the Downing Street reception Karenza recalls that Edward Heath asked if the dress she was wearing was part of a uniform!

After that reception I joined the party again for a trip to see the Black and White Minstrel Show in London. I thought then, as I do now, that it was an extraordinary choice of entertainment. I have no idea what the Chinese can possibly have thought about it; of course, they were very polite and said that they had enjoyed it.

A Grand Reception was held at the Chinese Embassy in London. There were numerous round tables with one English person at each, surrounded by Chinese. The drink was Maotai, a Chinese liquor; the toast was "Gan Bei" which means Dry Glass, the custom was to empty your glass at one go. At my table we toasted everything under the sun which nearly resulted in me being under the table but, stiff upper lip and all that, the English contingent managed to behave themselves reasonably well. Karenza was at another table; we helped each other back into the cars at the end of the evening. Quite an experience!



Cliff Thompson, Jimmy Langan and Tommy Caffrey, members of the Irish team



David and Jonathan Gestetner welcome the Chinese to the Gestetner factory



A tour organised at the Gestetner factory



A visit to Gestetner factory



Monday 20th December 1971 - Chinese team departs

## Results

Tuesday 7th December 1971, Manchester

**Women: England 2-1 China**

Jill Hammersley v Li Li -20, -14  
Elaine Mathews v Huang Xiping 17,21  
Jill Hammersley v Zheng Huaiying 20,-8,15

**Men: England 2-3 China**

Tony Clayton v Yu Changchun -15,18,-10  
Nicky Jarvis v Diao Wenyuan -18,-16  
Trevor Taylor v Xi Enting 19,-15,-19  
Denis Neale v Liang Geliang 8,14  
Chester Barnes v Li Jingguang 11,15

Thursday 8th December 1971, Cardiff

**Great Britain 2-6 China**

Trevor Taylor v Li Jingguang -15,-12  
Alan Griffiths v Yu Changchun -16,-14  
Karenza Mathews v Zheng Huaiying 20,-9,-16  
Graham Davies v Liang Geliang -18,22,20  
Chester Barnes v Xi Enting -17,-17  
Jill Hammersley v Hu Yulan -17,-14  
Trevor Taylor v Liang Geliang -10,-16  
Chester Barnes v Diao Wenyuan -24,10,18

Saturday 10th December 1971, Edinburgh

**Scotland 3-5 China**

Malcolm Sugden v Li Jingguang -13,-16  
Elaine Smith v Huang Xiping -16,-12  
Richard Yule v Xi Enting -18,20,15  
Eric Sutherland v Diao Wenyuan 17,-12,-10  
Kathleen Angus v Zheng Huaiying -12,-9  
Malcolm Sugden v Yu Changchun -17,16,12  
Elaine Smith v Lin Meiqun -12,14,15  
Richard Yule v Liang Geliang -19,-15

Monday 13th December 1971, Dublin

**Ireland 3-4 China**

Chester Barnes v Diao Wenyuan 17,-12,-15  
Jim Langan v Xi Enting 19,17  
Tommy Caffrey v Liang Geliang -16,-13  
Chester Barnes v Li Jingguang 16,-19,21  
Cliff Thompson v Yu Changchun -14,-14  
Kyra Stewart v Huang Xiping -20,17,12  
Karen Senior v Li Li -9,-12

Wednesday 15th December 1971, Birmingham

**England 3-4 China**

Tony Clayton v Xi Enting -21,-18  
Nicky Jarvis v Yu Changchun 19,-6,-12  
Elaine Mathews v Li Li -13,14,-17  
Denis Neale v Li Jingguang 18,25  
Jill Hammersley v Lin Meiqun 19,14  
Chester Barnes v Liang Geliang -18,-12  
Trevor Taylor v Diao Wenyuan 24,-19,6

Friday 17th December 1971, Crystal Palace

**England 3-4 China**

Denis Neale v Li Jingguang -19,15,-12  
Chester Barnes v Liang Geliang -19,-16  
Jill Hammersley v Zheng Huaiying -12,-13  
Trevor Taylor v Diao Wenyuan -17,-22  
Chester Barnes v Li Jingguang -16,19,16  
Karenza Mathews v Lin Meiqun 18,-14,18  
Denis Neale v Diao Wenyuan -16,15,18

Saturday 18th December 1971, Crystal Palace

**England 4-3 China**

Denis Neale v Xi Enting -17,15,-11  
Chester Barnes v Li Jingguang 18,-10,-16  
Jill Hammersley v Huang Xiping -13,16,18  
Nicky Jarvis v Liang Geliang 19,-18,-17  
Karenza Mathews v Li Li -11,16,16  
Denis Neale v Liang Geliang -14,17,21  
Chester Barnes v Yu Changchun -20,15,14



**We  
are  
going  
to play  
ping-pooooong**



An outstanding international career, a success on the World and European stage when representing Czechoslovakia; in 1978, the international career of Alica Chladekova, better known by her maiden name Grofova, came to an end.

The next logical step for someone who had enjoyed success at the highest level was to move into the coaching field and advise national teams.

Coaching followed but perhaps not as expected. Despite her education and experience, Alice was not offered a job working with the top players in the country. Therefore, she turned her attention to grass roots, embracing World Table Tennis Day (WTTD) to the fullest; if a ranking list of organisers was made, she would be at the top of the pecking order.

"I coached table tennis in schools in Bratislava for many years. I tried to encourage kids to love table tennis. I taught

them the basics of technique and rules, I tried to educate children how to play our sport; I know that children can love this sport," Alica stressed. "By chance, in 2017, I found out through the internet that World Table Tennis for All had been celebrated for three years, I decided to organise a celebration in Slovakia as well. It's amazing that the ITTF organises WTTD; we have managed to become a successful part of it."

She initiated "We are going to play ping-pooooong", a concept with clear humanitarian objectives. The theme was creating opportunities; involving people of all ages without gender, age, social background or physical limitations, participating in an unpretentious healthy sport that anyone can play. She directed her attention to promoting moral values, encouraging teamwork, stressing that sport is a prevention of falling into drug addiction.

The initiative has proved to be a great

success. Most importantly, there has been a long-term effect, many have been motivated by World Table Tennis Day and continue to play.

"My project is mainly aimed at supporting children and young people in schools, involving teachers, parents, grandparents and people with disabilities. In the first year I organised the project alongside Marian Bystrican, an international umpire," explained Alica. "In the last three years I have been co-operating with the Association of Sport for All in Slovakia; Dr. Jan Holko, the chairman, has been a great help, organising all the necessary formalities. Clubs, leisure centres and social service homes have taken up my challenge, organising various events, discussion groups, exhibitions and cultural programmes. In my opinion, the fact that they became a part of the global celebrations was great motivation."

**Prodigious numbers**

Incredibly, in 2018, the first year, a total of 141 events were organised in schools with almost 12,000 participants, selected schools received table tennis equipment from Butterfly. In 2019, a total of 187 events were established involving 19,803 participants, each organiser received rackets, balls and practice shirts; there were wristbands for all children who took part. In terms of the number of projects, the venture involved one fifth of those who participated worldwide!

A year later, a record 23,073 participants and 233 organisers had signed up but Covid-19 meant the proposals had to be drastically reduced. Eventually three events were staged in April, but with interest incredibly high, the decision was taken not to cancel but to postpone. The general opinion was that by having events in the later months of the year, the pandemic would be over. Therefore, the period from October to December was chosen.

Most impressively, 221 schools and 18,950 participants registered for the restart. Unfortunately, the pandemic had not abated. It was not possible to play in sports halls and gymnasias, only in the corridors and outdoors in the fresh air. Nevertheless, at least 71 events were held, a total of 5,373 children and adults taking part.

In 2021, the project continued in the months of May to June, when children in Slovakia returned to school. A total of 39 events was held in Slovakia, with at least 2,682 participants. The events were very relaxed, the necessary constraints not allowing for greater involvement. Other registered schools that did not have the opportunity to host an event played in the autumn.

"I very much hope that in 2022 we can return to previous levels with the e-parents and invited guests program, so that the whole country can have fun with ping pong during WTTD for all celebrations," Alica stressed.

Limitations, but Alica is more motivated than ever; increasing numbers is the goal.

"It's a big responsibility, the project is huge, I don't have time for anything else. I do 95 per cent of the work myself; getting financial support and sponsorship is very difficult. Unfortunately, despite the huge popularity and the number of participants, the project still has no support from the Slovak Olympic and Sports Committee; even the Ministry of Education only partially supports us", added Alica. "We support all the organisers with materials, balls and training shirts, each participant receives a small item to promote the day. It's necessary to provide finance, promote the project, buy goods, send packages; it's very important for me to communicate with the teachers and organisers so that I can help or advise them."



Alongside Irina Boza in Zohor 2019



Elementary school, Prievidza 2019



Primary and kindergarten school in Cajkov, 2020



Elementary and kindergarten school in Bukovce, 2020





**Positive response**

Hard work but appreciated, the response received justifies Alica's dedication.

"Also, the feedback; so far it is very positive, I am extremely happy with the response," continued Alica. "I'll accept a one-day tournament, but that's geared towards winners, I'm trying to suggest they play for a week or more; play in physical education facilities, classrooms and outdoors; play in hallways so that everyone from janitors to teachers and school principals can play. Special schools, children with disabilities and Roma children are often involved."

The initiatives promoted by Alica have a social dimension.

"In 2018 we supported a special primary school for mentally disabled children in Trebisov, they applied but had to borrow a table tennis table from the local club. So, we donated a table together with a net from Butterfly", explained Alica. "This year we supported a primary boarding school for visually impaired and blind children in Bratislava; special table tennis called "show down" is played. We donated special glasses and gloves for the players. I'm very into it."

**"I am very grateful to all the physical education teachers"**



**Full time task**

Everyone is encouraged to take part in the initiative, which is focused on one day, but for Alica it is 365 days a year, one more if it is a leap year!

"As soon as I evaluate one year, I start preparing for the next. I didn't expect the project to be so successful that it would keep me busy for a whole year, but I assure you it's something I'm very happy about!" Alica smiled. "It's remarkable that we don't need any promotion, we just need to contact the schools by email and invite them; it goes without saying, I'm very much up for it."

Alica is undoubtedly motivated, and most importantly, motivates others.

"I am very grateful to all the physical education teachers, as long as I am organising, I want to continue to grow the project so that more and more participants enjoy table tennis, not only during WTTD for all," concluded Alica. "After the Covid-19 pandemic we all need movement badly, I want table tennis to become one of the favourite sporting activities for the whole family. I'm very much up for it!"

**Encouraging girls and women**

Ambitious but one fact is clear, just as she had shown in her playing days, she is determined.

Actively she promotes table tennis for all; also, she promotes the women's cause; during the three-year period between 2017 and 2020 under her leadership, approximately 36,875 participants celebrated World Table Tennis Day, specifically 44.5 per cent were girls and women.

"Young children are fascinated by a ball, boys are naturally more competitive, girls are a bit shy, so they avoid playing. I think it's good for boys to play against girls depending on their level," Alica explained. "I focus on encouraging girls to enjoy playing; not to focus too much on competition; I also think kids like to play against their parents and grandparents, I would like to see local and national associations organise family days."

Covid-19 has curtailed matters, proposals are on hold but once the pandemic is over, the figures established in Slovakia are set to grow, and one suspects dramatically; as they say in Slovakia: "ideme hrať ping-ponooooong".



Special primary school, Kosice 2020



Elementary and kindergarten school in Ul'any nad Zitavou, 2020



Polytechnic School in Dolny Kubin 2020



## The Next Challenge

She may look away or look forward; as a player, coach, administrator or official, **Claude Bergeret** has always adopted the positive approach, never has she backed away. Now she faces yet another challenge, the task to take an organisation based on friendship and mutual respect to even greater unity, to break new ground, to explore wider horizons.

On Saturday 11th December 2021, she was unanimously elected the President of the Swaythling Club International.

It is another string to the bow for the owner of the National Order of the Legion of Honour, the highest French honorary decoration, a career that started as a player in the shadow of the Alps, in Annecy, south-east France.

Many will advise that once they laid bat on ball, they were hooked on the sport for ever; they were addicted, there was no known cure. It was not necessarily the

situation for Claude Bergeret, in fact table tennis was not her first choice.

"I liked ballet more than table tennis, I would attend ballet lessons three times a week, I wanted to be a ballerina!" smiled Claude Bergeret.

Surely, ballet provides excellent fundamentals for anyone involved in racket sports; balance and movement are key features whether wearing a tutu or skort. Dance an option but there was a parental influence; understandably, Claude took an interest in the leisure pursuits of her parents, Gilbert and Lucienne.

"My father was in charge of a table tennis at a club in Annecy, my mother played, I followed them into the hall", continued Claude Bergeret. "I think I would be seven or eight years old when I first played, but it was not until I was eleven that I really became involved."



At the 1977 World Championships Lee Kiwon and Lee Sangguk proved most testing opponents



Success, the Korea Republic duo beaten, a place in the final booked



The 1977 World Championships mixed doubles final against Sachiko Yokota and Tokio Tasaka

### Talent identified

A welcome visitor to the club was Charles Roesch, from 1968 to 1978 the Technical Manager for the French Table Tennis Federation. He recognised that Claude Bergeret was a player with great potential, quickly her name was included in a select national group of talented young players.

"I practised in my club ASPTT Annecy for two hours each day; always against boys and against different styles of play, defenders, top spin players whatever; it was very good", explained Claude Bergeret. "In school holidays I went to Paris or other French sports centres for training sessions; Charles

took great care of me. I had a book to fill in to keep a record. I would show Charles my book and we would find solutions for any problems that may have arisen."

During this period, her teenage years, Claude combined table tennis with education. At 17 years of age, she sat her Baccalaureate, a public examination to gain places in higher education; successful she attended university in Grenoble and at INSEP (National Institute of Sport, Expertise and Performance) in Paris.

"I finished at INSEP in 1976 but was able to stay as a sports teacher", explained Claude Bergeret. "In fact, I did no teaching, everything was organised so I could play table tennis full time."

Dedicated, success ensued. Representing ASPTT Annecy, alongside the likes of Yveline Lecler and Kristin Hagen, the club became French champions; a feat that was later achieved with Kremlin-Bicêtre in Paris, Emmanuelle Coubat and Nadine Daviaud being prominent teammates.

Additionally, Claude Bergeret won the women's singles title at the French National Championships on six occasions; at the European Championships in both 1974 in Novi Sad and 1976 in Prague she was a mixed doubles bronze medallist partnering Jacques Secretin.

"Prague was a good era for France", reminisced Claude Bergeret. "Also, I won women's doubles bronze with Brigitte Thiriet; Jacques Secretin won the men's singles, Christian Martin reached the semis."



The 1977 World Championships mixed doubles podium



**Finest hour**

However, nothing can compare with the 1977 World Championships in Birmingham when again she combined with Jacques Secretin. Safely through to the semi-finals, they beat Korea Republic's Lee Sangkuk and Lee Kiwon before securing the title at the final expense of Japan's Tokio Tasaka and Sachiko Yokota.

"In Birmingham it was not easy, in the semi-final against the Koreans we won the first two games; then lost the next two, they played better and better, I think we went the other way", reflected Claude Bergeret. "We had no answers, how we won that fifth game, I've no idea!"

Success in Birmingham, the title gained before later in the year, it was focus on the French National Championships.

"Jacques thought it wouldn't be interesting if we played together", explained Claude Bergeret. "Jacques decided not to play in the mixed doubles, so I partnered Vincent Purkart, a defender, not the ideal combination. We won, all the time Jacques was applauding and supporting us!"

A landmark in Birmingham; the legacy of which still remains, Claude Bergeret is the only French female player to win a title of any description at a World Table Tennis Championships.

"I played internationally until the 1982 European Championships in Budapest" explained Claude Bergeret. "I continued to play nationally until 1985; later I played for a short while in the second division at Kremlin Bicêtre but only practised once a week."

Experienced gained, a wealth of knowledge; Claude became coach for the French junior girls' team from 1983 to 1985, for the women's team from 1986 to 1988, the year in which her daughter, Lydie, was born.

**Official roles**

Returning to the scene, appointed by Pierre Albertini, the Technical Manager for the French Table Tennis Federation, she assumed the newly designed role of being responsible for International Relations, before becoming the Deputy Technical Manager responsible for high level.

Meanwhile, beyond French boundaries, commencing in the early 1990s, she was a member of the ITTF Ranking Committee, chaired by André Damman, as well as becoming the first chair of the Athletes Commission.

"Ichiro Ogimura, the ITTF President at the time, believed that a President of a national association should be a former champion, the theory based on the premise that former players know what is best for players", explained Claude Bergeret. "I think he thought I should be President of the French Table Tennis Federation! In 1995, I was invited to be the first Chair of the Athletes Commission."

Claude did her homework, met the Commission Chair of the International Olympic Committee and Adham Sharara, the ITTF President, to create a body that today works with great efficiency.

"I'm proud of the Athletes Commission; it took time but from nothing we created a strong organisation", reflected Claude Bergeret.

Later, Claude was elected Vice President of the European Table Tennis Union, holding office from 2000 to 2004; development being her portfolio. Immediately following, in 2005, she was elected ITTF Vice President, a position she held until 2009, her responsibilities being World Championships preparation, the Women's Working Group and the Athletes Commission.

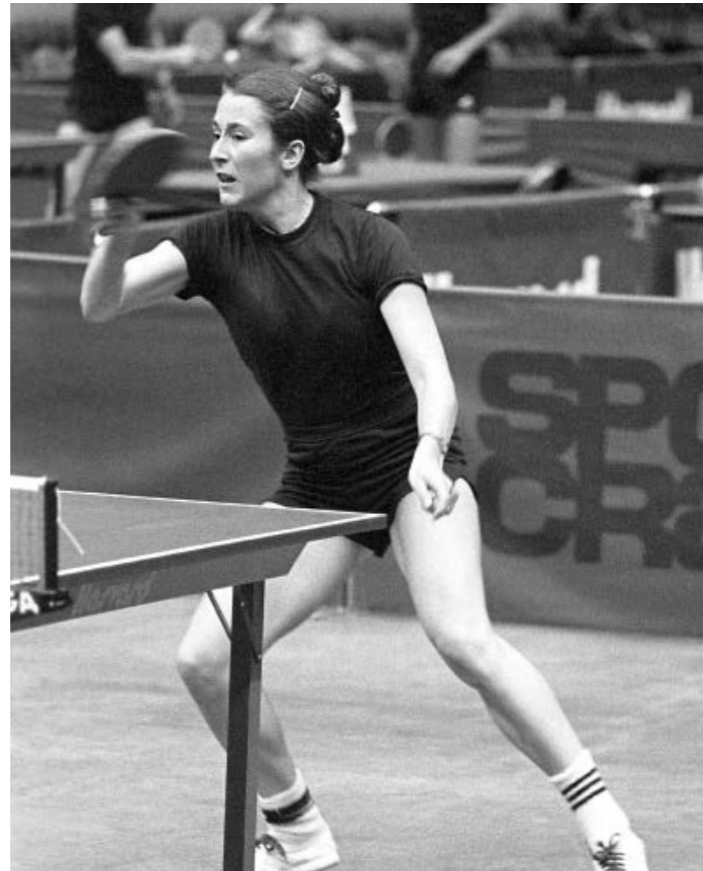
**Looking forward**

Now the task is to direct the fortunes of the Swaythling Club International.

"The club was created to find ways to bring together former champions and to give them the opportunities to share memories of their glorious past but that's not all", stressed Claude Bergeret

Major aims promoted by the organisation are to encourage young players and stress the importance of sportsmanship.

"President of the Swaythling Club is not something of which I had really thought; I was asked by friends, at the moment with all the restrictions imposed by Covid it makes the task very difficult because we cannot meet", explained Claude



At the 1979 United States Open



At the 1979 United States Open

Bergeret. "Nevertheless, I look forward to the challenge; that has been my table tennis life, a player, a Vice President, Commission Chair and being involved with the French Sports Ministry in gender equality."

Upbeat, the immediate target is to increase membership numbers and dispel the misnomer that the Swaythling Club is only for veteran players; providing the basic criteria is met, the door is wide open to all ages. It is an organisation present for the good of table tennis, not for private gain or personal glory.

"We need to look at ways to attract new members; as well as meeting at World Championships, perhaps we have to look at regional and continental gatherings; maybe organise some events, a tournament or something, new ideas", stressed Claude Bergeret. "Retaining the possibilities for members to attend major events is important, as is helping anyone in difficulties; I believe strengthening our position with the ITTF, the ITTF Foundation and also the ETTU is important."

Definitive thinking for Claude Bergeret who spends half her time living in Châtenay-Malabry, Paris; the other half in Fuengirola near Malaga in Spain.

A busy schedule, that has always been her lifestyle, never a dull moment. However, hectic the itinerary, there is one person for whom everything must stand aside and for whom she always has time, her pride and joy. She has a granddaughter, Margot is two and half years old.



In February the Swaythling Club Executive Committee met in Montreux: Reto Bazzi, Harvey Webb, Claude Bergeret, Øivind Eriksen, Lila de Soysa, Richard Scruton

**Swaythling Club**

It is proposed the host the [2022 Swaythling Club Annual General Meeting](#) during the World Team Championships in Chengdu. Also, there is one vacancy on the Executive Committee. Propositions and nominations for the vacant post should be sent to Harvey Webb, Secretary Swaythling Club International, by Wednesday 1st June. Contact: [harveywebb17@gmail.com](mailto:harveywebb17@gmail.com)

**New members:** Günther Angenendt, Elena Dubkova, Igor Heller, Eva Odorova

**English members meet in Nottingham**

**SWAYTHLING CLUB INTERNATIONAL PRESIDENTS & DEPUTY PRESIDENTS**

**1967-1972**

President: Victor Barna  
Deputy Presidents: Steve Boros, Zarko Dolinar, Ichiro Ogimura

**1973-1987**

President: Joe Veselsky  
Deputy Presidents: Zarko Dolinar, Ichiro Ogimura

**1987-1989**

President: Zarko Dolinar  
Deputy President: Ichiro Ogimura

**1989-1990**

President: Johnny Leach  
Deputy President: Ferenc Sido

**1991-1992**

President: Ferenc Sido  
Deputy President: Ichiro Ogimura

**1993-1994**

President: Johnny Leach  
Deputy President: Ferenc Sido

**1995-1996**

President: Ferenc Sido  
Deputy President: Angelica Rozeanu

**1997-2013**

President: Diane Schöler  
Deputy President: Johnny Leach  
**2013-2018**  
President: Eberhard Schöler  
Deputy President (1997-2017): Johnny Leach  
Deputy President (2017-2018): Øivind Eriksen

**2018-2019**

President: Øivind Eriksen  
Deputy President: Eberhard Schöler

**2019-2021**

President: Eberhard Schöler  
Deputy President: Harvey Webb

**2021-Present**

President: Claude Bergeret  
Deputy President: Reto Bazzi



Members of the Czech Republic Swaythling Club met in March



# The now generation, now retired



Desolation in London



Delight in Rio de Janeiro

Gold medallists at the Olympic Games, but prior to the start of the century not known on the international stage; the names of Wang Hao and Zhang Jike come to mind, as do those of Guo Yue and Li Xiaoxia. All ascended to the greatest heights but never competed on the global stage when the scoring system was a game to 21 points, and we had to wait for five services before the baton changed.

Mission accomplished, goals achieved, now there are two more members of the club. Most recently Jun Mizutani and Ding

Ning bid farewell; players who in their own special way have lit up the arenas of the world but commenced their exploits in rather different circumstances.

A lull in fortunes as the Millennium dawned, such was the scenario for members of the Japanese men's team. At World Championships, team bronze had been secured in 2000 in Kuala Lumpur; Koji Matsushita and Hiroshi Shibutani had reached the men's doubles semi-final in 1997 in Manchester. However, since the efforts of Mitsuru Kohno and Seiji Ono in the 1970s there was

little for the Land of the Rising Sun to celebrate.

Jun Mizutani presented new hope, good hands as they say, exerting exquisite control over the table tennis ball, delighting crowds with his top spin style of play away from the table. Comparisons with Frenchman Jacques Secretin and Sweden's Mikael Appelgren were made; a more European style player was on duty in Asian colours.

The task of Jun Mizutani was very much to lead the renaissance; for Ding Ning, it was very different, her goal was to continue the dynasty.

She followed in the footsteps of her colleagues Deng Yaping, Wang Nan and Zhang Yining, all players who could warrant the "greatest of them all" tag.

Similarly, she possessed a difference in her play to those who had come before; more than any other she adopted the squat "tomahawk" service. A distinctive feature but, above all, it was the bubbly outgoing personality that endeared her to the crowds, the smile engaging; the concept harboured half a century earlier that the Chinese were poker-faced and inscrutable totally destroyed.



One step nearer bronze in London



Partnering Mima Ito, a first ever Olympic gold for Japan

## Arrival

Notably, it was in the early days of the World Junior Championships when both came to our attention.

Only 14 years of age, Jun Mizutani was on duty at the inaugural event in 2003 in the Chilean capital city of Santiago. One match in particular caught the eye, in the group stage he faced Chinese Taipei's Chiang Hung-Chieh, a player of the same age, also oozing talent.

Were we watching a potential 2007 World Junior Championships boys' singles final? The thought did cross wise minds; it never happened; in that year he did not compete. In Santiago, Jun Mizutani prevailed in straight games, before in the round of the last 16, losing to Korea Republic's Cho Eonrae, the eventual runner up.

Two years later, Ding Ning made her debut in the tournament, at the time 15 years old, she departed with three titles, girls' singles, girls' team and girls' doubles. She proved herself a step ahead of the field, but it was a result earlier in the year, one that went somewhat unnoticed, which

## Disappointment

Success upon success, but both have experienced heartbreak, major career disappointments. At the 2005 World Junior Championships, when the clear favourite, Jun Mizutani was beaten in the boys' singles final by Germany's Patrick Baum.

Later in 2009 at the Asian Championships in Lucknow, in the final of the men's team event, he held three match points in the deciding fifth game against Xu Xin and lost; had he converted just one of those points, for Japan it would have been gold not silver.

Somewhat similarly, Ding Ning was a member of the Chinese outfit that lost to Singapore in the women's final at the Liebherr 2010 World Team

Championships in Moscow. Anguish, it was the same in the opening round of the women's singles event at the Volkswagen Open China, she beat DPR Korea's Kim Hyang Mi, the player who one year earlier had been the silver medallist at the Athens 2004 Olympic Games. Croatia's Tamara Boros ended progress in the following round.

Staged in Shenzhen, in the opening round of the women's singles event at the Volkswagen Open China, she beat DPR Korea's Kim Hyang Mi, the player who one year earlier had been the silver medallist at the Athens 2004 Olympic Games. Croatia's Tamara Boros ended progress in the following round. Defeats but one fact is clear; from those defeats both emerged stronger; the Rio 2016 Olympic Games providing the evidence. Jun Mizutani became the first male player from Japan to win a medal at the celebrated gathering when he claimed men's singles bronze; Ding Ning turned the tables, beating Li Xiaoxia in the women's singles final. Later in Tokyo, Jun Mizutani was to achieve the ultimate, mixed doubles gold in harness with Mima Ito.

A memorable final staged on home soil, Jun Mizutani wearing distinctive spectacles owing to eyesight problems, a reason for the decision to draw the curtain; now a range of options await, for Ding Ning, it is education. She is studying for a Master's degree in physical education at Peking University, appropriately the home for the table tennis events at the Beijing 2008 Olympic Games.

## Career Highlights

### Jun Mizutani

#### Olympic Games

MS: bronze (2016)  
MT: silver (2020), bronze (2016)  
XD: gold (Mima Ito - 2020)

#### World Championships

MD: bronze (Seiya Kishikawa - 2009, 2013)

#### World Team Championships

MT: silver (2016), bronze (2008, 2010, 2012)

#### Men's World Cup

MS: 4th Place (2010, 2011, 2014, 2015)

#### Team World Cup

MT: bronze (2009, 2019)

#### ITTF World Tour Titles

MS: 10  
MD: 4 Seiya Kishikawa (3), Kenji Matsudaira (1)  
XD: 2 Mima Ito (2)

#### ITTF World Tour Grand Finals

MS: gold (2019, 2020)  
XD: silver (Mima Ito - 2019)

#### World Junior Championships

BS: silver (2005)  
BD: gold (Seiya Kishikawa - 2004), bronze (Seiya Kishikawa - 2005)  
BT: gold (2005), bronze (2004)

## Career Highlights

### Ding Ning

#### Olympic Games

WS: gold (2016), silver (2012)  
WT: gold (2012, 2016)

#### World Championships

WS: gold (2011, 2015, 2017), bronze (2013, 2019)  
WD: gold (Li Xiaoxia - 2015), silver (Guo Yan - 2009, 2011; Liu Shiwen - 2013; Li Xiaoxia - 2015)

#### World Team Championships

WT: gold (2012, 2014, 2016, 2018), silver (2010)

#### Women's World Cup

WS: 2011, 2014, 2018

#### Team World Cup

WS: gold (2009, 2010, 2011, 2013, 2015, 2018, 2019)

#### ITTF World Tour Titles

WS 14  
WD 22 Chen Meng (2), Guo Yan (1), Li Xiaoxia (5), Liu Shiwen (11), Zhu Yuling (3)

#### ITTF World Tour Grand Finals

WS: gold (2015), silver (2009, 2011, 2012, 2013)  
WD: gold (Liu Shiwen - 2009; Li Xiaoxia - 2013; Zhu Yuling - 2015)

#### World Junior Championships

GT: gold (2005)  
GS: gold (2005)  
GD: gold (Peng Xue - 2005)



# PERFECT RECORD DENG YAPING

Now 30 years ago, in 1992 in Barcelona Deng Yaping won the women's singles and women's doubles titles, in 1996 in Atlanta, again partnering Qiao Hong, she did the same. She has the perfect Olympic Games record.

Soon after Atlanta, when studying at Nottingham University in England, she reflected on her Olympic Games successes.

In 1991 in Chiba, Japan, at the 41st World Championships we lost in the final of the women's team event to the Unified Korea team. We lost 3-2 and I lost to Yu Sun Bok, I still cannot believe that the team lost! In the women's singles I had to play her in the last 16, this time I won despite losing the first game. I went on to play Li Bun Hui in the final.

I had lost to Li Bun Hui at the World Championships in Dortmund in 1989 in the last 16, for two years I had trained very hard indeed with the dream of becoming World champion, that was my goal. I had to try to find a way to beat the player against whom I had lost two years earlier, I prepared thoroughly and won in straight games.

One year later in 1992 in Barcelona, I had to face Yu Sun Bok at the quarter-final stage

of the women's singles. It was my first Olympic Games, becoming Olympic champion was my dream of dreams. Once again, I had trained hard and prepared thoroughly, everything was right. I had lost to Sweden's Åsa Svensson at the Hungarian Open, the only time I ever lost to a European, but I felt in good form.

At the time I was 19 years old, the reigning world champion and I was expected to win.

However, the North Korean players were very dangerous, I had to be very focused. I wanted to take my chance to win a medal, I did not want to lose.

Fortunately, I won the match 3-0 and went on to beat Hyun Junghwa and Qiao Hong to win the women's singles; I won the women's doubles with Qiao Hong.



## CAREER HIGHLIGHTS

### BARCELONA 1992 OLYMPIC GAMES

#### Women's Singles

Group: 1. Deng Yaping (CHN) 2. Insook Bhushan (USA) 3. Barbara Chiu (CAN) 4. Nadia Al-Hindi (JOR)

Round One: v Csilla Batorfi (HUN) 14,12,15

QF: v Yu Sun Bok (PRK) 21,16,17

SF: v Hyun Junghwa (KOR) 6,19,17

F: v Qiao Hong (CHN) 6,8,-15,21

#### Women's Doubles (partner: Qiao Hong)

Group: 1. Deng Yaping/Qiao Hong (CHN)

2. Yukino Matsumoto/Rika Sato (JPN)

3. Otilia Badescu/Maria Bogoslov (ROU)

4. Helen Amankwaa/Patience Opukah (GHA)

QF: v Miriam Hooman/Bettine Vriesekoop (NED) 15,-19,10,11

SF: v Hong Chaok/Hyun Junghwa (KOR) -17,17,17,12

F: v Chen Zihe/Gao Jun (CHN) 13,-14,14,19

### ATLANTA 1996 OLYMPIC GAMES

#### Women's Singles

Group: 1. Deng Yaping (CHN) 2. Marie Svensson (SWE)

3. Lisa Lomas (GBR) 4. June Kyakobye (UGA)

Round One: v Park Haejung (KOR) 14-19,22

QF: v Nicole Struse (GER) 16,9,13

SF: v Liu Wei (CHN) -21,17,19,9

F: v Chen Jing (TPE) 14,17,-20,-17,5

#### Women's Doubles (partner: Qiao Hong)

Group: 1. Deng Yaping/Qiao Hong (CHN)

2. Emmanuelle Coubat/Wang Drexhou Xiaoming (TPE)

3. Barbara Chiu/Geng Lijuan (CAN)

QF: v Chen Chui-Tan/Chen Jing (TPE) -18,16,19,-22,21

SF: v Kim Mookyo/Park Kyungae (KOR) 15,-19,15,19

F: v Liu Wei/Qiao Yunping (CHN) -18,23,20,14

### Coping with pressure

In 1996 a major task was to cope with the pressure of being expected to win. I reached the final without any great problems. In the semi-final I beat Liu Wei in four games, the final was against Chen Jing, a tough opponent but I had trained hard and prepared well.

She was five years older than me, the same age as Qiao Hong. When I was 13 years old Chen Jing was one of the leading players in the national team. At the time she played for Hubei Province. They had a very strong side, Qiao Hong and Hu Xiaoxin completed the team. I played for Henan alongside He Wei and Li Qi.

In the final of the Chinese National Championships, we had to play Hubei, I beat both Qiao Hong and Chen Jing, whilst partnering He Wei to doubles success. We won 3-1; I had won all my matches when only 13 years old, immediately I became well known.

From that date onwards I had always beaten Chen Jing. We were both in the junior national team during the 1986-1987 season, after the Olympic Games in Seoul we trained together, later in 1989 at the 40th World Championships, Qiao Hong and myself beat Chen Jing and Hu Xiaoxin in the women's doubles final.

For the Asian Games in 1990 only four female players were allowed to compete from any one country. Undoubtedly, it was a difficult decision but both Hu Xiaoxin and Chen Jing were omitted from the team. The result was that Chen Jing left China and moved to Chinese Taipei.

Naturally, we both wanted to win the gold medal in Atlanta, it was a big match and whoever played well on the day would emerge victorious. I won the first two games but when the score was 15-all in the third there was a disruption to the play; a man waving a large Taiwanese flag created a disturbance in the crowd. The match stopped; the person concerned was escorted from the premises.

### Focus

The match restarted but when you are playing you want to keep going, any breaks in play give your opponent a chance to rethink and the belief they can still win. I lost the third game 22-20, my brain was in a mess, I was not thinking clearly, I was not focused. I was thinking about what had happened, why had I lost the third game? I had no clear ideas in my mind of how to win the fourth game. Quickly Chen Jing recovered to level the match. I was hanging on.

It was essential that I was positive and focused. However, the situation had changed, now she knew she had a chance. The game started and I was focused once again. She was not sufficiently positive; she was now hanging on and I came good!

She served, I led 3-2; I won all my five services and led 8-2, then 10-2 when we changed ends. It was absolutely critical that I remained totally focused. I had a good lead, but it could have been a dangerous time if I had allowed my confidence to lapse. I won the fifth game 21-5 and retained my title but it had been very hard indeed.

After the women's singles final I was totally drained emotionally, to give interviews after the match was extremely difficult.

I kept my emotions to myself but really, I just wanted to go away and cry in private. The press conference was extremely difficult, the presentation ceremony is always very tearful and emotional, to stand on the winners' rostrum and be crowned Olympic champion is a truly great feeling.

It was the greatest moment of my career.



1992 in Barcelona



1996 in Atlanta



World title retained in 1997





**Panagiotis Gionis**

Date of Birth: 7th Jan 1980  
Residence: Athens  
Racket: Korbel Off  
Rubber Forehand: Tenergy 05  
Rubber Backhand: Feint Long 2

## Defending Greek honour

Competing at high international level, a player of quality, at the same time undertaking a major administrative role, it is not the norm, but such is the situation for Panagiotis Gionis.

A four year term of office, on Wednesday 1st December 2021, at the time listed at no.54 on the ITTF Table Tennis World Rankings, he was elected General Secretary of the Hellenic Table Tennis Federation.

The situation is unique, we can think of China's Qin Zhijian, the mixed doubles winner with Yang Ying at the 2001 World Championships, who occupies a similar role, but he is long since retired. In fact, the more common situation is that those who hold such positions have never been international players!

Surely a surprise that Panagiotis Gionis should take a decision, or was it? He does tend to do things differently.

In an age where attacking top spin play is the favourite, he is a defender, alongside Germany's Ruwen Filus, Slovakia's Wang Yang and China's Ma Te, the only one of four names who appears regularly in the top 200 when the global listings are announced.

"My opinion is that to become a good defender is much more difficult than to become an attacking player. You need much more practise because you have to also work on offensive skills." explained Panagiotis Gionis. "You have to learn to move in a bigger space and that needs time to feel good."

Additionally, there is a line of thought that the plastic ball does not rotate as fast as the former celluloid ball.

"The plastic ball has changed the sport generally not only for defenders; you need to be very patient and most of the kids like me, when I started, want to be

aggressive and play offensive", continued Panagiotis Gionis. "You need a lot of talent to be a defender, the skills are difficult to learn. Maybe another significant reason is that defenders tend not to win big titles. One thing is sure that spectators love to watch defenders."

Different in playing style and different in terms of credentials. He is a qualified dentist and one of only three such practitioners who this century have played table tennis internationally; Wang de Ying from El Salvador, also a defender, and Zzwitjhallim Medina from Honduras both have dental surgeries in the front rooms of their homes!

However, following such a career is not high on the Gionis list of priorities. "Dentist is not finally a job that I would like to do", was the not too enthusiastic comment.

### Colleague

Additional to his sincere desire to further the sport of table tennis, recently retired Konstantinos Papageorgiou, elected President of the Hellenic Table Tennis Federation in March 2021, is a prime reason for the decision.

"Kostas Papageorgiou and I have been friends and teammates since we were little children. Since he took over the position of President we have daily communication on issues regarding the Federation", explained Panagiotis Gionis.

"When the position of General Secretary became vacant I felt I had a duty to help both Kostas and the Federation to try to achieve a better future for table tennis in Greece. So, we discussed the possibility. I was finally elected by the already named members of the Council. If Kostas was not the President it might not have crossed my



Congratulations from Konstantinos Vatsaklis after gaining his place in Tokyo at the European Qualification Tournament

mind. Most certainly, he is one of the main actors."

Unfortunately, in recent times Greece has suffered a recession, a fact exasperated when the pandemic hit in early 2020; the country relies heavily on tourism. The situation adds to the challenge the Hellenic Table Tennis Federation faces.

"The financial part is the weak element of the Federation. In Greece the subsidies for amateur sports are very low", explained Panagiotis Gionis. "We will have to find ways either through sponsorships or through some ideas to bring revenue to the Federation that we can use for the development of our sport."

Exacting challenges but where there's a will there's a way; Konstantinos Papageorgiou and Panagiotis Gionis clearly motivate each other.

"The post of General Secretary has specific duties. My goal is together with President and all the members of Federation in the long run is to improve the financial situation, recent years have been really bad", stressed Panagiotis Gionis. "Our aim is to develop and make the sport better known in Greece and of course to host international

events in the future as we did successfully with the Top 16 in Thessaloniki."

Staged in September, the 2021 Pomegranate Europe Top 16 Cup had a special status, it was the 50th edition and the first time ever staged in Greece.

"We are a young team with many more senior athletes as part of the administration, it means that we have enough knowledge in the competition field and can put in place good procedures for young children to become future champions", emphasised Panagiotis Gionis. "The Federation is also made up of members who have been in its composition for years and have a lot of knowledge in the administrative part, so the experience of the old in combination with the ideas of the young, I believe in future will bring success in the development of the sport in Greece."

### Short term

Long term is very much the goal for the Hellenic Table Tennis Federation, on a personal level the target is much closer; the Paris 2024 Olympic Games.

However, for Panagiotis Gionis, who during the 2021-

2022 season represented Dartom Bogoria Grodzisk Mazowieski in the Polish League, lining up alongside Marek Badowski, Chuang Chih-Yuan, Milos Redzinski and Pawel Sirucek, Tomasz Redzinski being the coach, there is a potential problem. He has a serious recurring Achilles injury.

"If I can soon overcome my Achilles injury my target is to qualify in Paris. After that I will continue to play just for fun", added Panagiotis Gionis. "Of course, qualifying for Paris motivates me a lot because it's in three years' time, not four years."

Most certainly, if he can achieve the goal, he will have been present in the celebrated multi-sport event every year since his debut in 2004 on home soil in Athens.

"Participating six times in the Olympic Games I think is amazing for anybody, not so many sportsmen manage to achieve it", explained Panagiotis Gionis. "I hope to be healthy, qualify in Paris and just enjoy it. For me it will be a dream to announce my departure from the national team after the Olympics in Paris."

Five appearances to date; always he has proved a most worthy competitor but if anyone has suffered tough draws and agonies, it is Panagiotis Gionis. "I feel unlucky in Olympic Games generally, because every time my draw has been not so good", said Panagiotis Gionis.

In Athens, he was beaten in the opening round by the player who is a total nightmare for defenders, Spain's He Zhiwen; when asking Matthew Syed, a high quality backspin player and former English national champion, to name the player he found the most difficult; the Spaniard's name was nominated without a second's hesitation.

Four years later, in 2008 in Beijing he was beaten in seven games in the second round by Hong Kong's Ko Lai Chak, a player in bristling form; in the next round he ended the aspirations of Korea Republic's Ryu Seungmin, the defending

champion!

Defeat at the hands of a player in form, in 2016 in Rio de Janeiro, it was the same scenario. He bid farewell in round three; he lost to Japan's Jun Mizutani, the eventual bronze medallist.

Tough draws, but it is the defeats against Japan's Seiya Kishikawa in 2012 in London and Korea Republic's Jeoung Youngsik in 2021 in Tokyo, both by the minimal two point margin in the deciding seventh game that are printed indelibly in the memory.

"In Beijing I was not so experienced a player to manage an important match", reflected Panagiotis Gionis. "In London in 2012 I felt that I could have played better against Kishikawa. He was always leading; in the end I lost a really easy point when I had my only match point at 10-9 in the seventh game."

A chance missed; against Jeoung Youngsik it was seven in a row!

"My biggest chance was in Tokyo. I was in my best condition ever, I felt amazingly confident. After so many years playing in top level I lost a match that until now I cannot believe how I managed to lose", reflected Panagiotis Gionis. "I don't remember in my career having lost a match from 10-4 ahead in last game, but that is the magic of sport. You feel emotions either negative or positive only sport can do that."

Now one last chance, Paris awaits, the swansong, one big last effort, surely the gods of sport will smile.





INTERVIEW BY  
Olalekan Okusan  
ITTF Member Relations Press Officer

# Champion Returns

Staged in the Nigerian capital city of Lagos from Wednesday 1st to Tuesday 7th December, the Molade Okoya-Thomas Hall of Teslim Balogun Stadium being the venue, the men's singles title at the 2021 Asoju Oba Cup was claimed by the host nation's Rilwan Akanbi. Present for the 53rd edition, currently resident in the United States, was celebrated compatriot **Atanda Musa**, the winner in 1984. Twice an Olympian, competing in 1988 in Seoul and four years later in Barcelona; amongst many achievements, he was the men's singles gold medallist at the Commonwealth Championships in 1982 in Mumbai, as well as at the African Championships in 1985 in Alexandria and 1988 in Lagos.

Commencing in 1992, he coached in Saudi Arabia, then in 1995 at the Ali Club in Qatar. Later in 1997 he played and coached in Nigeria before moving permanently to the United States. Very much the icon, he set the example for future generations of Nigerian players.

He spoke to Olalekan Okusan, ITTF Member Relations Media Officer.

## Who was your role model when you started playing table tennis?

Lekan Fenuyi while I was at school in Ijebu Ode, Fenuyi was at Ijebu Ode Grammar School; we used to hear about him because he was a very good player at that time.

## What was your view regarding the players competing in the Asoju Oba Cup?

I was happy with the quality of players I watched. I saw that several played very well but they need encouragement and more support. They need quality coaching, modern equipment, and more playing opportunities; more high grade tournaments like the Asoju Oba Cup.

## What concerned you about your visit to the Asoju Oba Cup?

During our days, we had more coaches who helped us to improve but I noticed lately the players have none. So, I will advise the Nigeria Table Tennis Federation to engage more coaches formally. It is a shame that most of these talents do not have a coach to tutor them and teach them how to be the best in the sport.

## What are your memories of the 1984 Asoju Oba Cup final against Yomi Bankole?

Before the final, the late Chief Molade Okoya-Thomas told me if I lost, he would send me to the Sunny Car company to get a brand-new car. Fortunately, I won the Peugeot 504.

## What were the strengths of Yomi Bankole?

I still regard the late Bankole as one of the best players ever from the country. He was a fantastic player with a lot of power. I respected him; he was a highly technical player, good in every aspect of the game.

## What makes the Asoju Oba Cup special?

I cherish the Asoju Oba Cup title more than all titles because of Chief Molade Okoya-Thomas, he kept me going in the sport. I had to work hard because I had to contend with more than 20 top players in my category at that time. I must commend the family for continuing the legacy of their late father. It is one of the tournaments that I am proud to be associated with; the tournament made me a better player, my sincere appreciation for keeping faith by staging the tournament annually.

## In what particular ways did Chief Molade Okoya-Thomas influence your career?

I won as a player because the late Okoya-Thomas took a personal interest in me. He was chairman of the Lagos State Sports Council, he gave me a lot of encouragement. He actually told me that it was my disciplined lifestyle that attracted him, he ensured I lacked nothing as a player. He also taught me how to remain disciplined as a player. I remain grateful to this great man for what he did for me.

## Quadri Aruna is your successor; how do you compare his performances?

Aruna is doing fantastic. He is doing much better than me during my time. The only problem we have during this era is that Aruna is the only one at the top. The gap between him and the next set of players in Nigeria is too wide; this is not too good for us as a nation. During my days, the top 20 players were the same level, so if you won a tournament, it did not guarantee you would win the next one. My concern is that the gap between Aruna and others in the team is too wide; we cannot continue like this. We need to bridge the gap; we need more players coming through.

## How is Quadri Aruna received in the United States?

I am very proud of Aruna and most of us ex-internationals are very proud of what he has achieved and is still achieving at global level. In the United States, a lot of people talk about him, even in my club in New York. So, I am very proud of him just like every Nigerian.

## How does Quadri Aruna compare with players of your era?

If Aruna had belonged to my generation, he would have struggled because we had too many players like the late Bankole. For Aruna to get to a final, he would have been tested, he would have played against top players who would have been at the same level as himself.

## What do you consider the major differences in the sport since you played?

What makes these present day players different from our time is the speed in the sport which we see nowadays. We played table tennis which was meant to entertain the fans. We could fight for a point by playing more than 20 rallies. Nowadays, the longest rally could be five. The speed in the sport lately has taken away the entertainment aspect.

## Do you notice any differences between the attitude of players today and your era?

When I was playing, no coach needed to tell me I had to jog to be fit at the table. Lately, I noticed that many players are not disciplined as they hardly do physical exercises before going to the table. All they want to do is to play on the table. You have to be fit to last long in the game.

## Why do you think you were able to remain a top player for a long period?

To remain on top then, I had to train on my own. I played seven days a week. I was not forced by any coach because I wanted to remain on top of my game. I knew that if I lost in a tournament, it was bad news for me and if I won it was good news. So, I guarded against distractions in my mind and life, I disciplined myself as a player. I took life simply. I remain a simple guy in life even today.

## What do you think are the major pitfalls players face?

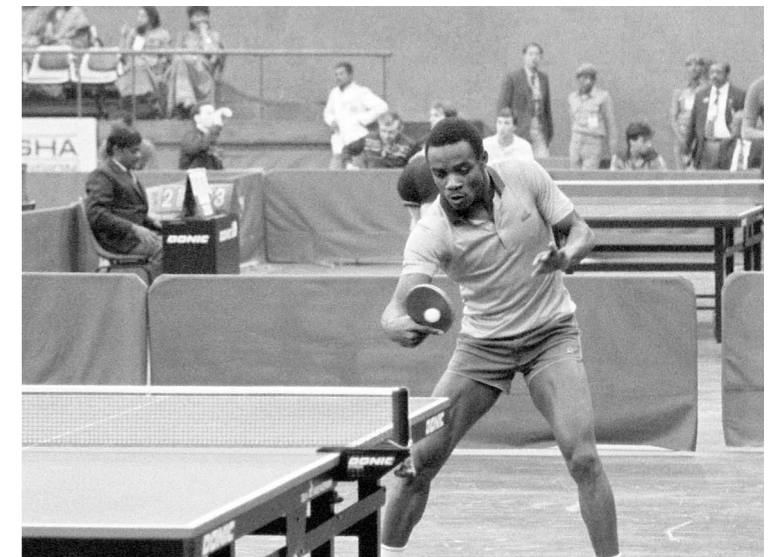
While playing, it was tough warding off women. In life, women can cause your downfall, especially when you are based in the United States. You must have self-discipline and patience because the United States is the best country in the world and the worst. They can bring you up and take you down and those that will bring you down are the women. All you need to do is stay away from them. I knew this before I decided to settle in the United States. So, my advice to athletes is to watch out for this pitfall in their career.

## To what extent did you receive family support during your career?

My worst moment in life was when my mother passed away. My table tennis career was going well. I wanted her to enjoy it. It is common among athletes that our parents contribute a lot to our growth and success. When fortune begins to come and you no longer see those people anymore, this makes you feel bad. My mother died when things began to look up for me in life, so it was very painful for me that she did not enjoy her efforts on me.

## What are your views on the longevity of Olufunke Oshonaike?

By now, Oshonaike should be a coach for the ladies' team because people like that know the practical and theory aspects of the sport. A high achiever in the game, like



Atanda Musa at the 1987 World Championships

**“I disciplined myself as a player. I took life simply. I remain a simple guy in life even today.”**

her, should be put at national level to coach. It is good for the development of upcoming players for her to coach them, be their role model, to inspire them, a coach maybe starting with the juniors.

## Would you consider returning to Nigeria to coach?

Let me be honest with you, I can come back to coach the Nigerian team. But there has to be consistency in the administration of sport because in Nigeria when they change minister, which we do on regular basis, things tend to change. There is no continuity in our sports and this kind of situation will make the job very difficult for me to handle. Sure, I am willing to come back because this is my country.

## What might persuade you to return to Nigeria to coach?

For me to handle Nigeria, I must be given a target with nothing less than a five-year contract that will be stable enough for me to produce new stars and train them to be world-class players. Apart from this, I don't think I can return home to just take up the job without a firm agreement.

## How do you view the current coaching situation in Nigeria?

Nigerian coaches are capable because they are conversant with trends in the sport. The issue with most of them is that they are not given permanent jobs that set targets for them. How do you expect someone to give his best when he or she is not sure of a stable income from what he or she is doing? If any coach is sure of a regular income, and he has also been given a target to achieve, such a coach will surely be productive. So, the problem with coaching in Nigeria is that the coaches are not engaged formally by those in authority. Most times, this makes some of them start misbehaving when given the chance to handle a team.





## STARS CROWNED STRIPES EARNED

The dust has settled, the curtain has long since closed, the overall opinion that despite living in strange times with all the restrictions imposed owing to Covid-19, the United States Table Tennis Association delivered. Staged in Houston's George R. Brown Convention Center from Tuesday 23rd November to Monday 29th November, the 2021 ITTF World Championships Finals was hailed a success, a step forward in presentation.

Proudly the nation's flag, the Stars and Stripes could fly in dignity.

Provide top class facilities and players respond, China's Fan Zhendong and Wang Manyu duly responded, they won the blue ribbon events, the respective men's singles and women's singles titles.

Fan Zhendong commenced matters the top seed, for Wang Manyu she was a member of a group of colleagues, all on their day capable of lifting the title.

Safe and secure, the major attribute displayed by Fan Zhendong being able to fulfill the basic requirements of winning a point; when top spin play is the order of the day, no-

one can keep the ball on the table longer.

Furthermore, he received no presents, he progressed through what could be considered the tougher half of the draw. The only Chinese player in the opposite half was Zhou Qihao, boys' singles winner at the 2011 ITTF Cadet Challenge staged in Puerto Rico; on World Championships debut, he was beaten by Germany's Timo Boll in round two.

Thus, from the second day of action, it was known there was no possibility of an all-Chinese final; a situation that had never occurred so early in a World Championships since 1969 in Munich when, owing the Cultural Revolution, the Chinese did not play!

One after another, in the later rounds Fan Zhendong beat colleagues Wang Chuqin, Lin Gaoyuan and Liang Jingkun to reach the final where Sweden's Truls Moregard awaited, the 19-year-old, the sensation of the tournament, emulating the efforts of colleague Mattias Falck. Two years earlier in the Hungarian city of Budapest he had reached the final, losing to Ma Long.

### Seven games

Following an opening round straight games success against Egypt's Ahmed Ali Saleh, Truls Moregard became the master of the seventh game. In full distance duels he accounted for Chinese Taipei's Chuang Chih-Yuan, Germany's Patrick Franziska and Korea Republic's Lim Jonghoon, before in six games ousting Nigeria's Quadri Aruna. A medal assured, a place in the penultimate round booked, he reverted to his seven games policy. He ousted Timo Boll, before Fan Zhendong rather abruptly ended adventures.

Gold for Fan Zhendong, a worthy successor to Ma Long; once again silver for Sweden, as in Budapest bronze for Liang Jingkun, the same colour for Timo Boll, matching his previous best a decade earlier in Rotterdam.

Another creditable finish for Liang Jingkun, who at the quarter-final stage in Budapest had beaten Fan Zhendong, the round in Houston where he almost came to grief. He lost

the opening three games against Brazil's Hugo Calderano, before winning the next four.

A quarter-final exit for Hugo Calderano, it was the same for the host nation's Kanak Jha. He fell just one step below the best ever from a United States player; in Stockholm (1949), Martin Reisman was a bronze medallist as was Dick Miles in Dortmund (1959). Nevertheless, it was a most creditable performance from the 21-year-old; having overcome Ruwen Filus in round four, the player who had ended the hopes of Poland's Jakub Dyjas, the second round winner against Japan's Tomokazu Harimoto, he was beaten by Timo Boll.

The effect was that in the last eight of the men's singles, with Quadri Aruna also present, no less than five continents – Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin America, North America – were represented.



Fan Zhendong



Wang Manyu

### Asia dominant

Conversely, in the women's singles, the quarter-finalists were all from Asia; in fact, in the last 16, there were only three names that were not from the continent and only two whose skills were not developed in that part of the world.

Yuan Jia Nan, now a French citizen but born and bred in China, experienced what proved to be the toughest fourth round draw of all, she was beaten by Wang Manyu. Similarly, at the same stage, Romania's Bernadette Szocs lost to Japan's Kasumi Ishikawa, Puerto Rico's Adriana Diaz to Sun Yingsha.

Asian players proved a step ahead, the Chinese a step ahead of their Asian colleagues; most significantly they had an answer to the player they considered their greatest threat, Japan's Mima Ito. She had caused Ding Ning and Liu Shiwen a host of problems, the new generation has been groomed with answers; at the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games, Sun Yingsha had halted progress, in Houston it was Wang Yidi; players in a very similar mould.

Silver was to be the end result for Sun Yingsha in Tokyo, it was the same in Houston when facing Wang Manyu. The duo re-enacted their epic girls' singles final at the 2017 World Junior Championships in Riva del Garda. On that occasion, match points saved, match points spurned, Sun Yingsha had gained the verdict; four years later, Wang Manyu, who had beaten Chen Meng in the semis, turned the tables, she won in six games.

Apart Sun Yingsha and Wang Manyu staved off all contenders; together they did the same. The women's doubles the only event in which titles won in Budapest were defended; once again at the final hurdle they accounted for Mima Ito and Japanese colleague, Hina Hayata. However, there was a difference, two years ago they had been required to recover from a two games to nil deficit to secure gold, two years later there was no charity, straight games.



Kristian Karlsson, Mattias Falck



Wang Manyu, Sun Yingsha



Wang Chuqin, Sun Yingsha

Gold but Sun Yingsha and Wang Manyu were totally upstaged by the pair they beat in the semi-final, Luxembourg's Sarah de Nutte and Ni Xia Lian. Against all odds in the third round, they had beaten Hong Kong's Doo Hoi Kem and Lee Ho Ching, the no.4 seeds, prior to recording a quarter-final round success in opposition to India's Manika Batra and Archana Girish Kamath.

### Outsiders

A major upset, the Luxembourg

duo commenced matters as rank outsiders, they were not listed amongst the most prominent pairs; it was the same in the men's doubles for Sweden's Mattias Falck and Kristian Karlsson, not seeded but a pair with pedigree and experience. At the 2012 European Championships in Herning, they had been runners up, narrowly beaten in the final by Austria's Robert Gardos and Daniel Habesohn.

In Houston, to describe their efforts as rising to the occasion, is an understatement; their opening contest presented a very clear statement. They recorded a first round straight games win against Russia's Maksim Grebnev and Lev Katsman, the reigning European champions, before in a full distance duel booking their place in the final.

They beat Korea Republic's Cho Daesong and An Jaehyun, prior to ending Chinese aspirations. They accounted for Fan Zhendong and Wang Chuqin, followed by success in opposition to Lin Gaoyuan and Liang Jingkun. A place in the final booked, a four games win against Jang Woojin and Lim Jonghoon, like Cho Daesong and An Jaehyun from Korea Republic, the 2018 ITTF World Tour Grand Finals winners in Incheon, secured gold.

Disappointment for China but not in the mixed doubles; after beating the top seeded Chinese Taipei pairing of Lin Yun-Ju and Cheng I-Ching, Wang Chuqin and Sun Yingsha, claimed the title. At the final hurdle they beat Tomokazu Harimoto and Hina Hayata, the semi-final winners in opposition to Lin Gaoyuan and Lily Zhang, one of two pairs promoting 50 years of Ping Pong Diplomacy, the other being Kanak Jha and Wang Manyu, beaten in round three by India's Sathiyam Gnanasekaran and Manika Batra.

Champions crowned in Houston successful not only for those who gained precious podium places but for all concerned; stars were anointed, most importantly the organisers earned their stripes.



Adriana Diaz



Lim Jonghoon, Jang Woojin



Tomokazu Harimoto, Hina Hayata



## Fan Zhendong reflects

Interview kindly conducted by Butterfly



### Looking back, what is your overall reflection?

I have long thought the World Championships is one of the best events in terms of the level of players. The event this time was special for me. It was my fifth time to participate, I was very glad that I finally won the title. I needed to enhance my performance in various aspects such as mentality.

### The draw was tough, you faced three Chinese players before the final, how difficult was that?

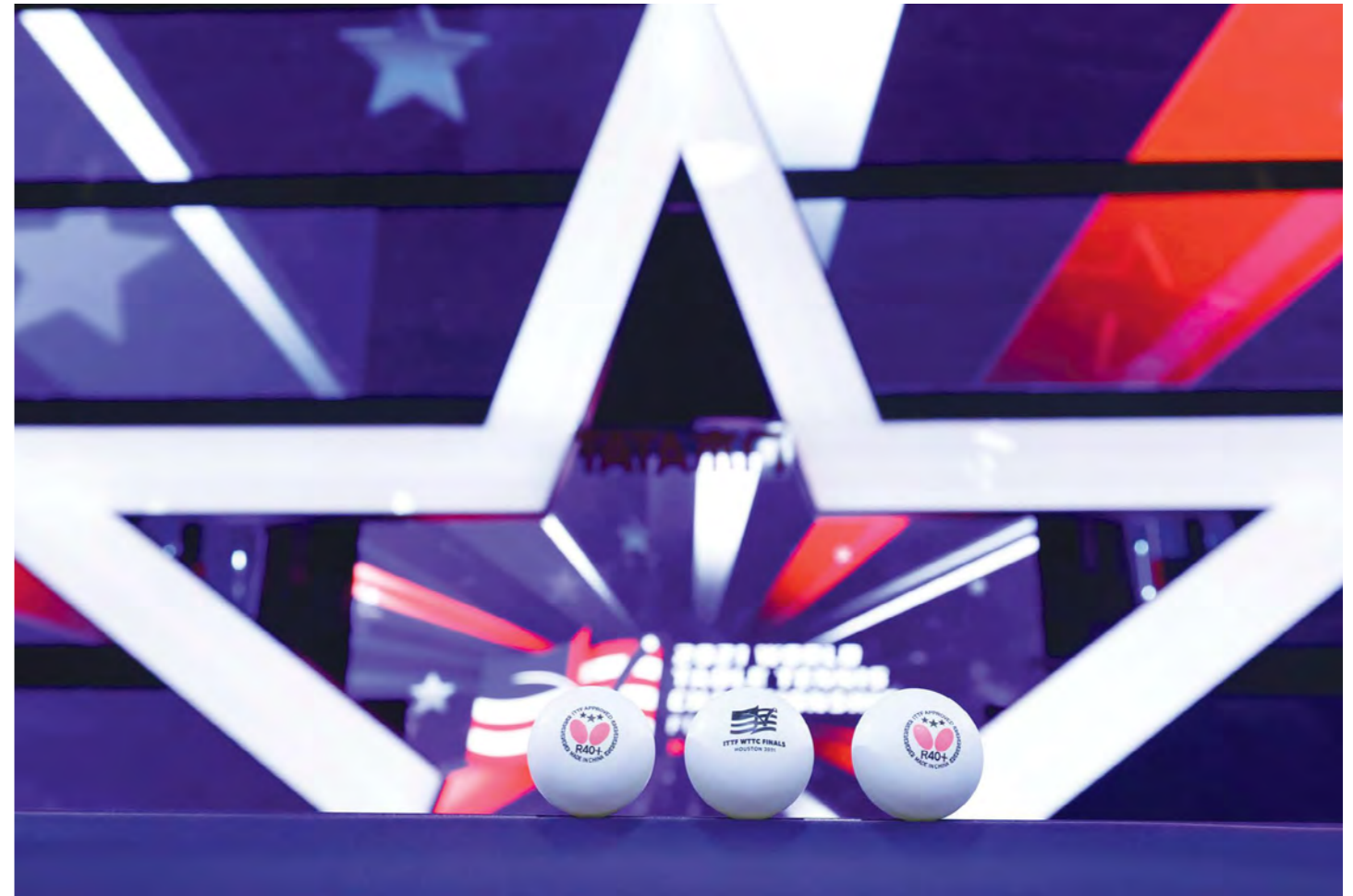
My first impression looking at the draw was it was tough because I would face not only Chinese colleagues but also many strong foreign players. However, I took measures and prepared for each match I faced one by one, not thinking too much about the future matches waiting ahead.

### How was do you assess your performance in the final against Truls Møregard?

I felt a great deal of pressure in the final. It was my first time to compete against Møregard and in the final of an important tournament, so I felt pressure and concern. However, I was able to concentrate on the match and gradually became less nervous as the match went on. I was able to demonstrate my intended performance. I had prepared for a tough match and the expected difficulties before it started. I was glad I could win in straight games.

### What is your impression on the first ever World Championships held in the Americas?

I feel honoured that I could participate in the first ever World Championships in the Americas. I was able to concentrate and enjoy the matches thanks to the good setup and atmosphere. I hope this successful event will increase the number of table tennis fans and encourage more people to be enthusiastic about table tennis.



### ITTF World Championships Finals

Houston, USA

23rd-29th Nov

#### Men's Singles

QF: Fan Zhendong (CHN) v Lin Gaoyuan (CHN) -8,7,5,8,9  
 QF: Liang Jingkun (CHN) v Hugo Calderano (BRA) -8,-12,-8,8,4,8,8  
 QF: Truls Moregard (SWE) v Quadri Aruna (NGR) 11,8,-2,4,-12,7  
 QF: Timo Boll (GER) v Kanak Jha (USA) -4,5,10,7,-9,7  
 SF: Fan Zhendong (CHN) v Liang Jingkun (CHN) 5,4,9,-8,11  
 SF: Truls Moregard (SWE) v Timo Boll (GER) -8,-8,6,8,-10,8,5  
 F: Fan Zhendong (CHN) v Truls Moregard (SWE) 6,9,7,8

#### Women's Singles

QF: Chen Meng (CHN) v Kasumi Ishikawa (JPN) 9,6,8,6  
 QF: Wang Manyu (CHN) v Chen Xingtong (CHN) 9,7,1,11  
 QF: Wang Yidi (CHN) v Mima Ito (JPN) 10,-7,2,7,9  
 QF: Sun Yingsha (CHN) v Suh Hyowon (KOR) 9,4,4,7  
 SF: Wang Manyu (CHN) v Chen Meng (CHN) -9,-7,8,6,-11,9,8  
 SF: Sun Yingsha (CHN) v Wang Yidi (CHN) 8,-3,8,6,8  
 F: Wang Manyu (CHN) v Sun Yingsha (CHN) -11,7,-6,8,8,15

#### Men's Doubles

QF: Lin Gaoyuan/Liang Jingkun (CHN) v Benedikt Duda/Qiu Dang (GER) 8,4,-12,-8,9  
 QF: Mattias Falck/Kristian Karlsson (SWE) v Fan Zhendong/Wang Chuqin (CHN) -8,8,-11,7,5  
 QF: Jang Woojin/Lim Jonghoon (KOR) v Ho Kwan Kit/Wong Chun Ting (HKG) -4,11,4,5  
 QF: Shunsuke Togami/Yukiya Uda (JPN) v Paul Drinkhall/Liam Pitchford (ENG) 10,-10,10,5  
 SF: Mattias Falck/Kristian Karlsson (SWE) v Lin Gaoyuan/Liang Jingkun (CHN) 10,8,8  
 SF: Jang Woojin/Lim Jonghoon (KOR) v Shunsuke Togami/Yukiya Uda (JPN) -8,4,9,7  
 F: Mattias Falck/Kristian Karlsson (SWE) v Jang Woojin/Lim Jonghoon (KOR) 8,13,-11,10

#### Women's Doubles

QF: Chen Meng/Qian Tianyi (CHN) v Choi Hyojoo/Lee Zion (KOR) 2,1,4  
 QF: Hina Hayata/Mima Ito (JPN) v Andreea Dragoman/Elizabeta Samara (ROU) 8,9,1  
 QF: Sara de Nutte/Ni Xiaiaian (LUX) v Manika Batra/Archana Girish Kamath (IND) 1,6,8  
 QF: Sun Yingsha/Wang Manyu (CHN) v Miu Hirano/Kasumi Ishikawa (JPN) -9,7,6,-6,4  
 SF: Hina Hayata/Mima Ito (JPN) v Chen Meng/Qian Tianyi (CHN) 9,-2,-10,6,7  
 SF: Sun Yingsha/Wang Manyu (CHN) v Sara de Nutte/Ni Xiaiaian (LUX) 4,3,12  
 F: Sun Yingsha/Wang Manyu (CHN) v Hina Hayata/Mima Ito (JPN) 9,7,8

#### Mixed Doubles

QF: Lin Yun-Ju/Cheng I-Ching (TPE) v Ho Kwan Kit/Lee Ho Ching (HKG) 7,7,-7,6  
 QF: Wang Chuqin/Sun Yingsha (CHN) v Alvaro Robles/Maria Xio (ESP) -6,6,2,8  
 QF: Tomokazu Harimoto/Hina Hayata (JPN) v Sathiyam Gnanasekaran/Manika Batra (IND) 5,2,-7,9  
 QF: Lin Gaoyuan/Lily Zhang (CHN/USA) v Emmanuel Lebesson/Yuan Jia Nan (FRA) 9,-9,7,7  
 SF: Wang Chuqin/Sun Yingsha (CHN) v Lin Yun-Ju/Cheng I-Ching (TPE) 8,-7,7,9  
 SF: Tomokazu Harimoto/Hina Hayata (JPN) v Lin Gaoyuan/Lily Zhang (CHN/USA) 9,1,-6,-8,2  
 F: Wang Chuqin/Sun Yingsha (CHN) v Tomokazu Harimoto/Hina Hayata (JPN) 2,5,8



## FACTS & FIGURES



### 2021

First time the tournament had been staged in Pan America.



### 36th & 13th

Fan Zhendong became the 36th player to win the men's singles title, the 13th from China.

### 3 golds

Fan Zhendong is the only player to have won the boys' singles title at a World Junior Championships (Hyderabad 2012), men's singles gold at a Youth Olympic Games (Nanjing 2014) and now be crowned World champion.



### 34th

Wang Manyu became the 34th player to win the women's singles title, the 16th from China.



### NEVER BEFORE

It was the first time in the history of the World Championships that both the reigning men's singles and women's singles champions were not present to defend their titles, even when considering the interruption caused by World War Two. Ma Long and Liu Shiwen being the respective winners in 2019. It has happened that one or the other reigning champion has not returned but never both.



### 1st pair

Wang Chuqin and Sun Yingsha became the first pair to win the mixed team event at a Youth Olympic Games (2018 Buenos Aires) and then the mixed doubles at a World Championships.



### Biggest Gap

Born 4th July 1963, Ni Xialian became the oldest player to win a medal at a World Championships and the player with the biggest time difference from securing her first. At the Tokyo 1983 World Championships, she was a member of the gold medal winning Chinese team alongside Cao Yanhua, Geng Lijuan and Tong Ling. She partnered Guo Yuehua to mixed doubles success and with Cao Yanhua won women's doubles bronze. On the day play closed, she was 19 years and 304 days old; on the concluding day in Houston, she was 58 years and 148 days old. The gap over 38 years!

### Age Difference

The success of Ni Xialian and Sarah de Nutte recorded the largest gap in ages of any pair securing a medal at a World Championships, Sarah de Nutte was born on 21st November 1992; a difference of almost 30 years.

Additionally, it is the first time a pair has won a medal at a World Championships when one member had secured medals in the tournament before the other was born!

### First ever

It was a first ever medal for Luxembourg at a World Championships.



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## New look in Vila Nova de Gaia

Inaugurated in 2003 in the Chilean capital city of Santiago, entitled the World Junior Championships, in 2021 there was a new look to the now well established tournament.

The age limit changed, a new age group was introduced, all events knock-out from the very start; such was the scenario for the ITTF World Youth Championships staged in the northern Portuguese municipality of Vila Nova de Gaia from Thursday 2nd to Wednesday 8th December.

Some factors did remain the same, the continued success of China. In the under 19 age group, Chen Yuanyu, Lin Shidong and Xiang Peng combined to win the boys' team title, Zeng Beixun only being selected for the opening round contest against Australia. For the girls, Chen Yi, Kuai Man and Wu Yangchen, the choice throughout, reserved the podium top step.

Thus, for China it was the 16th time in each event the result had been gold; the only missing occasions being when Japan had prevailed. The Land of the Rising Sun won both titles in 2016 in Cape Town; earlier they secured the boys in 2005 in Linz, the girls in 2010 in Bratislava.

Team success, later in the under 19 age group, Xiang Peng added the boys' singles crown and thus became the only player ever to retain the title; he won in 2019 in Korat. Adding to her nation's success, Kuai Man partnered Wu Yangchen to girls' doubles gold, before reserving the top step of the girls' singles podium. The win for Kuai Man meant the baton returned to China. In Korat, Miyu Nagasaki had emerged the victor, denting China's perfect record; in Vila Nova de Gaia, Japan almost caused a second dent. In the final, Kuai Man needed the full seven games to overcome Miyuu Kihara.

Disappointment for Miyuu Kihara but there was consolation. Partnering Japanese colleague Hiroto Shinozuka, the duo clinched the mixed doubles title;

notably in the final overcoming Xiang Peng and Kuai Man. Gold for Miyuu Kihara and a repeat of two years earlier; in Korat she had enjoyed success alongside Yukiya Uda.



China, under 19 boys' team champions



China, under 19 girls' team winners

### Russian gold

Japan very much in evidence as, in the under 19 age group, was Russia and the United States.

Selecting from Damir Akhmetzafin, Maksim Grebnev, Vladislav Makarov and Vladimir Sidorenko, boys' team silver was secured. Thus, Russia surpassed their previous best. In 2006 in Cairo, Andrey Bukin, Stanislav Golovanov, Mikhail Paikov, Artem Utochkin had emerged bronze medallists.

Later, for Russia, it was victory in the boys' doubles final at the third attempt; for the winners, Maksim Grebnev and Vladimir Sidorenko, at the second time of asking. In 2005 in Linz, Stanislav Golovanov and Kirill Skachkov had been the runners up; more recently in 2018 in Bendigo, Maksim Grebnev and Lev Katsman had experienced the same fate; in 2019 in Korat, it had been the identical destiny for Vladimir Sidorenko and Artem Tokonov.

Meanwhile, in the girls' team event, it was silver for the United States combination of Joanna Sung, Rachel Sung, Angie Tan

and Amy Wang, as it was later for Rachel Sung and Amy Wang in the girls' doubles.

The best ever in the history of the tournament for Russia and the United States. Likewise, by reaching the semi-final of the boys' singles, Payas Jain secured a first such medal for India, as in the boys' doubles did Carlos Fernandez for Peru and Taiwo Mati for Nigeria; they joined forces to claim bronze.



Rachel Sung and Amy Wang, under 19 girls' doubles silver medallists



Sora Matsushima focused



Miwa Harimoto



China, under 19 boys' team champions

### In the shade

Impressive performances but Japan's Sora Matsushima and Miwa Harimoto put everyone in the shade; Sora Matsushima, only 14 years old at the time, lost just one match in the whole tournament, Miwa Harimoto, one year younger, none at all.

The only defeat for Sora Matsushima came in the under 19 boys' team semi-final against China when beaten by Chen Yuanyu. In the under 15 events, the first time the age group had been held in the history of the tournament, he partnered Miwa Harimoto to mixed doubles success, before securing boys' doubles gold in partnership with Frenchman Felix Lebrun and then claiming the boys' singles title.

One loss in the whole tournament; for Miwa Harimoto, 13 years old at the time, one year younger than Sora Matsushima, it was the perfect record. Competing throughout in the under 15 age group, additional to mixed doubles gold, she joined forces with Yuna Ojio and Misaki Suzuki to enjoy girls' team success. Later, she combined with Hana Goda to win the girls' doubles event, prior to overcoming her partner to claim the girls' singles top prize.

Gold and silver for Hana Goda meant she became the first Egyptian to win medals in the now 18 year history of the tournament.

### Similar success

Outstanding in the under 15 age group from Japan, just as in the senior category, both the United States and Russia impressed.

In the boys' team final, fielding Ilia Koniukhov, Aleksei Samokhin and Roman Vinogradov, Russia recorded a 3-1 success against the United States trio comprising Jensen Feng, Nandan Naresh and Daniel Tran. Additionally, Ilia Koniukhov and Roman Vinogradov emerged boys' doubles silver medallists.

Similarly, in the girls' team event there were medals for both nations; bronze for Faith Hu, Sally Moyland and Emily Tan of the United States, silver for the Russian combination of Anastasiia Ivanova, Kristina Kurilkina and Zlata Terekhova.

Landmark achievements, none more so than for India; the notable name being Suhana Saini. She lined up alongside Pritha Oriya Vartikar and Sayali Rajesh Wani, to claim girls' team bronze, prior to reserving the same colour in the girls' singles. Add Payas Jain to the equation, never a previous medal secured in the tournament's history, India departed with honours in three events!

New horizons for India, it was very much the same for Poland; a situation of anything you can do I can more than match. In the under 19 age group Samuel Kulczycki emerged the boys' singles silver medallist, in the mixed doubles partnering Prithika Pavade of France, bronze medallist. In the under 15 category Milosz Redzinski did exactly the same, the boys' singles runner up, a mixed doubles semi-finalist partnering Germany's Mia Griesel.

Seven days of intense action, but none more so than for the stars of the show. Overall, taking into account every event in which they competed, for Sora Matsushima, in terms of matches the record read 15:1, in games 49:16; for Miwa Harimoto her match statistics were 18-0, in games 59:7!



### ITTF World Youth Championships

Vila Nova de Gaia, Portugal

Thu 2nd – Wed 8th Dec

#### Under 19 Boys' Team

SF: Russia (Maksim Grebnev, Vladislav Makarov, Vladimir Sidorenko)

3-0 Germany (Hannes Hoermann, Daniel Rinderer, Kay Stumper)

SF: China (Chen Yuanyu, Lin Shidong, Xiang Peng) 3-0 Japan (Kazuki Hamada, Sora Matsushima, Hiroto Shinozuka)

F: China 3-0 Russia (Xiang Peng v Vladimir Sidorenko 5,2,-7,8; Lin Shidong v Maksim Grebnev 6,4,9; Chen Yuanyu v Damir Akhmetzafin 4,12,3)

#### Under 19 Girls' Team

SF: China (Chen Yi, Kuai Man, Wu Yangchen) 3-1 Japan (Haruna Ojio, Miyuu Kihara, Ami Shiratama)

SF: United States (Rachel Sung, Angie Tan, Rachel Sung) 3-2 Romania (Luciana Mitrofan, Ioana Singeorzan, Elena Zaharia)

F: China 3-0 United States (Kuai Man v Rachel Sung 4,3,6; Chen Yi v Amy Wang 4,5,11; Wu Yangchen v Joanna Sung 5,3,7)

#### Under 19 Boys' Singles

SF: Xiang Peng (CHN) v Payas Jain (IND) 4,-10,4,2,1

SF: Samuel Kulczycki (POL) v Zeng Beixun (CHN) 12,-9,9,4,6

F: Xiang Peng (CHN) v Samuel Kulczycki (POL) 9,9,1,10

#### Under 19 Girls' Singles

SF: Kuai Man (CHN) v Haruna Ojio (JPN) -5,6,7,9,5

SF: Miyuu Kihara (JPN) v Wu Yangchen (JPN) 7,-2,9,-8,2,-6,7

F: Kuai Man (CHN) v Miyuu Kihara (JPN) 10,7,-8,5,-10,-7,8

#### Under 19 Boys' Doubles

SF: Maksim Grebnev/Vladimir Sidorenko (RUS) v Carlos Fernandez/Taiwo Mati (PER/NGR) 3,-10,9,12

SF: Csaba Andras/Ivor Ban (HUN/CRO) v Eduard Ionescu/Darius Movileanu (ROU) 4,5,-7,7

F: Maksim Grebnev/Vladimir Sidorenko (RUS) v Csaba Andras/Ivor Ban (HUN/CRO) -9,-6,9,7,9

#### Under 19 Girls' Doubles

SF: Kuai Man/Wu Yangchen (CHN) v Miyuu Kihara/Haruna Ojio (JPN) 6,-3,7,10

SF: Rachel Sung/Amy Wang (USA) v Cai Fong-En/Hsu Yi-Chen (TPE) -5,9,6,6

F: Kuai Man/Wu Yangchen (CHN) v Rachel Sung/Amy Wang (USA) 3,3,-6,1

#### Under 19 Mixed Doubles

SF: Hiroto Shinozuka/Miyuu Kihara (JPN) v Zeng Beixun/Wu Yangchen (CHN) 9,10,6

SF: Xiang Peng/Kuai Man (CHN) v Samuel Kulczycki/Prithika Pavade (POL) 8,3,8

F: Hiroto Shinozuka/Miyuu Kihara (JPN) v Xiang Peng/Kuai Man (CHN) -10,7,-12,12,7

#### Under 15 Boys' Team

SF: Russia (Ilia Koniukhov, Aleksei Samokhin, Roman Vinogradov) 3-0 Portugal (Tiago Abiodun, Bernardo Pinto, Rafael Silva)

SF: United States (Jensen Feng, Nandan Naresh, Daniel Tran) 3-2

France (Flavien Coton, Nathan Lam, Antoine Noirault)

F: Russia 3-1 United States (Aleksei Samokhin v Nandan Naresh 7,-10,-8,-8; Ilia Koniukhov v Daniel Tran 9,5,4; Roman Vinogradov v Jensen Feng 9,5,7; Aleksei Samokhin v Daniel Tran -9,9,7,2)

#### Under 15 Girls' Team

SF: Japan (Miwa Harimoto, Yuna Ojio, Misaki Suzuki) 3-1 United States (Faith Hu, Sally Moyland, Emily Tan)

SF: Russia (Anastasiia Ivanova, Kristina Kurilkina, Zlata Terekhova)

3-2 India (Suhana Saini, Pritha Oriya Vartikar, Sayali Rajesh Wani)

F: Japan 3-0 Russia (Miwa Harimoto v Zlata Terekhova 6,6,4; Yuna Ojio v Anastasiia Ivanova 9,7,5; Misaki Suzuki v Kristina Kurilkina 7,12,-5,-10,10)

#### Under 15 Boys' Singles

SF: Milosz Redzinski (POL) v Felix Lebrun (FRA) 8,-6,-5,12,9,6

SF: Sora Matsushima (JPN) v Isaac Quek Yong (SGP) 8,10,10,8

F: Sora Matsushima (JPN) v Milosz Redzinski (POL) 5,5,-5,5,7

#### Under 15 Girls' Singles

SF: Hana Goda (EGY) v Suhana Saini (IND) 10,-9,3,3,8

SF: Miwa Harimoto (JPN) v Ser Lin Qian (SGP) 6,10,4,-7,7

F: Miwa Harimoto (JPN) v Hana Goda (EGY) 8,-8,-7,3,6,5

#### Under 15 Boys' Doubles

SF: Felix Lebrun/Sora Matsushima (FRA/JPN) v Chang Yu-An/Izaak Quek Yong (TPE/SGP) 9,12,7

SF: Ilia Koniukhov/Roman Vinogradov (RUS) v Dragos Alexandru Bujor/Iulian Chirita (ROU) -10,8,9,-5,6)

F: Felix Lebrun/Sora Matsushima (FRA/JPN) v Ilia Koniukhov/Roman Vinogradov (RUS) 7,-8,4,3

#### Under 15 Girls' Doubles

SF: Hana Goda/Miwa Harimoto (EGY/JPN) v Veronika Matiunina/Suhana Saini (UKR/IND) 6,9,3

SF: Mia Griesel/Annett Kaufmann (GER) v Anna Hursey/Matilde Pinto (WAL/POR) 4,5,5

F: Hana Goda/Miwa Harimoto (EGY/JPN) v Mia Griesel/Annett Kaufmann (GER) 9,5,7

#### Under 15 Mixed Doubles

SF: Sora Matsushima/Miwa Harimoto (JPN) v Milosz Redzinski/Mia Griesel (POL/GER) 6,6,10

SF: Iulian Chirita/Bianca Mei Rosu (ROU) v Chang Yu-An/Cheng Pu-Syuan (TPE) 6,4,10

F: Sora Matsushima/Miwa Harimoto (JPN) v Iulian Chirita/Bianca Mei Rosu (ROU) -6,6,4,8





Thomas von Scheele and Peter Karlsson

## SWEDES AT THE DOUBLE

Fourth round men's singles exit at the 2021 ITTF World Table Tennis Championships Finals in Houston for Kristian Karlsson, even earlier for colleague Mattias Falck, he departed in round two; both may well have hoped for better outcomes.

Disappointment but then elation; they combined to win the men's doubles and thus became the only Swedes to secure the title since Peter Karlsson and Thomas von Scheele emerged victorious now over 30 years ago!

Claiming the Iran Cup, the circumstances at the 1991 World Championships, staged from Wednesday 24th April to Monday 6th May in Chiba, an era when individual events followed the team competition, have a striking similarity to the modern day.

Likewise, Peter Karlsson and Thomas von Scheele, both 21 years old at the time were very much outsiders and had experienced disappointment before creating their only special niche in history.

Neither had played in the preceding men's team event, in fact Thomas von Scheele was not even included in the five-man squad that retained the Swaythling Cup. Peter Karlsson had to sit on the bench throughout; predominantly the selection was Mikael Appelgren, Jörgen Persson and Jan-Ove Waldner. The only occasion those illustrious three names did not enter the court was in the initial group stage when Erik Lindh replaced Mikael Appelgren against Japan and Nigeria and deputized for Jörgen Persson when opposing Yugoslavia. Peter Karlsson did not appear in the mixed

doubles, Thomas von Scheele partnered Marie Svensson, not unsurprisingly the duo experiencing a third round exit at the hands of China's Wei Qingguang and Deng Yaping. Meanwhile, in the men's singles, in full distance contests, both departed in the second round, Peter Karlsson at the hands of Frenchman Jean-Philippe Gatien, Thomas von Scheele when opposing the classic defensive skills of Lee Gun Sang, in Chiba, as with his colleagues on duty for the Unified Korea team.

"At the time I was not in the top three in Sweden, so I was not disappointed that I didn't play in the team event; the players selected were better than me", said Peter Karlsson. "In the singles against Gatien I was two-one up and Thomas was two-nil ahead against Li Gun Sang; I liked Gatien's



Kristian Karlsson and Mattias Falck, reigning World champions

style, certainly losing that match I was disappointed."

An air of dissatisfaction and more intense when a match is close, a chance of victory having been spurned. Nevertheless, both had lost to players of high stature; thus, with the benefit of hindsight, the nature of the defeats combined with the quality of the opposition was arguably a motivating factor.

They were outsiders for the title but as a pairing but were not without achievements on the international stage; they had a very good understanding. Both had entered the national team in the 1986-1987 season and had become good friends. Furthermore, they had enjoyed success. In 1989 they had reached the men's doubles semi-finals at open international tournaments in China and Japan, whilst winning in Czechoslovakia; the following year they had secured bronze at the European Championships in Gothenburg.

"We were of the same generation, we'd been together many times at tournaments, we played together in team events, in doubles we'd had good results", explained Peter Karlsson. "There was a good chemistry, we knew each other well, we communicated well."

### Progress to final

Matches best of three games until the quarter-finals, in the opening round a straight games victory against Poland's Piotr Skierski and Lucjan Blaszczyk was the outcome. No great moments of alarm; the next round was somewhat different. They faced the Unified Korea pairing of Chy Kyo Sung and Choi Gyong Sop, the match went the full distance; in the decider one wondered if a major opportunity had been spurned.

"We knew we had the potential to do well but we were a little down, the match against the Koreans came soon after our singles defeats", reflected Peter Karlsson. "In the third we were 20-15 up, lost the next five points, had a further match point, saved a match point, before eventually winning."

Recovering from the precipice of defeat, just as losing full distance men's singles matches caused a feeling of dejection, so the doubles win, gained on the proverbial knife-edge, wrought self-belief.

"We were confident but next we faced Ilija Lupulesku and Zoran Primorac; at the Seoul

1988 Olympic Games they had been the silver medallists", recalled Peter Karlsson. "We were not the favourites, they were a very good pair, but we managed to win 21-19 in the third game."

Consecutive victories by the narrowest of margins; in the quarter-finals, matches now best of five games a somewhat unexpected partnership awaited, Norway's Frode Grini and Wang Yangsheng. A straight games win was the outcome.

"Winning two close matches was a big boost, earlier Frode Grini and Wang Yangsheng had beaten Chen Zhibin and Ma Wenge; different to the previous round we were the favourites", explained Peter Karlsson. "Now, it was best of five games and that suited us, just as against Lupulesku and Primorac, when they were the favourites, best of three games was better."

A straight games win was recorded, a medal guaranteed and a place in the gold medal contest for Sweden; in the penultimate round Erik Lindh and Jörgen Persson awaited.

"They were older than us, in singles they were the better players; we were the underdogs, we had never beaten them even in practice", sighed Peter Karlsson. "We lost the first game easily but then won the next two, both close games; we were able to play more freely."

### Left and right

A place in the men's doubles final for Peter Karlsson and Thomas von Scheele; moreover, a place for arguably the third best Swedish pairing!

The following year at the 1992 European Championships in Stuttgart, Peter Karlsson and Thomas von Scheele finished in the bronze medal position, at the semi-final stage they lost to Mikael Appelgren and Jan-Ove Waldner who in turn suffered in the final when facing Erik Lindh and Jörgen Persson.

It's maybe stretching things a little far but Ulf "Tickan" Carlsson, who had partnered Mikael Appelgren to gold at the 1985 World Championships in Gothenburg, clinched bronze in harness with Ulf Bengtsson at the 1984 European Championships in Moscow. So, was the partnership of Peter Karlsson and Thomas von Scheele the fourth best?

Whatever the argument, in a seven year period, Sweden had four men's doubles pairs of world class, each combination a left hander and right hander.

"A left handed and right handed partnership is easy" smiled Peter Karlsson. "It's like playing singles, the only time it's different is when the right hander is serving."

In the final a similar formation awaited, both 23 years of age, Lu Lin a right handed pen-holder in the traditional mode using one side of the racket only and Wang Tao, left handed, shake-hands grip, short pimples on the backhand.



“They were young, it was their first big championships; Lu Lin was very strong from the forehand but play to his backhand he was a little weak”, explained Peter Karlsson. “Both Thomas and myself had good backhands, it meant we could play wide, good placement was important, and I felt Lu Lin was struggling; I think when compared with Lu Lin we were better all round players but similar to Thomas and myself, Wang Tao was good at creating angles from the backhand.”

Some five years of understanding between the Swedes bore fruit; they established a two games to one lead and appeared on course for a four games victory.

“In the fourth we went ahead 8-1, then they came back; we lost the game”, reflected Peter Karlsson. “In the fifth we were down 14-17, a long rally, Thomas was simply amazing, they played safe; mentally at the crucial moments we were the better pair.”

**“It was a fantastic tournament, an amazing overall result; the best ever for Sweden, it was big news”**

Superior mentally; that fact was reflected in the eventual fifth game score line, Peter Karlsson and Thomas von Scheele surrendered just one further point.

Defeat for Lu Lin and Wang Tao but it was a lesson from which they clearly learnt; until beaten by Austria’s Karl Jindrak and Werner Schlager in the final at the 1996 English Open in Kettering, the first ever tournament on the ITTF Pro Tour, they were virtually invincible. They won gold at the Barcelona 1992 Olympic Games as well as the World Championships in 1993 in Gothenburg and 1995 in Tianjin.”

Such was the magnitude of the win recorded by Peter Karlsson and Thomas von Scheele in Chiba.

“It was a fantastic tournament, an amazing overall result; the best ever for Sweden, it was big news”, reminisced Peter Karlsson. “We flew back on an SAS flight, as we approached Stockholm, military fight planes provided an escort, simply incredible.”

Three titles for Sweden, three times the national anthem resounded. The men’s team title won two years earlier in Dortmund was retained, Jörgen Persson beat Jan-Ove Waldner in the men’s singles final to avenge the defeat of two years earlier.

Peter Karlsson and Thomas von Scheele added the icing to the cake, players who could not command a place in the Swedish men’s team in Chiba were world champions, a feat never achieved before or since, simply unique.



Peter Karlsson accounted for Jim Butler in the men’s singles opening round



The final versus Wang Tao and Lu Lin



Colleagues Erik Lindh and Jorgen Persson were the semi-final victims



The podium, Wang Tao, Lu Lin, Peter Karlsson, Thomas Von Scheele, Erik Lindh, Jorgen Persson, Dimitrij Mazunov, Andrey Mazunov

**Thomas von Scheele looks back**

It’s a long time ago, 30 years, the first thing that comes to my mind when I think back is that at the same time both me and Peter had tough losses in the second round of the men’s singles. I lost three-two to Li Gun Sang, Peter three-two to Gatien; then immediately we had to play in the second round of the doubles against the Korean couple.

Our feeling was that we were not really on top of things when the match started; we played badly and had one match point against us. We managed to come back and win that match, returned to the hotel and licked our wounds; we were disappointed to have lost in the singles but at the same

time happy we had survived in the doubles and could play the next day!

In the round of 16 we faced Lupulesku and Primorac, they were the tournament favourites. Peter played fantastically from the very beginning and I just followed him. I think it was then we started to realise that we could win the whole tournament, it helped that we were and still are such good friends outside the table tennis arena.

We both felt that it was fine to take risks and make mistakes; it took away a lot of pressure, especially when it mattered in critical moments in both the semi-final against Lindh and Persson and in the final against Wang Tao and Lu Lin.



Thomas von Scheele and Peter Karlsson aiming high

**World Championships 1991**

Chiba, Japan

Wednesday 24th April to Monday 6th May

*Neither player was selected for the men’s team event*

**Men’s Singles – Peter Karlsson**

Round One: v Jim Butler (USA) 10,18,19

Round Two: v Jean-Philippe Gatien (FRA) -16,19,21,-15,-15

**Men’s Singles– Thomas von Scheele**

Round One: v Christopher Arnold (Sri Lanka) 8,10,12

Round Two: v Li Gun Sang (PRK) 14,21,-13,-13,-15

**Mixed Doubles**

**Thomas von Scheele / Marie Svensson**

Round One: v Farjad Saif / Tayyeba Rasool (PAK) 6,11

Round Two: v Wong Kit U / Lai Lit Leung (MAC) 8,-18,18

Round Three: v Wei Qingguang / Deng Yaping (CHN)

-16,18,-5

**Men’s Doubles**

**Peter Karlsson/Thomas von Scheele**

Round One: v Piotr Skierski, Lucjan Blaszczak (POL) 14,15

Round Two: v Chy Kyo Sung / Choi Gyong Sop (KOR) 10,-20,22

Round Three: v Ilija Lupulesku / Zoran Primorac (YUG) 19,-12,19

Quarter-final: v Frode Grini / Wang Yangsheng (NOR) 15,14,10

Semi-final: v Erik Lindh / Jörgen Persson (SWE) -13,19,19,12

Final: v Lu Lin / Wang Tao (CHN) -16,16,14,-18,18



# THE MODEL OF RELIABILITY



Progress to the semi-final stage at the 2016 Women's World Cup in Philadelphia marked the end of international appearances for Tie Yana; most apt that the event should be her swansong. The prestigious annual tournament very much reflects her career as a member of the Hong Kong team. It was her 12th appearance, her first in 2002 in Jinan City, then on duty in the next ten before returning to the scene in the American metropolis; the mainstay, the player to whom her colleagues looked to set the example.

Only one player can boast more attendances, Austria's Liu Jia; when she competed in Chengdu in 2018 she made her 13th appearance. However, there is a notable difference. Ever competitive in illustrious company, but Liu Jia never advanced beyond the quarter-final round; Tie Yana reached nine semi-finals, on three occasions the bronze medallist, in 2008 in Kuala Lumpur the runner up. "I think from 2002 to 2016, my results were basically stable, I did not expect my career to have lasted that long", said Tie Yana. "There was nothing particular about each tournament, no outstanding memory, I just enjoyed them, I

was committed in every match I played." Ever reliable, it was the same with regards to other major tournaments; married to Tang Peng, the only cause of absence being for the birth of her son, Tyler Tang in 2013. Commencing in 2004 in Athens, she competed in four consecutive Olympic Games; overall, 13 World Championships starting in 2003 in Paris, the same number of appearances at the ITTF World Tour Grand Finals, the first being in 2002 in Stockholm. "In both 2004 and 2006, we were runners up on both occasions at the World Championships", recalled Tie Yana. In the final against China

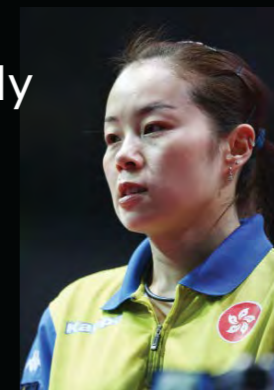
in 2004, she had lined up alongside Lau Sui Fei and Zhang Rui, two years later in the same contest in Bremen, Lin Ling had replaced Zhang Rui. Defeat at the hands of China, six years later in Dortmund, it was the same again but at the semi-final stage. Tie Yana inflicted the only defeat on the champions elect; she beat Li Xiaoxia, the player who some four months later would be anointed gold medallist at the London 2012 Olympic Games. "I think I developed some new techniques at that time, especially the backhand flick over the table when returning services; it posed a threat to opponents", reflected Tie Yana.

## Silver medallists at the 2006 World Championships

- Zhang Rui
- Tie Yana
- Lin Ling
- Lau Sui Fei
- Yu Kwok See
- Li Huifen



"I think I developed some new techniques at that time, especially the backhand flick over the table when returning services"







**Top step achieved**

Medals at World Championships but not gold, the problem as with all challengers is arresting the top step of the podium from China; however, at both the Asian Cup and Asian Championships, that pinnacle was achieved.

In 2004 in Kitakyushu, Tie Yana emerged the winner at the Asian Cup accounting for Japan's Ai Fukuhara in the final; one year later in 2005 at the Asian Championships in Jeju-do, lining up alongside Lau Sui Fei and Lin Ling, a 3-0 win was posted in the women's team final in opposition to the host nation's Kim Kyungah, Kim Bokrae and Moon Hyunjung.

China with Guo Yan, Guo Yue and Niu Jianfeng on duty experienced a 3-2 penultimate round defeat against the Koreans, who in that fixture preferred the attacking skills of Lee Eunhee to the defensive attributes of Kim Bokrae.

"We were all so happy, so excited", reflected Tie Yana.

Rising to the occasion, at open international tournaments, Tie Yana fulfilled that feat time and again; it was on the ITTF World Tour where her durability and consistency were exemplified.

A debut in 2002 in Italy, then later in the year success in Gangneung, the first of her nine wins in 11 women's singles finals, a most impressive conversion rate; the number of titles only exceeded by members of the Chinese national team.

However, it is in women's doubles where she excelled the most; the top step of the podium reserved 15 times. She succeeded on one occasion with Song Ah Sim and four times with Jiang Huajun but it is the partnership with Zhang Rui that stands out the most. Between 2005 and 2007 they prevailed on 10 occasions; the only pairs with better records being the Chinese combinations of Guo Yue and Li Xiaoxia, alongside Ding Ning and Liu Shiwen. Each won 11 times.

"Winning in Gangneung, I felt I officially started my professional career in table tennis", said Tie Yana. "I think in the doubles with all partners, the mutual understanding was most important, especially to be able to use my own strength to complement any shortcomings of my partners; simply to support each other."

**Pivotal years**

Unquestionably, 2002 was a milestone; it was a year when she had to make a major decision.

"At that time, I was studying at the East China University of Technology in Shanghai. I represented the Chinese University Team which participated in the 2001 World University Games in Beijing", explained Tie Yana. "I managed to win three gold medals including women's team with Zhang Yining and Niu Jianfeng, the mixed doubles with Wang Liqin and the women's singles. I was then lucky enough to be invited by the Hong Kong Table Tennis Association to join their team."

Illustrious company; in that tournament there were most notable names in action. Wang Liqin beat Chinese Taipei's Chuang Chih-Yuan in the men's singles final, Liu Guozheng had to settle for bronze. In the women's singles final, Tie Yana overcame Niu Jianfeng having in the penultimate round accounted for Korea Republic's Ryu Jihae. In the adjacent semi-final, Niu Jianfeng ended the hopes of a certain Zhang Yining.

The results suggest Tie Yana was more than worth a place in the Chinese line-up but she never played for China and was never a member of the national team.

Nevertheless, born on Sunday 13th May 1979 in Henan province, the key factor is she did experience a Chinese table tennis education, there is no better.

"I was seven years old; at the time, the Zhengzhou City Sports School table tennis team was in my school, the coach directly selected team members from the school and I was lucky to be selected", explained Tie Yana. "Wang Yantong became my first coach, later I played for the Zhengzhou Sports School; I developed comprehensive techniques and a good feeling when in the field of play."

A constructive schedule in place, Tie Yana, the fluent backhand a major attribute, she responded to the programme in the country that is the hotbed of the sport, the competition for places in teams at all levels intense; dedication essential.

"Table tennis is a national sport in China with vast numbers of participants; there are many talented and capable athletes; in college, every day after classes we had table tennis training for about three to four hours", explained Tie Yana. "You must love the sport, be positive and be motivated if you want to keep winning."

Playing days over, now resident in nearby Shenzhen but what of the future; just as when competing Tie Yana is very positive.

"For me I want to keep my involvement in table tennis", she stressed. "Members of the Hong Kong table tennis team are now basically born in Hong Kong; in recent years, they have achieved excellent results and I am optimistic about their future prospects!"

In the era of Tie Yana, colleagues such as Lau Sui Fei, Lin Ling and Zhang Rui, honed their skills in China before crossing the border; now with the likes of Doo Hoi Kem,



Partnering Jiang Huajun, runners up at the 2009 and 2010 Grand Finals



London 2012 Olympic Games

CAREER HIGHLIGHTS | TIE YANA



Rio 2016 Olympic Games

Lee Ho Ching and Minnie Soo Wai Yam, bronze medallists in the women's team event at the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games, lead the way, times have changed.

They are all home grown, they have a role model, the splendid Tie Yana; Hong Kong's most successful ever player.

**Olympic Games**

- 2004 Athens: **WS** QF, **WD** QF (Song Ah Sim)
  - 2008 Beijing: **WS** QF, **WT** Fifth Place (Lau Sui Fei, Lin Ling)
  - 2012 London: **WS** R3, **WT** QF (Jiang Huajun, Lee Ho Ching)
  - 2016 Rio de Janeiro: **WT** QF (Lee Ho Ching, Doo Hoi Kem)
- World Championships**
- 2005 Shanghai: **WD** Semi-Final (Zhang Rui)
  - 2007 Zagreb: **XD** Semi-Final (Ko Lai Chak)
  - 2009 Yokohama: **WD** Semi-Final (Jiang Huajun)
  - 2011 Rotterdam: **WD** Semi-Final (Jiang Huajun)
- World Team Championships**
- 2004 Doha: **WT** RU (Lau Sui Fei, Song Ah Sim, Yu Kwok See, Zhang Rui)
  - 2006 Bremen: **WT** RU (Lau Sui Fei, Lin Ling, Yu Kwok See, Zhang Rui)
  - 2008 Guangzhou: **WT** SF (Jiang Huajun, Lau Sui Fei, Lin Ling, Zhang Rui)
  - 2012 Dortmund: **WT** SF (Jiang Huajun, Lee Ho Ching, Ng Wing Nam, Yu Kwok See)
  - 2014 Tokyo: **WT** SF (Doo Hoi Kem, Jiang Huajun, Lee Ho Ching, Ng Wing Nam)

**Women's World Cup**

- 2003 Singapore: **WS** Third Place
  - 2004 Xiaoshan: **WS** Third Place
  - 2008 Kuala Lumpur: **WS** Runner Up
  - 2011 Singapore: **WS** Third Place
- 2001 Summer Universiade**
- 2001 Beijing: **WS** Winner, **XD** Winner (Wang Liqin), **WT** Winner (Niu Jianfeng, Zhang Yining)

**Asian Games**

- 2006 Doha: **WS** Runner Up, **WD** Runner Up (Zhang Rui)

**Asian Championships**

- 2003 Bangkok: **WS** Semi-Final, **WD** Semi-Final (Song Ah Sim), **XD** Semi-Final (Cheung Yuk)
- 2005 Jeju-do: **WT** Winner (Lau Sui Fei, Lin Ling, Song Ah Sim, Zhang Rui), **WD** SF (Zhang Rui)
- 2007 Yangzhou: **WT** SF (Jiang Huajun, Lin Ling, Zhang Rui), **WD** Semi-Final (Zhang Rui),

**XD** Runner Up (Ko Lai Chak)

- 2009 Lucknow: **WT** SF (Jiang Huajun, Lau Sui Fei, Lin Ling, Tie Yana, Zhang Rui)
- 2015 Pattaya: **WT** SF (Doo Hoi Kem, Lee Ho Ching, Minnie Soo Wai Yam), **WD** SF (Jiang Huajun)

**Asian Cup**

Women's Singles – Winner: 2004 (Kitakyushu), Third Place 2003 (Kitakyushu), 2005 (New Delhi)

**ITTF World Tour**

Women's Singles  
 Winner: 2002 (Gangneung City), 2003 (Rio de Janeiro), 2004 (St Petersburg), 2005 (Zagreb), 2006 (Jeonju), (2006 (Taipei City), 2007 (Belo Horizonte), 2010 Budaors), 2016 (Budapest)  
 Runner Up: 2005 (Gothenburg), 2005 (Fort Lauderdale)

**Women's Doubles (Zhang Rui)**

Winner: 2005 (Fort Lauderdale), 2005 (Gothenburg), 2005 (Santiago), 2005 (Magdeburg), 2005 (Velenje), 2005 (Zagreb), 2006 (Jeonju), 2006 (Yokohama), 2007 (Belo Horizonte), 2007 (Santiago)  
 Runner Up: 2006 (Qatar), 2006 (Singapore), 2007 (Qatar)  
 Women's Doubles (Jiang Huajun) - Winner: 2008 (Santiago), 2008 (Shanghai), 2011 (Almeria), 2015 (Doha); Runner Up: 2009 (Kuwait City), 2009 (Korea Republic), 2016 (Budapest)

Women's Doubles (Song Ah Sim) - Winner: 2004 (Warsaw), Runner Up: 2002 (Courmayeur), 2003 (Aarhus)

Women's Doubles (Doo Hoi Kem) - Runner Up: 2015 (Olomouc)

Women's Doubles (Lin Ling) - Runner Up: 2007 (Wels)

**ITTF World Tour Grand Finals**

Women's Doubles (Jiang Huajun) – Runner Up: 2009 (Macao), 2010 (Seoul)

**Women's World Ranking**

Highest: No.3 (July 2006)



# Fortitude, fourfold

Cancelled, that was the word which appeared time and again on the 2021 tournament calendar; organising such gatherings was more exacting than ever before, requirements needed owing to the advent of Covid-19, added to management and administrative tasks.

A massive challenge, it took bravery to go ahead and spearhead such ventures; the bravest of them all was Paul Calle, President of the Ecuador Table Tennis Federation.

Organised in Cuenca, the principal city in Azuay Province located high in the Andes Mountains, not only was he the man at the helm for one event, he directed four in succession! Most notably the programme catering for the youngest age group through to senior.

Commencing on Monday 11th October and concluding on Saturday 6th November, the schedule began with the ITTF Americas Continental Hopes Week and Challenge, the ITTF Pan American Under 11 and Under 13 Championships followed; next was a World Table Tennis Youth Contender tournament, the ITTF Ecuador International Open concluding proceedings.

"These kind of activities are beneficial to the development of table tennis in Ecuador in different ways: more exposure for table tennis, more possibilities of national players participating in international events, economic returns", explained Paul Calle.

Equally, Cuenca has a reputation for sport; Jefferson Perez gold medallist in the 20 kilometre walk at the Atlanta 1996 Olympic Games and bronze medallist in 2008 in Beijing hails from the city.

"Cuenca has the best conditions to hold international table tennis



events, a good venue and hotel capacity. The city is recognised as the sports capital in Ecuador; also, it is a great touristic city named "Cultural Heritage of Humanity", added Paul Calle. "Another fact is that several members of the Executive Committee are based in Cuenca, as well members of the staff, so it makes the organisation and logistics more efficient. Additionally, we have support from the Azuay Sport Federation, the Municipality of Cuenca, the Ministry of Sport, and the Ecuadorian Olympic Committee; also, there is help from some public and private universities as well as local companies."

## Management

Essential factors but one component shines through, Paul Calle has created a most harmonious group; a calm personality, prepared to listen, he excels at man management.

"We have a great team. They worked very hard for the events. Even though we have just three employees, they are very efficient", stressed Paul Calle. "Mireya Cojitambo is our Administrator, Byron Martinez is in charge of Technical Issues and last but not least, Nicole Smith is our Social Communicator. Also, we had the support of four head volunteers that assisted in the logistics for each area. Students of three different universities related to sport took part as volunteers. Additionally, some parents of players gave us a hand. It was amazing!"

Most certainly in Byron Martinez there is an employee who has a deep understanding of table tennis. He represented Ecuador at the 2006 World Team Championships in the German city of Bremen; a line up that included a 15-year-old in the guise of Alberto Miño, a player who since that date has been the backbone of the national team. He became the first Ecuadorian to compete in the table tennis events at an Olympic Games when he played in Tokyo.

"Alberto's appearance in Tokyo has been a great boost, it has given much more exposure to our sport at national level; also, we have gained more respect from other countries", emphasised Paul Calle. "He proved that Ecuadorians have the ability to achieve big things through table tennis; our younger players get motivated from his example. They have the chance to see table tennis as a profession."

## Rewarding

Most certainly there was a host of young talents present in Cuenca seeking to emulate Alberto Miño, a fact that motivated Paul Calle.

"The possibility to host the Continental Hopes was amazing", explained Paul Calle. "One of the most important memories that I have was being able to watch the innocent faces of children."

A rewarding experience for Paul Calle as was every aspect of the entire initiative.

"During the Pan American Championships, I really enjoyed all the creative support from the fans of each country. It was amazing", reflected Paul Calle. "Also, in the World Table Tennis tournament our players obtained some good results, that was satisfying; in the International Open, it was really good to see players from India, Austria and Guyana."

The project was a personal triumph for Paul Calle, well deserved, he had given heart and soul.

"In general, sharing and seeing old friends, being able to show them my hometown, the culture and our ability to work as a team was special", he stressed with pride. "Proving we can do things well and with quality standards."

Many positives but as with any tournament, wherever the destination, there are problems to negotiate. Cuenca only possesses a domestic airport, the nearest international airports are Guayaquil or Quito, each a short 30 minute flight.

"We did not make any special arrangements, but we guaranteed safe travel from Guayaquil, the official airport to Cuenca", explained Paul Calle. "For us definitely the lack of resources is always a problem, but I think the most difficult situation was the Covid time."

Undoubtedly, it was a major step forward for Ecuador, an experience from which all have learnt.



At the 2021 ITTF Annual General Meeting



Opening the series of tournaments in Cuenca



At the 2021 ITTF Pan American Championships in Lima



“Negotiation and communication skills were vital throughout; I think having these facets is most important for the organisation of major events”, endorsed Paul Calle. “Often you have to negotiate with hotels, the municipality, even with your own helpers; to have assertive communication is fundamental in order to achieve good co-operation between national associations and different stakeholders.”

Efficiently any potential difficulty was addressed but when trying to organise matters for young players, Ecuador does have a problem, school holidays vary. In the cities at sea-level, such as Guayaquil, the school year starts in May, in the highlands and the Amazon region, as in Quito, in September.

“It is difficult, most of all when you have players from each region” said Paul Calle. “Organising events is not the big challenge, bringing together players from the national team is a problem. We organise some training camps and try our best; thankfully parental support is always good.”

**Promising players**

Notably promising young players are emerging; names in particular to catch the eye being Nathaly Paredes, Jeremy Cedeño, Diego Piguave and Neycer Robalino.

Nathaly Paredes partnered Albert Miño to gold at the 2017 Bolivarian Games; in 2019 she was the junior girls’ singles runner up at the South American Junior and Cadet Championships.

Likewise, at the South American Junior and Cadet Championships, in 2020 in the cadet age group Jeremy Cedeño emerged with three silver medals to his name. He was the boys’ singles runner up, the same finish with Diego Piguave in the boys’ team and boys’ doubles.

More recently at the World Table Tennis Youth Contender tournament in Cuenca, Diego Piguave won the under 19 boys’ singles before



Agreement in 2021 signed with Vivek Kohli, Chair of Stag International, in Houston

partnering Neycer Robalino to men’s doubles bronze at the Cali 2021 Pan American Junior Games.

“We have built a long term Strategic Plan for 2021-2028; in this plan we can pursue different strategic lines like good governance and management”, explained Paul Calle. “We have a pathway. The plan is to start designing projects and programmes in order to achieve the different strategic objectives.”

A pathway, the next step for such players is to compete at senior level; one of the problems in recent years is that there has been a dearth of open international tournaments in Latin America. Ecuador has no great history in this area of competition. Arguably the bravest decision of all made by Paul Calle was to organise such a tournament.

“The Ecuador International Open

was the only such tournament to be held in Latin America in 2021; Argentina had planned a tournament for December but a low entry and Covid forced cancellation”, explained Paul Calle. “I think the pandemic was one of the factors that affected the entry for our tournament; nevertheless, we did attract entries from India and Austria.”

Perhaps the entry was not as had been hoped, travel is comparatively expensive when considering South America; a fact that with co-operation, Paul Calle believes can be addressed.

“Once we overcome the Covid situation, maybe a good strategy will be that countries in Latin America such as Ecuador, Colombia and Peru make arrangements in order to host consecutive events,” explained Paul Calle. “This will be more attractive



Players and coaches from Ecuador with Paul Calle at the 2019 South American Regional Hopes week in Cuenca



Players and coaches from throughout the continent with Paul Calle at the 2019 South American Regional Hopes week in Cuenca

for international players, especially for players from Europe and Asia, they can fly to the continent with one ticket and then start a tour of these countries.”

Ready for the challenge, four international events in succession, would Paul Calle do the same again? He answered without a split second’s hesitation.

“Yes, of course. It was such a nice experience; these kind of activities are always helpful in order to develop table tennis in Ecuador”, he concluded. “It is hard work, but the reward is amazing!

The reward, good news for the country that straddles the equator and from which the name is derived; most importantly the man at the helm is progressive, forward thinking and highly motivated, Paul Calle, President of the Ecuador Table Tennis Federation.

**PAUL CALLE**

Born on 17th March 1975 to Augusto and Jodefina Calle, Paul has three elder sisters, Daniela, Valeria and Ana; his partner is Carla Cadena. Notably when six years old it was his sisters that motivated him to play table tennis.

Spanish his native language, he speaks fluent English being an Agronomic Engineer by profession, graduating at the University of Cuenca. Additionally, he owns a Master in Sports Training qualification from the Universidad de las Fuerzas Armadas (ESPE), and an International Coaching diploma from Leipzig University (ITK).

Currently he is the Chief Executive Officer at the Cuenca Sports Club, in total 12 sports. Additionally, he is Head of Physical Education teaching at the “Técnico Salesiano” College.

Representing Ecuador, he was the runner up in the under 12 boys’ singles at the 1987 South American Championships in Lima. Later at the 1994 South American Games in Valencia and at the South American Championships in Isla Margarita, he was a men’s singles bronze medalist. At the 2005 Bolivarian Games in Armenia, he was a member of the silver medal winning team. He competed in six World Championships commencing in 1995 in Tianjin, followed by stints as national coach from 2006 to 2007 and 2010 to 2011.

Vice President of the Tecni Club; most recently, he has fulfilled the office of Fiscal and Treasurer of the Latin American Table Tennis Union in addition to being the General Secretary and Treasurer of ITTF Americas. He is a member of ACODEPA (Asociación de Confederaciones Deportivas Panamericana), the ITTF Board of Directors and the Ecuador National Olympic Committee.

He was elected President of the Ecuador Table Tennis Federation in 2017.



The 2019 Under 11 & Under 13 South American Championships in Cuenca



# 'IT IS GOOD TO BE CRAZY'

Recognised as a National Umpire and a National Referee in the country then known as Czechoslovakia, in 1979 when **Karol Ziduliak** arrived in the splendidly located west coast Canadian city of Vancouver with his wife Magdalena and three daughters, Olga aged 12, Erika 11 and Eva just two years of age; for the 39 year old, refugees, it was start again.



Karol with wife Magdalena



The Blue Badge qualification is the fourth level of umpiring; the first being basically for local events, the next a national qualification, followed by the International White Badge.

In order to gain the Blue Badge, an International White Badge qualified umpire must have been active for a minimum period of two years, possessing proven experience in at least two international events during that period. Additionally, it is necessary to attend an Advanced Umpires Training Course and pass the ITTF Advanced Rules Examination.

Furthermore, it is required to gain "Meets Expectation" evaluations from at least three evaluators in a minimum of two competitions and pass an oral interview in English, either in person, via Skype or similar. A Blue Badge umpire must be competent in English.

Evaluation starts only after attending an Advanced Umpires Training course and passing the Advanced Rules Examination; if a candidate fails the Advanced Rules Examination, a period of one year must elapse before a retake. A different paper will be set.

After obtaining the first "meets expectations" the remaining three should be obtained within seven attempts. No evaluations may be from an evaluator from the umpire's own association.

The Blue Badge process must be completed within five years of attending an Advanced Umpires Training course and passing the Advanced Rules Examination.

Departing a nation that had spawned a host of world champions, to one which could not boast such a history, did not necessarily please the man who was comparatively experienced in the world of officialdom.

"I was not happy about it, but at the end it has turned out to be good for me", said Karol Ziduliak. "I learnt English much faster and passed all my exams from Club Umpire to Blue Badge Umpire at the first attempt. It has helped me also in my personal and working life."

Step by step Karol Ziduliak, whose only English words when he arrived in Canada were "thank you" and "welcome" climbed the ladder. Arriving in Vancouver, eventually he worked as a technician for the Insurance Company of British Columbia where he was responsible for building maintenance.

"Back home in Czechoslovakia I was a mechanical engineer; at one point in

charge of the maintenance of pumping stations and an oil pipeline, "Druzba", coming from the Soviet Union", explained Karol Ziduliak. "I became persona non grata after the Russian invasion in 1968, changed employer and at the end escaped in 1979. We lost our citizenship; everything was confiscated because we had betrayed our motherland. After the change in 1990 we managed to restore our citizenships, but no return of confiscated things. I was not able to get a qualification as a Mechanical Engineer in Canada; lack of Canadian experience and language."

Difficult times, table tennis proved a saviour. He umpired in many tournaments in Canadian colours. Notably he was on duty at the 1987 World Championships in New Delhi, the following year at the Olympic Games in Seoul and in 1996 at the Paralympic Games held in Atlanta. "The Seoul 1988 Olympic Games

was very special, because it was the first time that table tennis was included in Olympic Games", reminisced Karol Ziduliak. "A refugee eight years earlier, I represented my adopted country of Canada."

Subsequently, in June 2004, he became the first umpire in Canada to gain the Blue Badge. He officiated at a host of World Championships, later becoming an Evaluator for the Blue Badge Programme; his efforts being recognised by the ITTF Umpires and Referees Committee.

Additionally, after passing the Provincial and National Referees Examinations, he succeeded in 1998 in Houston when sitting the International Referees Examination.

"If I remember well out of three participants from Canada, I was the only one who passed" recalled Karol Ziduliak. "I guess many years of refereeing in my old country of Czechoslovakia paid off."

## Demand high

Highly qualified, in his capacity as an International Referee, Karol Ziduliak was very much in demand in North America, in particular being on duty at Canadian Championships, Canada Winter Games, British Columbia Championships, British Columbia Winter Games plus a whole range of Canadian tournaments as well as at both the United States Closed and Open Championships.

Most notably, Karol became a familiar figure at World Veteran Championships; a career that started in 2000 when the event was held in Vancouver.

"The success of the Championships in Vancouver was thanks to the many volunteers", explained Karol Ziduliak. "I think that was one of the reasons why organizers of following World Veteran Championships invited me to work as the Deputy Referee."

He officiated in the role of Deputy Referee in 2004 in Yokohama, 2008 in Rio de Janeiro; then two years later in Hohhot and in 2016 in Alicante.

**"At one point in British Columbia, we had more International Umpires and Blue Badge Umpires than the rest of Canada"**



### Para table tennis

However, an area in which he became particularly well known was in the Paralympic arena; his introduction being at the inaugural Para Pan American Championships staged in 2001 in Buenos Aires.

Christian Lillieroos was the Technical Delegate; Raul Calin, nowadays the ITTF Secretary-General fulfilled the role of Referee. However, there was no available Deputy Referee with an international qualification. Karol had arrived with Greg Dzioba and fitted the bill. A very efficient team was formed, later with Hernan Brizuela, a local Referee, all enjoyed the ambiance of dinner after an exhausting schedule.

"Certainly, I gladly accepted the invitation, as they say you need to be at the right place at the right time; that was the beginning of my many years of involvement with Para table tennis. It was before Para table tennis joined ITTF. It was well known that the Para tournaments used to be short of qualified umpires and in many cases qualified Referees", reminisced Karol Ziduliak. "I am sure many umpires and referees can remember that organisers quite often invited spectators to help with umpiring. I have been invited to many Para tournaments as a Referee, or Deputy Referee."

Additional to fulfilling the role of Referee, Karol Ziduliak was the Technical Officer for the Para Table Tennis Department when matters came under the umbrella of the ITTF in 2006, a role he fulfilled until 2011.

"I was involved with merging Para rules and ITTF rules during that time. Also, I qualified as a Technical Delegate for Para tournaments and have been the Technical Delegate to many Para Tournaments in South America, the United States and Europe", explained Karol Ziduliak. "I attended my last Para tournament as a Technical Director in Buenos Aires in December 2018. I must stress, that I have enjoyed volunteering for Para events very much. Para athletes



Karol Ziduliak with Greg Dzioba

and coaches appreciate officials much more than able bodied. It is a completely different atmosphere."

### Home soil

Totally immersed internationally in a wide range of events, Karol Ziduliak always paid attention to his locality, British Columbia and Canada.

"In Canada, I started to work as a member of Officials Committee and later as the Officials Committee chairman. Besides doing regular duties on our committee with Art Koberstein, Darek Mikita and myself, we prepared and administered refresher exams for Umpires and Referees", stressed Karol Ziduliak. "I believe perhaps the first refresher exams in the world."

Innovating, introducing new ideas; most importantly, Karol Ziduliak spread the word. He worked tirelessly on developing and qualifying Club Umpires, Provincial Umpires, National Umpires, International Umpires and Provincial Referees.

"At one point in British Columbia, we had more International Umpires and Blue Badge Umpires than the rest of Canada. I remember we had at least two full years when every match of every tournament was umpired by a certified umpire", said Karol Ziduliak. "It made me feel good, especially when many of these officials have told me that thanks to me, they have become table tennis officials. Some call this time a golden era of table tennis officiating in British Columbia. It would not have been possible without exceptionally good support from the Board of Directors of the British Columbia Table Tennis Association; thank you for that."

Grateful to the support afforded and most grateful to his wife of some 55 years, Magdalena, whom he married on Saturday 7th May 1966 and now needs almost full-time support, Karol will only officiate if needed at events in Vancouver.

"She needs me almost full-time, because of her health issues", added Karol Ziduliak. "Now is the time to

pay back for putting up with my very extensive activities in table tennis, not only putting up, but she always encouraged me."

Present at major tournaments throughout the current century, solving problems, finding solutions, keeping the peace; it requires a sense of humour!

"I used to say, only the crazy volunteer for table tennis", smiled Karol Ziduliak. "I am proud to be one of them. I have enjoyed every minute."

It's good to be crazy!

### Career Highlights

#### Major International Tournaments

- 2003 World Junior Championships: Santiago, Chile (Referee)
- 2005 CPISR (Cerebral Palsy International Sports and Recreation Association World Championships): New London, Connecticut, USA (Referee)
- 2005 ITTF World Junior Circuit: Richmond, Canada (Referee)
- 2006 Arctic Winter Games: Kenai, Alaska, USA (Referee)
- 2019 North American Olympic Qualification: Chicago, USA (Deputy Referee)

#### World Veteran Championships

- 2000 Vancouver: (Referee)
- 2004 Yokohama: (Deputy Referee)
- 2008 Rio de Janeiro: (Deputy Referee)
- 2010 Hohhot: (Deputy Referee)
- 2016 Alicante: (Deputy Referee)
- Para Table Tennis
- 2005 Parapan American Championships: Brasilia, Brazil (Referee)
- 2006 Para World Championships: Montreux, Switzerland (Deputy Referee)
- 2007 Para Pan American Games: Rio de Janeiro, Brazil (Referee)
- 2008 Paralympic Games: Beijing, China (Deputy Referee)
- 2009 Para Pan American Championships: Margarita Island, Venezuela (Referee)
- 2011 Para Pan American Games: Guadalajara, Mexico (Deputy Referee)
- 2015 Para Pan American Games: Toronto, Canada (Deputy Referee)
- 2016 Para United States Open: Las Vegas, USA (Deputy Referee)



# Cuba's long wait ends

Present in 1992 in Barcelona alongside Yolanda Rodriguez, eight years later on duty in Sydney in partnership with Leticia Suarez but there was no immediate successor to Marisel Ramirez, Cuba's leading player of the era.

In fact, the Caribbean island had to wait two decades before once again a female player entered the table tennis arena at an Olympic Games. They had wait for a player to emerge, born almost two years after the closing ceremony at the Sydney Olympic Games on Sunday 1st October 2000.

At the Latin American Singles and Mixed Doubles Qualification Tournament staged in the Argentine city of Rosario some three months before the torch was lit at the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games, Daniela Fonseca, 18 years old at the time, reserved her berth in the multi-sport gathering.

She gained the very last women's singles place available in Rosario, prior to enjoying mixed doubles success alongside 29-year-old Jorge Campos; to give him his full name, Jorge Moises Campos Valdes.

"Seeing all the players that I followed on the internet since I was a child; it was a great experience to share the occasion with the greatest players", reflected Daniela Fonseca. "It is something that I dreamed of but did not imagine reaching so soon. Moises is one of my idols and playing with him as his doubles partner was something unique, it is something that I will tell my children one day."

An experience to savour and could she relish the same taste in Paris in 2024? She has already made one step in that direction. At the Cali 2021 Pan American Junior Games, she won the women's singles title; it means she has qualified to compete in the Santiago 2023 Pan American Games, in itself a qualification tournament for



**Daniela Fonseca**  
 Date of birth: 24th Jul 2002  
 Residence: Perico, Matanza Province, Cuba  
 Family: Elder sister Ailen, younger sister Valeria  
 Racket: Butterfly Viscaria  
 Rubber Forehand: Tibhar MX  
 Rubber Backhand: Butterfly Raystorm pimples out

the Paris 2024 Olympic Games. Add the women's team bronze medal, secured alongside Idalys Lovet, Lisi Castillo and Lizdainet Rodriguez at the 2018 Pan American Championships in Santiago, her first international tournament of note, the success in Cali more than matches the efforts of three years earlier. "To have been the champion in Cali is among one of my greatest achievements, since it was one of the few official competitions in my age group; I hardly knew any players in the category," added Daniela Fonseca. "I almost always play senior events; if we talk just about senior events, for sure the best is to have qualified for Tokyo."

## Medal the goal

Playing in Cali, an under 21 event, was somewhat different to Tokyo where the world's best were on duty; also, in the Colombian city she was the women's singles fifth seed, a podium finish was a realistic target.

"In Cali my goal was to win a medal for Cuba, I was the only Cuban woman who competed in the table tennis events at the Olympic Games, so I felt pressure; there was a weight on my back", explained Daniela Fonseca. "I started quite nervously and insecure but thanks to my teammates, as the days went by, I was moving away from that feeling."

Gradually, Daniela warmed to the challenge, feeling more and more at home in the environment.

"At first the tables and balls seemed a little strange, but I adapted" continued Daniela Fonseca. "I felt comfortable with my services and in my attacking play."

The fifth seed, a confidence boost came in the second round when in

six games she accounted for Puerto Rico's Fabiola Diaz.

"It was my toughest match; I started playing under a lot of pressure and insecurity. She is a player who caused me confusion because of the way she plays", said Daniela Fonseca. "It was a match I thought I might lose; it was the first time I had played against her. Fortunately, I was able to control the situation."

A major hurdle negotiated, Daniela Fonseca beat Brazil's Laura Watanabe and Chile's Valentina Rios to book her place in the final where Mexico's Arantxa Cossio awaited.

"Before the final, I felt a little calmer; I felt more confident and more focused on my game", stressed Daniela Fonseca. "After winning I was very happy, to be honest I had never thought of qualifying for Santiago; I just wanted to focus on playing my best, enjoying this event, the rest a bonus. Even so, being able to participate in the Pan American Games in 2023 is something very, very, special; I know that it is not something easy to achieve for a young player."

## Energetic

It is yet another goal achieved for the young lady from Perico, in Matanza province, who decided to try table tennis when a coach came to her school in Cerro Pelado in search of new talents.

"When I was a child, I had a lot of energy so I thought it could be a good way to expend my energy in my free time after school and then return home tired", smiled Daniela Fonseca.

Nowadays life is much different; predominantly it is far away from Caribbean shores across the Atlantic Ocean in Germany, a fact that underlines her dedication. Table tennis is the one sport she plays, free time is with her family, listening to music or riding horses.

"I practise at the Topspin Sport TischTennis-Center in Bad Aibling, Germany where I have been living, but the last few days before Cali,

I was in Cerro Pelado, Cuba with my teammates", explained Daniela Fonseca. "In Cuba, normally I practise five to six days per week, from 9.00 am to 12.00 noon in the morning and then from 5.00 pm to 7.00 pm or 8.00 pm; there is physical training every day. If I am in Germany, two sessions each of two hours and a third with my teammate Andy Pereira."

A well organised schedule but like all other sports, disrupted by the Covid-19 pandemic.

"During Covid, it was pretty hard because I did not have the chance to train for eight months, I just did some physical training", explained Daniela Fonseca. "Before the Pre-Olympic in Argentina in April, I was able to train hard only in February and March, so I already knew it would be a difficult

tournament for me."

Times seemingly now more settled, Daniela plans to study for a bachelor's degree at the Manuel Fajardo University of Physical Culture and Sports Sciences, combining education whilst playing high level table tennis.

"Right now, I just want to prepare myself for the next competition, always giving my best and continue playing table tennis, the sport I have been taught and that I like so much", concluded Daniela Fonseca.

In 2021 her name became increasingly prominent in international circles; she emerged a most worthy and respected opponent.

She set a standard, a high standard; now the questions posed. Will she motivate generations to follow? How soon will there be a successor?



Patrick Franziska and Petrissa Solja were the first round opponents in Tokyo for Daniela Fonseca and Jorge Campos



Marisel Rodriguez seen here in 1987, competed in the 1992 and 2000 Olympic Games



At the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games





## Delightful innocence

Overawed by the occasion, it has happened to more than one player, simply the biggest theatre on earth proved too great; it has happened to the most successful.

Matthew Syed, now a celebrated journalist, author, broadcaster, openly admits that when representing Great Britain in the table tennis events at the Sydney 2000 Olympic Games, he choked, his performance way below par.

One player for whom that situation does not apply is Syria's Hend Zaza. She was on duty at the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games, then two days after the torch had been extinguished in Japan's capital city, on Tuesday 10th August, she was present in Amman, Jordan at the Arab Championships.

Simply, for the young lady born on Thursday 1st January 2009 in Hama, her table tennis career commencing in 2014, it was "water off a duck's

back"; another tournament, somewhat mesmerised and bemused why she should be the focus of attention. There is a delightful innocence.

The reason is quite simple. She was the youngest competitor in any event in Tokyo, when the torch was lit at the opening ceremony on Friday 23rd July, she 12 years and 203 days old.

She was the youngest Olympian since 1992 in Barcelona when Spain's Carlos Front competed in rowing and Hungary's Judit Kiss in swimming. At the start of the Barcelona Games on Saturday 25th July, Carlos Front was 11 years and 269 days old, Judit Kiss 12 years and 180 days old.

The youngest ever recorded female competitor at a Summer Olympic Games is Italian gymnast Luigina Giavotti, she was 11 years and 301 days old when she competed in 1928 in Amsterdam.

However, if the Games

had been held as originally planned, Hend Zaza would have been younger than all three; on the scheduled date of Friday 24th July 2020 for the opening ceremony, she would have been 11 years and 205 days old. The only recorded younger females are figure skaters at the Winter Olympic Games. Great Britain's Cecilia College was 11 years and 73 days old when she competed in 1932 in Lake Placid, Romania's Beatrice Huştiu 11 years and 159 days in 1968 in Grenoble.

The youngest recorded male Olympian, at the Summer Games is Dimitrios Loundras from Greece; at the Winter Games it is Frenchman Alain Giletti, also a figure skater. Dimitrios Loundras was 10 years and 218 days old when he made his debut in 1896 in Athens. He competed in the parallel bars; his team finished in third place; thus, he gained bronze but only three teams competed! Alain Giletti was

12 years and 162 days old when present in 1952 in Oslo; younger than Hend Zaza but not if the event had taken place in the originally planned year.

There is some doubt that in Paris in 1900, a boy as young as seven years old was a late substitute cox for the Dutch team in order to reduce the overall weight but this fact has never been substantiated.

Simply, there is a whole host of evidence as to why Hend Zaza should attract attention! Hend Zaza is in very salubrious company.

### Relaxed

Many coaches, advisors or whoever will try to persuade their charge that every tournament is a tournament, every player is a player; don't put things on a pedestal, just pick up your racket, relax and do your best.

Such is the character of Hend Zaza, who was beaten in the opening round of the

women's singles event in Tokyo by Austria's 39 year old, Liu Jia, a player whose career, Hend Zaza may well be advised to consider carefully.

Many who enjoy success in younger days do not advance to high level senior play. Liu Jia won the junior girls' singles title at both the 1998 and 1999 European Youth Championships, before progressing to win the senior title in 2005 in Aarhus. Now approaching veteran years, Liu Jia continues.

"I was the youngest player, it was a dream to play in the Olympic Games; I think playing in Tokyo has given me more confidence", said Hend Zaza. "I know I need to raise my level."

Alongside brother, Obaida, in 2016 she attended the ITTF Hopes Week and Challenge in Qatar. Presently, she plays for the Al-Muhafaza Table Tennis Club in Damascus and has won national titles at all levels: hopes, cadets, junior and senior.

Most importantly, she is at an age when you learn quickly, it is the ideal time to hone technical skills; that takes time, hours of practice and dedication. Equally, the mental aspect is important, in that respect, even though teenage years have not yet dawned, she is well adjusted.

"In Tokyo or here in Amman I have nothing really in my mind to suggest there is any difference", stressed Hend Zaza. "It's the same, just enjoy and remember that nothing is impossible."

### Seizing opportunities

Already Hend Zaza has proved what can be achieved with dedication and determination; well aware that if you are to succeed at the highest level, those are factors common to all great players.

"Ma Long, he's a real champion; I'd like to think I can see myself in Ding Ning", added Hend Zaza. "It was good to see Mima Ito play, so fast especially when attacking from the backhand with short pimples."

Now the task for Hend Zaza is the gain experience,

to become table tennis wise. "I would like to play in as many ITTF World Table Tennis Youth tournaments as possible", concluded Hend Zaza. "I'm hoping to play in the next World Youth Championships."

The goal is to make the most of chances presented.

"Our task now is to work alongside the ITTF and make the best of any opportunities that are presented to her", explained Mustafa Sqwsain, the General Secretary of the Syrian Table Tennis Association.

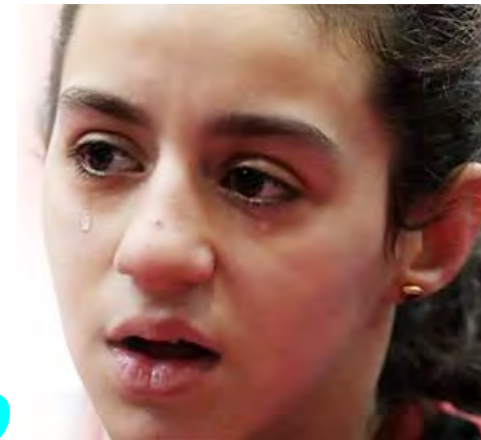
Making the most of chances afforded is key, a fact of which, Ali Hallack, the Syrian coach on duty in Amman, is well aware but is also mindful of the restrictions his country faces.

"We need more material, more equipment", stressed Ali Hallack. "Also, we need top coaches, books to read about coaching, we needed to keep up-to-date with modern ideas."

Asserting a solid base from which table tennis in Syria can progress is essential but now they have a bonus, a precious commodity; people want to seed Hend Zaza play. Competing in the Olympic Games she has given table tennis in her country a major boost, she became a quite iconic figure, but does she realise that fact, does she understand the important role she has played?

Perhaps not and perhaps we keep it that way, delightful innocence.

“I was the youngest player, it was a dream to play in the Olympic Games”



Obaida Zaza at the 2019 Bahrain Junior and Cadet Open



# 10 out of 10

New to the calendar in 2021, tournaments organised under the auspices of World Table Tennis; no player responded better to the initiative than Romania's Iulian Chirita.

In a period of under six months, at Youth Contender events, he reached no less than ten finals; most notably he won all ten!

Look back over the past quarter of a century to the ITTF World Tour and ITTF World Junior Circuit, in such a short period of time there is no player who can match that record!

He managed to win titles in the same week in different cities. After securing the under 15 boys' singles top prize on Monday 6th September in Otocec, three days later he clinched the under 17 boys' singles title in Varazdin. Immediately following, the very next day in the same hall, he emerged the under 15 winner, thus in the Croatian city he captured both age group titles, a feat he had achieved earlier in the year in Vila Real.

"It was very hard physically and mentally to play two tournaments in a row; I played over 20 matches in a week without a break, but that's why I started playing table tennis because I like to compete", reflected Iulian Chirita. "I prepared at home as much as possible, so I was ready for any opponent; overall, I think that in 2021 I improved physically, so I was able to withstand many matches and many competitions; also, I think my tactics improved."

Undoubtedly there was progress, Iulian Chirita is at an age when learning is faster than in later years but one fact in particular shone through, his level of maturity. You can have all the skills in the world but if the brain is not in gear, consistent results are not possible. At Youth Contender tournaments in 2021, in all six under 15 boys' singles events in which he competed, he reserved the top step of the podium!



**Iulian Chirita**

Date of Birth: 2nd Feb 2006  
 Birthplace: Chisinau, Moldova  
 Residence: Campulung, Romania  
 Racket: Butterfly Viscaria FL  
 Rubber – Forehand: Butterfly Dignics 09C  
 Rubber – Backhand: Butterfly Dignics 05  
 Club: Vointa Campulung Sport Club

**Worthy partner**

Departing with two titles was more the norm than the exception. Likewise, in Otocec and Wladyslawowo he returned home with two gold medals to add to his collection. In the under 15 age group, he emerged the boys' singles winner, on each occasion he added boys' doubles gold, partnering colleague Dragos Alexandru Bujor.

"Actually, I prefer the Contender tournaments that have doubles, because now we don't play so many tournaments with doubles", stressed Iulian Chirita.

Notably in 2021, Iulian Chirita proved himself a most worthy partner; at the Gazprom European Youth Championships, alongside Dragos Alexandru Bujor, in the under 15 age group, he won boys' team gold, followed by boys' doubles silver. Later in the year at the ITTF World Youth Championships, again with Dragos

Alexandru Bujor, the pair secured boys' doubles bronze, with Bianca Mei Rosu, mixed doubles silver.

A chance to play doubles, also at the Star Contender tournaments in Otocec and Wladyslawowo, there was the opportunity to compete in under 19 boys' singles events, worthy names in the guise of colleague Darius Movileanu and Germany's Kay Stumper respectively ending progress.

"It's always testing to play two events, the competition at under 19 and under 17 level is much higher than under 15, first of all players have more difficult services to return, they are more powerful and keep the ball longer on the table", explained Iulian Chirita. "In under 17 events, the level is high, there are several players in that age group who are in the top 10 in the under 19 world rankings."

Most certainly in whatever the

age group, Iulian Chirita proved a worthy adversary; understandably, placing a priority on the under 15 age group category.

"I was highly motivated because it was my last year as a cadet, I worked hard to get these results", added Iulian Chirita. "I had a lot of hard matches, the one I remember the most was the final in Havirov when I beat Felix Lebrun; it was a very important match for me to prove myself."

Just over one month later, Felix Lebrun was to extract revenge; he overcame Iulian Chirita in the under 15 boys' singles final at the Gazprom 2021 European Youth Championships.

"He is a very good player with a good backhand", explained Iulian Chirita. "He puts a lot of balls on the table, he also plays very fast."

**Strong group**

Similar ages, both born in 2006, Felix Lebrun and Iulian Chirita are very much Europe's bright hopes; equally, within the next decade could Romania become a major force in men's events on the global stage?

Additional to Iulian Chirita, Dragos Alexandru Bujor and Darius Movileanu, the names of Horia Stefan Ursut, Eduard Ionescu and Andrei Teodor Istrate all appeared on the medal podium at the Gazprom 2021 European Youth Championships.

"Yes we have a very good generation, it helps me that we can help each other at the table", explained Iulian Chirita. "I train very well with all of them, and they are also my good friends."

Furthermore, for Iulian Chirita, who can add the 2021 Europe Top Ten cadet boys' title to his credit, he follows a very focused training schedule under the guidance of Madalin Ionescu. It is surely one that matches the intensity of any found in the successful Asian countries and was very much maintained during the period of the pandemic, all necessary precautions being taken.

"At home in Romania, usually I practise from four to six hours each



May in Vila Real



October in Wladyslawowo

**Iulian Chirita – Youth Contender 2021**

**WTT Youth Contender**

May	Vila Real, Portugal U17BS Winner U15BS Winner
Jun	Havirov, Czech Republic U17BS: Quarter-Final U15BS: Winner
Jun	Otocec, Slovenia* U19BS: Last 16 U15BS: Winner U15BS: Winner (Dragos Alexandru Bujor)
Sep	Varazdin, Croatia U17BS: Winner U15BS: Winner
Sep	Otocec, Slovenia U17BS: Last 16 U15BS: Winner
Oct	Wladyslawowo, Poland* U19BS: Quarter-Final U15BS: Winner U15BD: Winner (Dragos Alexandru Bujor)

\*Star Contender tournaments

in hand.

"I was watching my brother play and I was very curious to try to play; for two years I played on a smaller table", recalled Iulian Chirita. "He is the reason I moved to Romania in 2015, he was already there, and I wanted to play at high level."

Coached by Natalia Smirnova, the foundations laid in Chisinau, bore fruit after moving to Campulung in Romania. Only 13 years old, at the 2019 European Youth Championships, he partnered Eduard Ionescu to cadet boys' doubles gold, before finishing in runners up position in the cadet boys' singles. He was beaten by Darius Movileanu.

One wonders what riches may lay in store for Iulian Chirita but when he looks back will the year 2021 be one that proved pivotal? The year that was the launching pad, the year his marks were 10 out of 10, top of the class.

day, from 11.00 am to 1.00pm; then with a break in between from 4.00pm to 8.00pm", explained Iulian Chirita. Also, Iulian has a very good practice partner available, his elder brother, Cristian. Born in 2000, he has accumulated considerable experience; a familiar face in recent years on the ITTF World Junior Circuit, notably he was through to the under 21 men's singles quarter-finals at the 2020 ITTF Challenge Polish Open when, owing to the pandemic, play was suspended. "Cristian helped me a lot in the beginning, he still helps me always giving advice", stressed Iulian Chirita.

In fact, Cristian is very much the source of motivation, the family hailing from Moldova where when five years old Iulian first held racket



# A year to remember

A debut in the tournament, the lowest ranked player, any win a bonus, thus the task was to gain experience; at the Gazprom 2021 European Under 21 Championships, staged from Wednesday 10th to Sunday 14th November in the Belgian town of Spa, Germany's Annett Kaufmann totally destroyed such a hypothesis.

She won the women's singles title. Quite simply anything Emma Raducanu could do in the tennis world by starting in the qualification, winning the United States Open and then being voted BBC Sports Personality of the Year, Annett Kaufmann proved a worthy match.

On Saturday 18th December, she was named "Newcomer of the Year" at the German Sports Personality of the Year award ceremony held in Baden Baden, an accolade that recognised 12 months of outstanding success.

Additional to her victory in Spa, earlier in the year, in the under 15 age group, she won four World Table Tennis Youth Contender girls' singles titles, as well as three at the European Youth Championships.

Perhaps she cannot converse in Mandarin as perfectly as Emma Raducanu, whose mother is from the Chinese city of Shenyang, but she speaks English fluently. In that respect Annett Kaufmann sets an example. We need the top table tennis players in the world to be able to speak in the accepted international language and not need a translator who, on more than one occasion, has not quite grasped either question or answer.

Just to put the icing on the cake, in Spa, Annett Kaufmann, became the youngest winner but only just, the margin a mere 75 days. On the day of the final Annett

Kaufmann was 15 years and 144 days old; the previous year when succeeding in Varazdin in March, Prithika Pavade of France was 15 years and 219 days old.

"I had no expectations at all. I was only allowed to play because of the wild card, so my goal was to win a match, like in every tournament. I never thought in my life that I would win", reflected Annett Kaufmann. "I knew almost all the players and knew that they were all very good. Really I just wanted to enjoy the time I had there."



Winning point in Spa

## Difficult start

Enjoy but that enjoyment was very nearly cut short, required to compete in the first group stage of proceedings, only the top eight names excused; it was a phase where adventures nearly ended.

Annett lost to the Czech Republic's Zdena Blaskova in seven games, who in her opening contest had experienced defeat when facing Croatia's Andrea Pavlovich by the same margin. Aware of what was needed, to be safe a six games win or better, Annett responded. She won in five games; thus, on

### Path to gold in Spa

#### Stage One (Group)

Betul Nur Kahraman (TUR) 4,8,6,10  
Zdena Blaskova (CZE) -10,-7,-4,7,12,7,-8  
Andrea Pavlovic (CRO) 7,-9,8,7,5

#### Stage Two (Group)

Helga Dari (HUN) 1,-13,6,3,9  
Sabina Surjan (SRB) 7,-8,5,-6,4,9  
Lelili Mostafavi (FRA) -8,8,-8,10,3,7

#### Stage Three (Knock-Out)

RI: Hana Arapovic (CRO) 5,6,9,-7,9  
QF: Camille Lutz (FRA) -8,10,4,-7,7,9  
SF: Franziska Schreiner (GER) 6,-11,9,6,14  
F: Mariia Tailakova (RUS) 11,-6,9,8,-7,8

### Podium Places 2021

May	WTT Youth Contender Vila Real, Portugal U15GS: Winner
Jun	WTT Youth Contender Havirov, Czech Republic U17GS: Runner Up U15GS: Winner
Jun	WTT Youth Contender Otocec, Slovenia U19GS: Semi-Final U15GS: Semi-Final
Jul	European Youth Championships U15GT: Winner (Mia Griesel) U15GS: Winner U15GD: Winner (Bianca Mei Rosu) U15XD: Semi-Final (Lleyton Ullman)
Oct	WTT Star Contender Wladyslawowo U19GS: Semi-Final U15GS: Winner U15GD: Runner Up (Bianca Mei Rosu)
Nov	European Under 21 Championships WS: Winner
Dec	ITTF World Youth Championships U15GD: Runner Up (Mia Griesel)

games ratio she topped the group with Zdena Blaskova in runners up spot.

Alas for Andrea Pavlovic it was elimination; first and second placed players advanced to stage two.

In fact, the first stage proved the most exacting of all, the only time Annett became embroiled in seven game full distance encounters. Likewise, the second stage, also organised on a group basis, the eight seeds joining the 24 first phase qualifiers, it was top spot. A place in the knock-out rounds, safely through to the final, Russia's Mariia Tailakova awaited, a final with its own place in sport. A major continental event and the title deciding contest witnessing the top seed facing the no.56 ranked player, the lowest all!

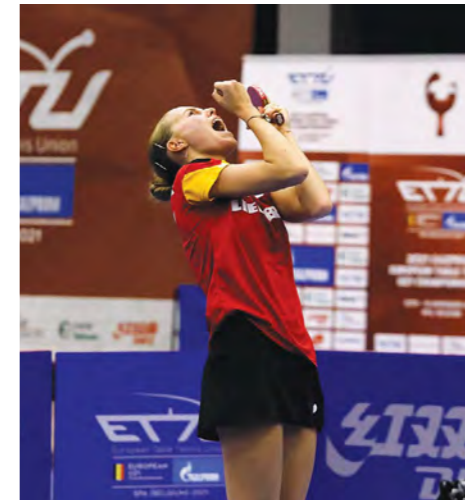
"Before the final I was very, very excited" reminisced Annett Kaufmann. "I was already so overwhelmed by what I had already achieved, but somehow, I still wanted to win the final because I thought: "I have already come so far, why stop now". Of course, I was nervous going into the game because it's not every day you play the final of the Under 21 European Championships, but somehow my gut feeling told me that I might make it. Also, I have to say that my opponent was very good, that made me a bit more nervous."

Memories of England's John Hilton who won the men's singles title at the 1980 European Championships at odds of 1,000:1; before playing Hungary's Gabor Gergely in the quarter-finals his thoughts were: "I'd come so far, why not?"

It was his destiny, just as over four decades later, it was the destiny of Annett Kaufmann; in the final she beat Mariia Tailakova in six games, the goal that seemed out of the question three days earlier, had been achieved.



Mariia Tailakova, Annett Kaufmann, Andreea Dragoman, Franziska Schreiner



"I was simply done. I was so happy that I had made it but at the same time I was so tired because all the many and exhausting games against good opponents took all my energy", explained Annett Kaufmann. "Anyway, I was so overwhelmed that I just couldn't put my feelings into words. It was so incredible because I would never have believed it; if someone had told me before the tournament that I would win, I would laughed at the person and never given a thought to believing it."

### Earlier success

Success in Split came just under one year after she had won the cadet girls' singles title at the

2020 Europe Top 10 tournament in Berlin; a tournament where expectations were much the opposite of Spa. She was the top seed.

"When I entered the tournament, I thought that I could win but I was never 100 per cent sure because everyone was a good player", reflected Annett Kaufmann. "It was a really good feeling after I won the last point, the realisation that I had won the whole tournament."

An all-play-all event, a total of nine matches in three days, it was an exacting schedule both physically and mentally. Annett experienced just one defeat, she was beaten by colleague Mia Griesel, the second seed, who was



to finish in an eventual fourth place behind Charlotte Lutz of France and Anna Hursey of Wales.

"The match against Mia Griesel was hard for me; for the first time she had pimped rubber on the backhand, I had problems to play against that surface. Also, I was nervous because it was the first tournament after the hard Covid situation", explained Annett Kaufmann. "In this match, she was better than me, I had to accept that I must try to play better in the next matches; I did, it was a relief to win the tough matches."

Defeat against Mia Griesel, it was almost the same when facing Romania's Bianca Mei Rosu.

"I didn't know her, and I had a tough start. I was down 0-2 and I didn't believe that I could win", continued Annett Kaufmann. "However, I started to play my game and managed to change things to win 3-2."

The success in Berlin was one step higher than the previous year in Noordwijk, when finishing in second place behind Romania's Elena Zaharia, but matched her first international title when in 2018, she prevailed at the Eurominichamps in Schiltigheim.

Notable results but it was at the 2021 European Youth Championships in Varazdin when she really blossomed.

In the cadet age category, she secured the girls' singles, girls' team, and girls' doubles titles in addition to being a mixed doubles semi-finalist.

"I think every situation, doesn't matter good or bad, is a good memory but we won a tough match against Poland, after being 1-2 down, that stands out", recalled Annett Kaufmann. She partnered Mia Griesel; likewise in the mixed doubles she joined forces with a fellow German, Lleyton Ullmann, but in the girls' doubles a player from foreign shores, Bianca Mei Rosu.

"I needed a doubles partner, so the national coach and I were thinking I could play with some player not from



Under 15 girls' singles winner in Poland



Advice from Jie Schöpp



Silver for Annett Kaufmann and Mia Griesel at the World Youth Championships

my country", explained Annett Kaufmann. "Everyone from my country had already a partner."

An answer was found, the thinking behind the decision underlying the fact that to gain success in sport, intelligence is needed; conferring with Lara Broich, the national coach, Annett Kaufmann displayed that quality, she proved a wise head on young shoulders.

"I thought about players I could play with, we would be able to fit together, I mean the chemistry should be good because you and your doubles partner should be like a team; if you don't fit together, it would be very difficult", she explained. "I thought about Bianca. We are close friends and we fit perfectly together. The coach agreed and then it happened. Both federations agreed; then we could play doubles."

A well thought out solution and one that paid dividends; one that produced memories that will live long in the mind.

"Of course, every time my team, my doubles partner, my mixed partner and myself won a game, especially in a final, it was such a good and beautiful moment", continued Annett Kaufmann.

Oustanding performances at the European Youth Championships, it was the very same at the World Table Tennis Contender tournaments.

"I think my best performance was at the WTT Star Contender in Wladyslawowo", reflected Annett Kaufmann. "I won against many good players, especially a very good friend in Hana Goda; of course, I was really happy with every result I gained at WTT tournaments."

The win against Hana Goda was one of note; it was in the under 15 girls' singles final, Annett recovered from a two games to nil deficit to secure a five games win.

**Start of career**

A most successful career is developing, one which started when she was eight years old after watching Alexandra, her elder sister, play.

"I tried dancing, I was in a dance club, I did that for a while and also played table tennis", explained Annett Kaufmann. "I stopped after a few months because I was too tired to do both, so I decided to do just table tennis. Also, I had more fun playing table tennis."

The decision made, she joined TTC Bietigheim-Bissingen and now represents SV Böblingen in the powerful German Bundesliga. Motivated, she progressed under the tutelage of coaches Momcilo Bojic, Evelyn Simon and Sönke Geil; her first success being the top prize at a local tournament for players in the under 11 years age category.

Good support from club and coaches, most importantly from her family. Father, Andrej, an industrial mechanic excelled at ice hockey; mother, Anna, a kindergarten teacher, at alpine skiing; both are table tennis diploma coaches.

Depending on international requirements, accommodating the demands of schoolwork, when at home, Annett practises from 5.15 pm to 9.30 pm four or five times per week; the effects of the pandemic having recently curtailed matters.

"At the beginning I could not practice for about five weeks but then we got some chances to practice in a small hall, just enough space for me and my coach Evelyn Simon", explained Annett Kaufmann.

Dedicated, appreciating the hours needed in the practice hall, Annett is well aware of her strengths and areas for improvement.

"Definitely I think my strengths at the moment are my backhand topspin when receiving from

backspin, playing over the table and in open rallies", she explained. "I need to improve my service and return; I don't have many variations, which is not so good; a rally starts on the serve or return. Also, I need to try to improve my footwork, especially my speed."

Add table tennis and school together, Mathematics and English, in addition to sport, being her favourite subjects, for Annett Kaufmann, time outside the classroom or training hall is very much at a premium

"I like spending time with my family, especially with my sister; meeting my friends and doing such things as going shopping", smiled Annett Kaufmann. "Also, I like to read and watch films, Marvel and Grey's Anatomy, alongside Disney movies "Tangled" and "Frozen" are my favourites."

A teenager like any other but make no mistake a very special teenager, there is no doubt whatsoever, Annett Kaufmann is a very special talent.



**Annett Kaufmann**  
 Date of birth: 23rd Jun 2006  
 Residence: Born in Wolfsburg, now living in Bietigheim-Bissingen  
 School: Ellental-Gymnasien  
 Racket: Tibhar Cédric Nuytinck Hybrid ZC  
 Rubber Forehand: Tibhar MX-D  
 Rubber Backhand: Tibhar Compass  
 Equipment Sponsor: Tibhar



## Santiago, Santiago bound



### Road to gold in Cali

R1: bye  
 R2: Sid Naresh (USA) 9,6,3,9  
 R3: Dario Arce (MEX) -9,7,-10,-9,3,4,9  
 QF: Rodrigo Hidalgo (PER) 9,3,4,8  
 SF: Eday Gomez (CUB) 12,8,10,3  
 F: Angel Naranjo (PUR) 8,5,-7,5,11

**B**eing the first, that is the aim of every player, but when you are the first of the first and you succeed in the nick of time, the achievement is even more special; such is the claim to fame of Argentina's Santiago Lorenzo.

At the Cali 2021 Pan American Junior Games, a competition for athletes born in 2000 or later, the inaugural edition of the multi-sport gathering, on Thursday 2nd November, Santiago Lorenzo claimed the men's singles title.

The following day, he was diagnosed with Covid-19, the local organising committee insisted he isolated. It meant that there was no chance of a medal in the men's team competition, a disappointment but one with which he had come to terms.

"Earlier, my teammate Martin Bentancor had been tested positive for Covid", said Santiago Lorenzo. "It was a very hard blow because we expected to win a medal; from the very start we were out of some events. I understand that for him it must have been much more difficult because he could not play any event."

A tournament, limited to a maximum of two players per country in each gender, it meant no men's doubles, no men's team, only the mixed doubles with Camila Kaizoji and the men's singles. A second round defeat on the opening day when facing Canada's Jeremy Hazin and Sophie Gauthier

was the mixed doubles outcome.

Thus, from the close of play on day one, for Santiago Lorenzo, there was only one option. However, was that an advantage in disguise? He was totally focused on the men's singles, the effect of the success being that like Cuba's Daniela Fonseca, the women's singles winner, it means qualification for the event that bears his name, the Santiago 2013 Pan American Games.

"I wanted to win the singles to qualify for Santiago, I knew I could if I played well; luckily I did", reflected Santiago Lorenzo. "I think my strong point was the mental part, I was calm because I had prepared well before playing in tournament; during the tournament I was very confident in my ability that I could achieve the goal."

### Biggest win

Santiago the target, duly achieved, a city of which he has fond memories. In 2018 he was the boys' singles runner up at the South American Junior Championships; later, at the 2019 Chile Junior and Cadet Open, he won the junior boys' singles title.

In the same year, in Buenos Aires, he was the men's singles bronze medallist at the South American Championships.

"My participation in the 2018 Youth Olympic Games in Buenos Aires was one of the most

beautiful moments", reflected Santiago Lorenzo who was called upon at the last moment. He was the replacement for Iran's Amin Ahmadian, not being permitted to compete in a mixed event for religious reasons, Santiago was summoned to duty and partnered San Marino's Chiara Morri.

"Nevertheless, I think winning in Cali is my greatest achievement to date. I was assimilating it later; standing on the top of the podium and listening to my country's national anthem was a beautiful feeling" reflected Santiago Lorenzo. "After the ceremony, I felt calm and relaxed knowing that I had worked hard and achieved my goal."

Hard work, most certainly that was the scenario; none more so than in the third round when it appeared he may disappear from view.

"Against Dario Arce from Mexico in the round of 16 I started the match feeling very uncomfortable. He had previously beaten me, and I was down 1-3", reflected Santiago Lorenzo. "From that point I was able to change tactically and ended up winning 11-9 in the seventh game; after that I felt more relaxed and was able to play better."

Win a close match and confidence blossoms is a well-worn phrase; never was it truer than for Santiago Lorenzo.

"Before the final I felt very good, very confident; I had played against Angel Naranjo less than a month earlier in the Pan American Championships in Lima and I won", reminisced Santiago Lorenzo. "He did a good job in the tournament and also in the final, but I think I

had a more consistent game and that helped me win."

### Career

Success for the young man born in the city of San Rafael, located in the province of Mendoza; a career which started when seven years old.



"My grandfather gave me a table tennis table in 2008, from that date Franco Piruzi was my coach; whenever I am in San Rafael, he is still my coach", explained Santiago Lorenzo. Success followed quickly; in 2010 he won his first tournament, an inter school event in Mendoza, his first international appearance being one year later, the under 10 boys' singles event in 2011 at a South American tournament in Paraguay.

"Also, Oscar Roitman has also helped me; in recent years since moving to Buenos Aires it's been Gustavo Levisman, the national coach. He's my coach when representing Argentina", added Santiago Lorenzo.

However, for the majority of the year, Santiago Lorenzo is based in Europe, he spends seven months of the year in Oporto where the Portuguese national team is based. Away from home but education is not forgotten, he follows an on-line bachelor's degree environmental management course organised

by Siglo 21 University in Buenos Aires.

"The training in Oporto is very good, normally I practise six days a week, if I have a league game that weekend, then five days, every day an average of between five and six hours", explained Santiago Lorenzo. "Physical training varies depending on the time of year, but generally four times per week."

Excellent practice facilities but as with everyone, the pandemic has caused problems.

"It was difficult but luckily in Mendoza the isolation was not so long, after two or three months we were able to start training again" explained Santiago Lorenzo. "I had a robot at home, I

supported myself as best I could."

Good support both on home soil and abroad for the young man who played soccer, as well as trying tennis and handball before settling on table tennis; most importantly, good support from what is very much a table tennis family. Father played as did younger sisters, 16 years old Guadalupe and one year younger Isabella.

"Even my mom played a little, so we all know the sport very well", added Santiago Lorenzo with a somewhat mischievous smile.

The Santiago 2023 Pan American Games is a major target, a supportive family, experienced coaches, high level training, a formula for success is very much in place, a place on the podium? We wait to see but Cali suggests it is within the grasp a bright young man from Argentina, note the name, Santiago Lorenzo.



# Australia opens doors, Liu Yangzi walks through

A quarter of a century of tournaments on the ITTF World Tour; for Australia, a nation steeped in sport, not the brightest of reading, never the podium top step reserved. The first full year of World Table Tennis, that situation changed dramatically, in 2021 Liu Yangzi made her presence felt.

Teenage days coming to a conclusion, she took full advantage of the age limit in youth tournaments being under 19 years, winning three girls' singles titles. Food for thought but at the end of the year the icing on the cake; she secured women's singles gold at the Feeder Düsseldorf in December.

"I played a lot of good players at the Düsseldorf Feeder, winning this competition makes me feel that my efforts are paying off, I am on the right way", said Liu Yangzi. "The win means a lot to me."

Success in Düsseldorf was very much the result to attract attention; one step higher for the colours of the green and gold. On the ITTF World Tour in 2002, Miao Miao had been the under 21 women's singles runner up in the Chinese city of Qingdao. Later in 2014 in Sydney and 2016 in Melbourne, it had been the same women's doubles outcome when partnering Jian Fang Lay. Meanwhile, in 1996 in Brisbane, a men's doubles silver medal was the reward for Mark Smythe in harness with Canada's Johnny Huang.

Exceeding the achievements of her predecessors, her background underlines the reasons. She learnt her skills in China, the country associated with table tennis technical excellence; most importantly, Liu Yangzi has strong parental backing. Mother works for the government affording moral support, she has an uncle who

plays table tennis, but the principal reason is her father. He is a high level coach who introduced his daughter to the sport.

"I started playing table tennis when I was about five years old. I was very weak when I was a little, I needed to go to hospital quite often", explained Liu Yangzi. "The first time I touched table tennis was one day when my dad was playing, another coach saw that I had nothing to do. She tried to teach me to serve; from then on, I was very interested in table tennis, I became stronger. In the beginning I played table tennis just because I enjoyed it, it was good for me because I exercised."

Interest in the sport grew, naturally improvement followed. In 2008 she played in her first tournament; she represented her school, Yangtai, in a Shanghai Primary Schools competition for players under six years of age. She won both the girls' team and girls' singles events.

Later when seven years old she joined the Cao Yanhua Table Tennis School; the name synonymous with high level. Cao Yanhua won the women's singles title at the 1983 World Championships in Tokyo, retaining the title two years later in Gothenburg.

## Ideal situation

Skills fashioned in China; Liu Yangzi finally settled in Australia in June 2019, having spent a short time the previous year in Portugal. Notably, in late 2018 she won the junior girls' singles title at the ITTF World Junior Circuit tournament in Guimarães. Six months after moving to Australia, in December, she succeeded at the Finlandia Open in Helsinki; an open international tournament title setting new heights for Oceania.

## Liu Yangzi

Date of birth: 6th Jul 2002  
 Birthplace: Puyang City, Henan Province, China  
 Family: Parents Liu Wenjie and Yang Xuebing  
 Home: Melbourne, Australia  
 Racket: Butterfly Interforce ZLC, FL  
 Rubber Forehand: Butterfly Dignics 09C black  
 Rubber Backhand: Butterfly Impartial XB red 1.7 / Largestorm Spin red 1.9  
 Style of play: Right handed attacking player, short pimples on backhand  
 Equipment Sponsor: Butterfly

"I moved to Australia because I have family in Australia; also, I want more opportunities to show myself in the international arena, I have a really nice life in Australia! I live in a nice city, Melbourne", smiled Liu Yangzi. "We have a national training centre here, so I get good training. I live very close to a beautiful river, so I get to see nice views from my apartment. Everything here is very convenient."

It is a quite idyllic situation for Liu Yangzi, one that enables her to dedicate her time to table tennis.

"I haven't seriously tried other sports; I have played sports like badminton, bowling and Australian footy for fun, I don't think I'm a very talented person in sports, perhaps table tennis is the exception?" laughed Liu Yangzi "In the future I plan to go to university to study but at the moment I'm just focusing on playing table tennis."

Throughout father is by her side, advising, guiding, encouraging.

"He is the one who knows me best", said Liu Yangzi, who was very quick to acknowledge the fact that in Australia she is receiving top class support.

"In Australia I have excellent coaches who are helping me; Eva Jeler pushes me very hard in training, owing to Eva's training, my table tennis has become more solid", stressed Liu Yangzi. "I appreciate her strict requirements for me in training, otherwise I wouldn't have had good results in all competitions in my first three months with her."

Advised by Eva Jeler, she is in most capable hands, in her 37 years as German national coach, such players as Timo Boll, Dimitrij Ovtcharov and Ruwen Filus have benefitted from her advice, as from an earlier generation have Nicole Struse, Wu Jiaduo, Steffen Fetzner and Jörg Roskopf.

"Also, John Murphy, Australian head coach, has been guiding me on how to be a real professional table tennis player. He's helping a lot with my mental health", continued Liu Yangzi. "Meanwhile, Simon Gerada always brings new ideas for me in training."

A detailed training programme in place, one to which Liu Yangzi has responded.

"In Australia we practise six days per a week, normally we have Sunday off to recover for a new week", said Liu Yangzi. "We practise in the morning and afternoon, sometimes also in evening; the

morning session is 10.00 am to 12.30 pm. We don't leave, we have lunch in the hall, have some rest and start again at 2.30 pm."

Well organised but as with every such schedule, the pandemic has curtailed matters.

"Our team worked hard to communicate with the government to get us facilities for training, so we didn't stop training for too long because of Covid", added Liu Yangzi. "During the most difficult weeks, no one could leave home, we had online training to make us physically strong. From my side, I was doing a lot of physical work, watched some videos of some good players, to keep myself up with trends."

## Success

Difficulties addressed and overcome; that was crystal clear when in October 2021 she won the first of her World Table Tennis under 19 girls' singles titles.

"It was my first competition after Covid; it was a difficult start. I needed to find a way to play my game in an international tournament", reflected Liu Yangzi. "My coach, John Murphy, has been encouraging me a lot and helping me prepare for every match. Yeah, the best thing in Italy was I won, got a good start for the next few competitions. Also, I liked the food there!"

Success in October was followed by success in the first seven days of November. Consecutive tournaments, one day in between for travel, she won in the Slovakian town of Senec, then across the border in Hungary when competing in Szombathely. An exacting itinerary by any stretch of the imagination!

"Actually, it was not a problem for me" explained Liu Yangzi. "I just needed to focus on every match and do everything right in

order to win every match." She did just that!

"In Senec I was really happy I didn't lose one game in my six matches. I was very focused in every match to find a way to win", said Liu Yangzi. "Szombathely was my last junior tournament, so I am glad I had a good end in Hungary with all of my junior tournaments."

A good finish but rather different to Senec; in the final against India's Lakshita Narang, there were testing times.

"The final was a bit hard for me. I didn't get a good start. I was 0-2 down in the beginning but I wanted to win that game very much, I tried to make some changes to my tactics, I got back to win 3-2", recalled Liu Yangzi. "I want to thank myself for not giving up, winning this match gave me a lot of confidence."

A fitting end to competing in junior age groups tournaments and one that carried a very special significance.

"The win meant that I won every junior tournament in which I played", concluded Liu Yangzi.

Now, that is some record and in the not too distant future could the effect of such performances witness a change in the Australian order? For many years female fortunes have been spearheaded by Jian Fang Lay, now 49 years old, surely there is now a worthy successor. In 2021 Liu Yangzi presented sufficient evidence.



For over two decades Australia has relied heavily on Jian Fang Lay and Miao Miao



# Promise rewarded

## Izaak Quek Yong

Racket blade: Butterfly Lin Gaoyuan ALC - FL  
Forehand Rubber: DHS Hurricane 3  
Backhand Rubber: Butterfly Dignics 05

Successful at 2021 World Table Tennis Youth Contender tournaments, Izaak Quek Yong, Ser Lin Qian and Zhou Jingyi, alongside the somewhat older Lucas Tan, gained their due rewards in early January 2022. They became members of the Singapore senior squad, the elevation being in line with the policy of promoting younger players.

Born in 2006, Izaak Quek Yong enjoyed his most successful year to date.

Competing in the under 15 age group, in October, he won the boys' singles title in Lignano, after the previous week being the runner up in Wladyslawowo. Later he was a semi-finalist in Senec, before at the World Youth Championships in Vila Nova de Gaia, achieving the same finish in both the boys' singles and in the boys' doubles partnering Chinese

## Zhou Jingyi

Racket blade: Butterfly Viscaria - FL  
Forehand Rubber: Hurricane 3  
Backhand Rubber: Dignics 05

Taipei's Chang Yu-An. Notable results but arguably the most significant of all was in Szombathely in November. After reaching the under 17 boys' singles semi-final, he emerged the under 19 winner.

The results came after earlier in the year he had become the first Singaporean to occupy the top position on a world ranking list. In April he headed the Under 15 boys' order of merit.

Equally, the successes underlined the promise displayed in recent years. He made his international debut when 12 years old, competing at the 2018 South-East Asian Junior and Cadet Championships in the Philippines. On duty in the cadet age group, alongside, Lim Daoyi and Yan Kai Andy Wong, he struck boys' team gold. Later he partnered Yan Kai Andy Wong to boys'

## Ser Lin Qian

Racket blade: ZJK ZLC - FL  
Forehand Rubber: Butterfly 09  
Backhand Rubber: Butterfly Dignics 05

doubles bronze, prior to securing the same colour medal in the boys' singles event.

Success on debut, one year later in the Philippines, competing in the same age group it was a full house. He secured the boys' singles title after having joined forces with Yan Kai Andy Wong to win the boys' doubles and boys' team titles, Lim Daoyi completing the line-up.

Furthermore, in 2018, he won the boys' singles at the ITTF South-East Regional Hopes Challenge and at the Asia Hopes Week. Later, at the ITTF Hopes Week he concluded matters the runner up.

"It is my dream to be a member of the national team since young, I am honoured to serve Singapore in this new capacity; the Singapore Table Tennis Association's

## Lucas Tan

Racket blade: W968 -FL  
Forehand: Hurricane 3 Blue Rubber  
Backhand: Dignics 05

confidence in my abilities means a great deal to me", said Izaak Quek Yong. "I look forward to the new challenges and opportunities. I promise to work hard to bring more sporting glory for Singapore."

## Similar success

Medals at the South-East Asian Junior and Cadet Championships for Izaak Quek Yong, likewise it had been the same for Ser Lin Qian and Zhou Jingyi.

In 2017, selecting from Ser Lin Qian, Zhou Jingyi, Tan Jassy Li Lin and Idys Koh Gaoh Cai, it was girls' team bronze, as it was in the girls' doubles for Ser Lin Qian partnering Idys Koh Gaoh Cai and for Zhou Jingyi in harness with Tan Jassy Li Lin.

One year later, in the cadet girls' singles it was gold for Zhou Jingyi, bronze for Ser Lin Qian.

Earlier, the duo had combined to win the girls' doubles and with Tan Zhao Yun, the girls team event. Likewise, in 2018, the three players liaised to retain the team title; Zhou Jingyi beat Ser Lin Qian in the girls' singles final, after the duo had emerged girls' doubles bronze medallist.

"I am very thankful that I am being promoted to the National Team. I would like to thank the Singapore Table Tennis Association for recognising my hard work and believing that I am ready to take on more challenges", said Ser Lin Qian. "I appreciate the opportunity and I look forward to contributing to the women's team."

Meanwhile, at 2021 World Table Tennis tournaments, in the under 15 category, Ser Lin Qian won in Lignano. In addition, she was the runner up in Senec and a semi-finalist at the World Youth Championships. Most creditably, she reached the under 17 girls' singles semi-final in Szombathely.

Impressive, it was the same from Zhou Jingyi, in Lignano she advanced to the under 17 girls' singles semi-final, prior to concluding matters the under 19 girls' singles runner up. Earlier in early October at the Asian Championships, alongside Goi Rui Xuan, Lin Ye and Wong Xin Ru, bronze had been gained.

"I am very excited about the promotion; this is a really a great way to start the New Year", said Zhou Jingyi. "This year, my goal is to qualify for the upcoming major games and do Singapore proud. Thank you Singapore Table Tennis Association for your support, the support helped me to develop into a better player."

Most notably, following their elevation to the senior team, success at World Table Tennis Youth Contender tournaments has continued. In February in



Izaak Quek and Lucas Tan



Zhou Jingyi and Ser Lin Qian

Metz, Ser Lin Qian won both the under 19 girls' and under 17 girls' singles events. Later in the month in Vila Real, Zhou Jingyi beat Ser Lin Qian to win the under 17 girls' singles title, one day later Ser Lin Qian reversed the decision to claim under 19 girls' singles gold. Impressive, it was the same from Izaak Quek Yong, he emerged the under 19 boys' singles runner up.

## Worthy competitor

Notable success for the three teenagers, Zhou Jingyi being one year older than Izaak Quek and Ser Lin Qian; for Lucas Tan, born in 1999, likewise he has proved a worthy competitor on the international stage.

At the 2017 South East Asia Games in Kuala Lumpur, alongside Clarence Chew Zheyu, Gao Ning and Ethan Poh Shao Feng, silver was the men's team outcome. The following year in Bali at the South-East Asian Championships, again with Clarence Chew Zheyu and Ethan Poh Shao Feng but with Gerald Yu completing the selection, it was gold. Also, he reached the semi-finals in the men's singles and similarly with Gerald Yu, the men's doubles.

Meanwhile, in 2019 at the Commonwealth Championships in Cuttack, in harness with Clarence Chew Zheyu, Josh Chua Shao Han and Pang Yew En Koen, men's team

bronze was secured.

"I am happy and grateful for this opportunity; it definitely gives me more confidence in my game", reacted Lucas Tan. "This is a great start to 2022!"

Delighted players and similarly a most pleased Ellen Lee, JP, PBM, the President of the Singapore Table Tennis Association.

"Today, we have introduced a fresh generation of young players into our National Team, the Singapore Table Tennis Association

will continue to give the best support to our young talents, as we build the next generation of Team Singapore", she said. "So, we seek the continuous support from our various stakeholders, sponsors, parents, fans and volunteers. Let us all do our part to support the athletes. Together, we can make a greater impact that will eventually see more Singaporeans on the world stage."

Izaak Quek Yong and Lucas Tan join Ethan Poh Shao Feng, Pang Yew En Koen, Josh Chua Shao Han, Beh Kun Ting in the men's national team; in the counterpart women's national squad, Zhou Jingyi, Ser Lin Qian combine with Yu Mengyu, Lin Ye, Zeng Jian, Goi Ruixuan, Wong Xin Ru, Zhang Wanling and Pearlyn Koh.



# VALUABLE EXPERIENCE

## Valuable experience

Staged in splendid premises at the Princess Sumaya Hall, located in Amman's King Hussein Sports Centre, the five star Rohana Hotel providing the accommodation, on Tuesday 14th December eight days of action concluded at the 2021 ITTF Hopes Week and Challenge.

Under the direction of Tarek Al Zouby, the President of the Jordan Table Tennis Federation, there was a spirit of co-operation and harmony, principal names in one voice.

## Polona Cehovin (ITTF High Performance and Development Director)

An important achievement in all possible senses and a fine conclusion of a very challenging year. We were delighted that in spite of all the challenges, 20 girls and 20 boys aged 12 or less, from all corners of the world made their journey to Amman. All had the opportunity to practise under the watchful eyes of the ITTF coaching team.

Talent identification is a core component of the programme but there is much more to the Hopes initiative; coach education represents an important pillar. We hope that each returned home equipped with new knowledge and richer in precious experience. Hopefully, those factors will enable them to continue the hard work with their protégées until we meet again.

A big note of thanks to the host, the Jordan Table Tennis Federation, for the excellent work and to everyone, who takes care of keeping the Hopes spirits continually flying high."

## Massimo Costantini (ITTF High Performance Elite Coach)

The ITTF World Hopes Week and Challenge has been for over 12 years the initial push for many

athletes who aspired to a career in table tennis. There is always a lot of expectation around this initiative which captures a common interest that runs throughout all continents.

Also, this time, we hit the target again. After the forced break in 2020, the 2021 ITTF World Hopes Week and Challenge, held in Amman, left a unique, indelible experience for all 40 players and 34 coaches who participated.

The main value lies not only in playing and improving one's technical level, but also in instilling an education in a sporting activity that makes the players not only qualitatively stronger but also more knowledgeable.

Starting with the Jordan Table Tennis Federation, I am very satisfied with the environment created by the participants; that contributed to the success of the activity.

Ah...I was about to forget...I am pretty sure that in the next few years we will hear more from this group of mini champions.

## Eva Jeler (Head Coach – Boys)

For most it was the first time being together in a group since lockdown; everyone was socialising once again. Recently, players and coaches have met in small groups, maybe just with father and mother helping.

Overall, standards are rising, associations are becoming more serious and are investing in coaches. Notably, countries that have not been traditionally strong in table tennis are now producing young players with great promise.

It's the best programme ever designed by the International Table Tennis Federation, coach based, that enables countries to continue development rather than one outstanding talent emerging and then nothing to follow. Informal meetings with coaches are a

ITTF coaching staff in Amman

Hansini Mathan Rajan, the girls' singles winner

great benefit, explaining how and why; discussing how to move to a higher level and operate on a small budget.

Everything here in Amman was excellent.

## Zoltan Batorfi (Head Coach – Girls)

The great value is that players from different parts of the world meet; the players learn from each other and so do the coaches. Here both players and coaches have listened and learnt.

Players develop on home soil; the important factor from this week is that they take home a good experience. Most certainly the level is rising and there is a wider spread of talent, more players from what can be termed non-traditional countries and from smaller nations are playing at a very good level.

Komeil Niknejad Divshali, the boys' singles winner

Puerto Rico sets the example, a small island, Enrique Torres reached the boys' singles final.

Congratulations to all, the accommodation at the Rotana Hotel was superb, the organisation excellent.

## Matilda Ekholm (ITTF Appointed Coach)

All the players showed such a high level of interest, everyone motivated; the response from everyone has been excellent.

I think everyone agrees that this week has been of immense value, having played for some 17 years internationally I can relate to these players and the difficulties they may face. It's now 18 months since I finished playing, I was happy to finish at a good level, no injuries, nothing like that; now I'm happy to be the coach and to stay in the sport.



The coaches who travelled with their players to Amman



Girls' singles medallists - Hansini Mathan Rajan (gold), Hend Zasa (silver), Baran Arjmand (bronze), Nina Gao Zheng (bronze), with Princess Zeina Rashid



Boys' singles medallists - Jakub Kabelka (bronze), Michal Nagy (bronze), Enrique Rios (silver), Hansini Mathan Rajan (gold) with Khalil Al-Mohannadi



The players and coaches who travelled from far and wide

### Girls' Singles Winner: Hansini Rajan Country: India

Residence: Chennai  
Date of Birth: 30th Apr 2009  
School: P.S. Senior Secondary  
Style: Right handed attacking player  
First Played: Seven years old  
Coach: Murlidhar Rao and Shrinivas Rao  
Racket: Andro Off FL  
Rubber Forehand: Andro Rasanter  
Rubber Backhand: Andro Rasanter  
Practice: Six days per week, from 6.00 am to 8.30 am and 4.30 pm to 7.30 pm  
Playing strengths: Backhand drive  
Improvement needed: Movement

### Boys' Singles Winner: Komeil Divshali Country: Iran

Residence: Lahijan  
Date of Birth: 4th Jan 2009  
School: Noor Mohammadi  
Style: Left handed top spin player  
First Played: Five years old  
Coach: Hasan Fekri  
Practice: Six days per week from 4.00 pm to 8.00 pm  
Racket: Donic Baum Esprit FL  
Rubber Forehand: Blue Storm  
Rubber Backhand: Blue Fire  
Playing strengths: Service and fight hard  
Improvement needed: Backhand and changing spin



# Famous faces at the Gala dinner on Sunday 27th March to celebrate England's table tennis centenary



Centenary Hall of Fame inductees - John Hilton, Mary Wright, Jill Parker, Desmond Douglas, Will Bayley



Pedro Moura, Petra Sorling, Sandra Deaton, Leandro Olvech, Wiebke Scheffler



Matthew Syed



Brian Wright, Paul Drinkhall, Alison Broe



Alan Hydes, Tin-Tin Ho, Paul Day



Petra Sorling (ITTF President) and Sandra Deaton (Chair, Table Tennis England)



Petra Sorling, Adrian Christy



Jackie Worrell, Lisa Lomas, Alison Broe



Aaron McKibbin, Ross Wilson, Billy Shilton, Will Bayley, Gorazd Vecko



Gavin Evans, Paul Drinkhall, Sam Walker, Darius Knight



Pat Chatwin, Doreen Stannard



Margie and Desmond Douglas



Alan Hydes and Matthew Syed



Darius Knight, Skylet Andrew, Richard Hyacinth



# Podium Places

January – March 2022

## WTT Feeder Düsseldorf I

Wed 12th – Sat 15th Jan

**MS** *W:* Robert Gardos (AUT) *RU:* Brian Afanador (PUR)  
**WS** *W:* Barbora Balazova (SVK) *RU:* Shan Xiaona (GER)  
**MD** *W:* Esteban Dorr/Felix Lebrun (FRA) *RU:* Florian Bourrassaud/Diogo Chen (FRA/POR)  
**WD** *W:* Hana Arapovic/Polina Trifonova (CRO/BUL) *RU:* Mateja Jeger/Ivana Malobabic (CRO)  
**XD** *W:* Robert Gardos/Karoline Mischek (AUT) *RU:* Tobias Hippler/Franziska Schreiner (GER)

## WTT Feeder Düsseldorf II

Mon 17th – Thu 20th Jan

**MS** *W:* Patrick Franziska (GER) *RU:* Ovidiu Ionescu (ROU)  
**WS** *W:* Elizabet Abraamian (RUS) *RU:* Amelie Solja (AUT)  
**MD** *W:* Alexis Lebrun/Felix Lebrun (FRA) *RU:* Ovidiu Ionescu/Alvaro Robles (ROU/ESP)  
**WD** *W:* Chantal Mantz/Wan Yuan (GER) *v RU:* Giorgia Piccolin/Debora Vivarelli (ITA)  
**XD** *W:* Dimitrije Levajac/Izabela Lupulesku (SRB) *RU:* John Oybode/Gaia Monfardini (ITA)

## WTT Macao, Exhibition

Wed 19th – Sun 23rd Jan

**MS** *W:* Wang Chuqin (CHN) *RU:* Lin Gaoyuan (CHN)  
**WS** *W:* Wang Manyu (CHN) *RU:* Liu Shiwen (CHN)  
**XD** *W:* Xu Xin/Liu Shiwen (CHN) *RU:* Fan Zhendong/Kuai Man (CHN)

## WTT Youth Star Contender Tunis

Wed 2nd – Sun 6th Feb

**U19BS** *W:* Alexis Lebrun (FRA) *RU:* Adrien Rassenfosse (BEL)  
**U19GS** *W:* Elena Zaharia (ROU) *RU:* Suhana Saini (IND)  
**U19BD** *W:* Louis Laffineur/Adrien Rassenfosse (BEL) *RU:* Khalid Alshareif/Alex Kourachi (FRA/KSA)  
**U19GD** *W:* Liubov Tentser/Veronika Voronina (RUS) *RU:* Bianca Mei Rosu/Elena Zaharia (ROU)  
**U15BS** *W:* Samuel Arpas (SVK) *RU:* Alan Kurmangaliyev (KAZ)  
**U15GS** *W:* Anastasiia Ivanova (RUS) *RU:* Bianca Mei Rosu (ROU)  
**U15BD** *W:* Tiago Abiodun/Flavien Coton (POR/FRA) *RU:* Khai Noah Lam/Serafim Orlov (NOR/RUS)  
**U15GD** *W:* Maria Santa Comba/Maria Berzosa Casas (POR/ESP) *RU:* Gaetene Bled/Leana Hochart (FRA)

## WTT Youth Contender Metz

Mon 14th – Sun 20th Feb

**U19BS** *W:* Thibault Poret (FRA) *RU:* Hugo Deschamps (FRA)  
**U19GS** *W:* Ser Lin Qian (ESP) *RU:* Lucie Mobarek (FRA)  
**U17BS** *W:* Lee Hoyun (KOR) *RU:* Dragos Alexandru Bujor (ROU)  
**U17GS** *W:* Ser Lin Qian (SGP) *RU:* Mia Griesel (GER)  
**U15BS** *W:* Alan Kurmangaliyev (KAZ) *RU:* Flavien Coton (FRA)  
**U15GS** *W:* Natalia Bogdanowicz (POL) *RU:* Park Gahyeon (KOR)  
**U13BS** *W:* Steven Moreno (PUR) *RU:* Robert Alexandru Istrate (ROU)  
**U13GS** *W:* Nina Guo Zheng (FRA) *RU:* Lisa Wang (GER)  
**U11BS** *W:* Gorkem Ocal (TUR) *RU:* Romeo Müller (FRA)  
**U11GS** *W:* Siri Benjegard (SWE) *RU:* Buse Kocak (TUR)

## WTT Youth Contender Spa

Mon 14th – Sun 20th Feb

**U19BS** *W:* Adrien Rassenfosse (BEL) *RU:* Andrei Teodor Istrate (ROU)  
**U19GS** *W:* Elena Zaharia (ROU) *RU:* Vlada Voronina (RUS)  
**U17BS** *W:* Milosz Redzinski (POL) *RU:* Lee Hoyun (KOR)  
**U17GS** *W:* Sarah Jalli (USA) *RU:* Nicole Arlia (ITA)  
**U15BS** *W:* Flavien Coton (FRA) *RU:* Nathan Lam (FRA)  
**U15GS** *W:* Park Gahyeon (KOR) *RU:* Bianca Mei Rosu (ROU)  
**U13BS** *W:* Danilo Faso (ITA) *RU:* Steven Moreno (PUR)  
**U13GS** *W:* Asel Erkebaeva (UZB) *RU:* Nina Guo Zheng (FRA)  
**U11BS** *W:* Gorkem Ocal (TUR) *RU:* Quentin Sandona (FRA)  
**U11GS** *W:* Siri Benjegard (SWE) *RU:* Buse Kocak (TUR)

## CCB 2022 Europe Top 16 Cup, Montreux

Sat 26th – Sun 27th Feb

**MS** *W:* Darko Jorgic (SLO) *RU:* Truls Moregard (SWE)  
**WS** *W:* Han Ying (GER) *RU:* Polina Mikhailova (RUS)

## WTT Youth Contender Vila Real

Sat 26th Feb – Fri 4th Mar

**U19BS** *W:* Hugo Deschamps (FRA) *RU:* Izaac Quek (SGP)  
**U19GS** *W:* Ser Lin Qian (SGP) *RU:* Zhou Jingyi (SGP)  
**U17BS** *W:* Daniel Berzosa (ESP) *RU:* Stepan Brhel (CZE)  
**U17GS** *W:* Zhou Jingyi (SGP) *RU:* Ser Lin Qian (SGP)  
**U15BS** *W:* Nathan Lam (FRA) *RU:* Tiago Abiodun (POR)  
**U15GS** *W:* Elise Pujol (FRA) *RU:* Gaetene Bled (FRA)  
**U13BS** *W:* Steven Moreno (PUR) *RU:* Robert Istrate (ROU)  
**U13GS** *W:* Julia Vitorino (POR) *RU:* Beatriz Pinto (POR)  
**U11BS** *W:* Lukas Wang (GER) *RU:* Abdulrahman Al Taher (KSA)  
**U11GS** *W:* Maria Ruivo (POR) *RU:* Irina Silva (POR)

## WTT Contender Muscat

Sun 27th Feb – Sat 5th Mar

**MS** *W:* Liang Jingkun (CHN) *RU:* Lin Gaoyuan (CHN)  
**WS** *W:* Kuai Man (CHN) *RU:* Qian Tianyi (CHN)  
**MD** *W:* Lin Shidong/Xiang Peng (CHN) *RU:* Chuang Chih-Yuan/Peng Wang-Wei (TPE)  
**WD** *W:* Kuai Man/Zhang Rui (CHN) *RU:* Ayhika Mukherjee/Sutirtha Mukherjee (IND)  
**XD** *W:* Wang Chuqin/Chen Xingtong (CHN) *RU:* Manav Vikash Thakkar/Archana Girish Kamath (IND)

## Caribbean Senior Championships, Havana

Thu 3rd – Tue 8th Mar

**MT** *W:* Cuba (Jorge Campos, Livan Martinez. Adrian Perez) *RU:* Puerto Rico (Oscar Birriel, Daniel Gonzalez, Angel Narajo)  
**WT** *W:* Cuba (Daniela Fonseca, Idalys Lovet, Karla Perez) *RU:* Dominican Republic (Eva Brito, Esmerlyn Castro, Yasiris Ortiz)  
**MS** *W:* Jorge Campos (CUB) *RU:* Daniel Gonzalez (PUR)  
**WS** *W:* Idalys Lovat (DOM) *RU:* Daniela Fonseca (CUB)  
**MD** *W:* Jorge Campos/Livan Martinez (CUB) *RU:* Oscar Birriel/Richard Pietri (PUR)  
**WD** *W:* Daniela Fonseca/Karla Perez (CUB) *RU:* Fabiola Diaz/Daniely Rios (PUR)  
**XD** *W:* Jorge Campos/Daniela Fonseca (CUB) *RU:* Isaac Vila/Esmerlyn Castro (DOM)

## Singapore Smash 2022

Mon 7th – Sun 20th Mar

**MS** *W:* Fan Zhendong (CHN) *RU:* Ma Long (CHN)  
**WS** *W:* Chen Meng (CHN) *RU:* Wang Manyu (CHN)  
**MD** *W:* Fan Zhendong/Wang Chuqin (CHN) *RU:* Shunsuke Togami/Yukiya Uda (JPN)  
**WD** *W:* Sun Yingsha/Wang Manyu *RU:* Hina Hayata/Mima Ito (JPN)  
**XD** *W:* Wang Chuqin/Sun Yingsha (CHN) *RU:* Lin Yun-Ju/Cheng I-Ching (TPE)

## WTT Youth Star Contender, Doha

Mon 7th – Fri 11th Mar

**U19BS** *W:* Feng Yi-Hsin (TPE) *RU:* Maciej Kubik (POL)  
**U19GS** *W:* Miwa Harimoto (JPN) *RU:* Yuno Ojio (JPN)  
**U19BD** *W:* Nicholas Lum/Finn Luu (AUS) *RU:* Feng Yi-Hsin/Navid Shams (TPE/IRI)  
**U19GD** *W:* Yashwini Ghorpade/Suhana Saini (IND) *RU:* Lucia Mitrofan/Elena Zaharia (ROU)  
**U15BS** *W:* Tamito Watanabe (JPN) *RU:* Alan Kurmangaliyev (KAZ)  
**U15GS** *W:* Miwa Harimoto (JPN) *RU:* Yuna Ojio (JPN)  
**U15BD** *W:* Wassim Essid/Tamito Watanabe (TUN/JPN) *RU:* Alan Kurmangaliyev/Youssef Aidli (KAZ/TUN)  
**U15GD** *W:* Miwa Harimoto/Yuna Ojio (JPN) *RU:* Natalia Bogdanowicz/Bianca Mei Rosu (ROU)

## WTT Feeder Doha, Doha

Sun 13th – Thu 17th Mar

**MS** *W:* Zhao Zihao (CHN) *RU:* Yuan Licen (CHN)  
**WS** *W:* Qian Tianyi (CHN) *RU:* Liu Weishan (CHN)  
**MD** *W:* Feng Yi-Hsin/Huang Yan-Cheng (TPE) *RU:* Horacio Cifuentes/Tamas Lakatos (ARG/HUN)  
**WD** *W:* Liu Weishan/Qi Fei (CHN) *RU:* Qian Tianyi/Zhang Rui (CHN)  
**XD** *W:* Xu Yingbin/Qian Tianyi *RU:* Yuan Licen/Liu Weishan (CHN)

## WTT Youth Contender Sulaymaniyah

Mon 14th – Sun 20th Mar

**U19BS** *W:* Mobin Alipourghalehjough (IRI) *RU:* Marwan Gamal (EGY)  
**U19GS** *W:* Kimi Rostami (IRI) *RU:* Shima Safaei (IRI)  
**U17BS** *W:* Borna Petek (CRO) *RU:* Badr Mostafa (EGY)  
**U17GS** *W:* Mariam Younes (EGY) *RU:* Elina Rahimi (IRI)  
**U15BS** *W:* Samran Karimi (IRI) *RU:* Mohammad Habibi (IRI)  
**U15GS** *W:* Setayesh Iloukhani (IRI) *RU:* Yekta Abidian (IRI)  
**U13BS** *W:* Benyanmin Faraji (IRI) *RU:* Faraz Shakiba (IRI)  
**U13GS** *W:* Hend Zaza (IRI) *RU:* Yekta Larkian (IRI)  
**U11BS** *W:* Faraz Shakiba (IRI) *RU:* Asser Hussein (EGY)  
**U11GS** *W:* Rakia Elbaz (EGY) *RU:* Nada Elbadawy (EGY)

## WTT Contender Doha

Fri 18th – Thu 24th Mar

**MS** *W:* Yuan Licen (CHN) *RU:* Qiu Dang (GER)  
**WS** *W:* Fan Siqi (CHN) *RU:* Zhang Rui (CHN)  
**MD** *W:* Mattias Falck/Kristian Karlsson (SWE) *RU:* Kilian Ort/Ricardo Walther (GER)  
**WD** *W:* Miyuu Kihara/Miyu Nagasaki (JPN) *RU:* Chen Szu-Yu/Huang Yi-Hua (TPE)  
**XD** *W:* Lin Yun-Ju/Cheng I-Ching (TPE) *RU:* Sathiyam Gnanasekaran/Manika Batra (IND)

## WTT Youth Contender Tunis

Mon 21st – Sun 27th Mar

**U19BS** *W:* Milhane Jellouli (FRA) *RU:* Mauro Scharrer (SUI)  
**U19GS** *W:* Suhana Saini (IND) *RU:* Markhabo Magdieva (UZB)  
**U17BS** *W:* Céline Besnier (FRA) *RU:* Milhane Jellouli (FRA)  
**U17GS** *W:* Suhana Saini (IND) *RU:* Jennifer Varghese (IND)  
**U15BS** *W:* Flavio Mourier (FRA) *RU:* Kacper Piwowar (ENG)  
**U15GS** *W:* Jennifer Varghese (IND) *RU:* Lilou Massart (BEL)  
**U13BS** *W:* Kacper Piwowar (ENG) *RU:* Youssef Aidli (TUN)  
**U13GS** *W:* Asel Erkebaeva (UZB) *RU:* Hend Zaza (SYR)  
**U11BS** *W:* Alexander Malov (ESP) *RU:* Yousef Alhawi (UAE)  
**U11GS** *W:* Ela Saidi (TUN) *RU:* Elee Abassi (TUN)

## ITTF Costa Brava Spanish Para Open 2022, Platja d'Aro

Thu 24th – Sat 26th Mar

**MS1** *W:* Endre Major (POL) *RU:* Federico Falco (ITA)  
**MS2** *W:* Rafal Czuper (POL) *RU:* Fabien Lamirault (FRA)  
**MS3** *W:* Jenson Van Emburgh (USA) *RU:* Maciej Nalepka (POL)  
**MS4** *W:* Rafal Lis (POL) *RU:* Alexandre Delarque (FRA)  
**MS5** *W:* David Olsson (SWE) *RU:* Ahad Sarand (USA)  
**MS6** *W:* Matteo Parenzan (ITA) *RU:* Kazuki Shichino (JPN)  
**MS7** *W:* Jean-Paul Montanus (NED) *RU:* Michal Deigsler (POL)  
**MS8** *W:* Ross Wilson (GBR) *RU:* Piotr Grudzien (POL)  
**MS9** *W:* Joshua Stacey (GBR) *RU:* Ander Cepas (ESP)  
**MS10** *W:* Igor Misztal (POL) *RU:* Matteo Boheas (FRA)  
**MS11** *W:* Florian Van Acker (BEL) *RU:* Peter Palos (HUN)

**WS1/2** *W:* Giada Rossi (ITA) *RU:* Dorota Buclaw (POL)  
**WS3** *W:* Andela Muzinic (CRO) *RU:* Hatice Dulman (TUR)  
**WS4/5** *W:* Alexandre St. Pierre (FRA) *RU:* Moon Sunghae (KOR)  
**WS6** *W:* Fliss Pickard (GBR) *RU:* Morgan Caillaud (FRA)  
**WS7/8** *W:* Thu Kamkasomphu (FRA) *RU:* Kelly van Zon (NED)  
**WS9** *W:* Lei Li Na (AUS) *RU:* Karoline Pek (POL)  
**WS10** *W:* Yang Qian (AUS) *RU:* Natalia Partyka (POL)  
**WS11** *W:* Ebru Acer (TUR) *RU:* Evellyn dos Santos (BRA)

**MD4** *W:* Rafal Czuper/Jiri Suchanek (POL/CZE) *RU:* Kang Changyong/Joo Youngdae (KOR)  
**MD8** *W:* Jenson Van Emburgh/Ahad Sarand (USA) *RU:* Alexandre Delarque/Tomislav Spalj (FRA/CRO)  
**MD14** *W:* Esteban Herrault/Clément Berthier (FRA) *RU:* Dustin Eier/Jean-Paul Montanus (NED)  
**MD18** *W:* Joshua Stacey/Ross Wilson (GBR) *RU:* Aaron McKibbin/Billy Shilton (GBR)

**WD10** *W:* Nergiz Altintas/Irem Oluk (TUR) *RU:* Michela Brunelli/Giada Rossi (ITA)  
**WD20** *W:* Lei Li Na/Yang Qian (AUS) *RU:* Natalia Partyka/Karolina Pek (POL)

**XD10** *W:* Suleman Vural/Irem Oluk (TUR) *RU:* Fabien Lamirault/Alexandre St. Pierre (FRA)  
**XD14** *W:* Clément Berthier/Morgan Caillaud (FRA) *RU:* Jean-Paul Montanus/Kelly van Zon (NED)  
**XD17** *W:* Piotr Grudzien/Karolina Pek (POL) *RU:* Gyula Zborai/Alexa Svitacs (HUN)  
**XD22** *W:* Kim Bogyeeom/Sumeyra Turk (KOR/TUR) *RU:* Eduardo Cuesta/Evellyn dos Santos (ESP/BRA)

## WTT Star Contender Doha

Fri 25th – Thu 31st Mar

**MS** *W:* Andrej Gacina (CRO) *RU:* Lim Jonghoon (KOR)  
**WS** *W:* Miyuu Kihara (JPN) *RU:* Han Ying (GER)  
**MD** *W:* Benedikt Duda/Qiu Dang (GER) *RU:* Liao Cheng-Ting/Lin Yun-Ju (TPE)  
**WD** *W:* Miyuu Kihara/Miyu Nagasaki (JPN) *RU:* Cheng I-Chng/Li Yun-Jhun (TPE)  
**XD** *W:* Emmanuel Lebesson/Yuan Ji Nan (FRA) *RU:* Lin Yun-Ju/Cheng I-Ching (TPE)



Sat 4th Dec: Claudia Herweg elected President of the German Table Tennis Association (DTTB). At the Annual General Meeting she received 204 votes, only two against.

Sat 18th Dec: Greg Dzioba elected honorary member of the Manitoba Table Tennis Association. In 2015, he received the Art Barren Award for the most outstanding official in Canada.

Fri 28th Jan: Anders Lind received the "Nothing Is Impossible" award. March: he broke vertebrae in a car crash. September: he won European Team Championships bronze.

Tue 22nd Feb: Timo Boll was voted "Male Player of the Year" by German fans. Nina Mittelham secured the counterpart women's award; the best performance award went to Annett Kaufmann.

Thu 17th Mar: Long-time friends Nisse Sandberg and Khalid El-Salhy were prominent figures at the WTT Youth Contender Sulaymaniyah tournament.

Sat 4th Dec: Thomas Weikert elected President of the German Olympic Sports Confederation (DOSB). He concluded his four year term of office as ITTF President on Wednesday 24th November.

Wed 19th Jan: Oman signed a memorandum of understanding for table tennis to be included in the school syllabus.

29th Jan: An 11 day Olympic Solidarity Course, conducted by Julien Girard concluded in Madagascar; 28 aspiring coaches attended.

Wed 23rd Feb: Sweden's Anna-Carin Ahlquist announced her retirement, the pinnacle of her career was winning the women's singles class 3 title at the London 2012 Paralympic Games.

Wed 2nd Feb: Gilles de la Bourdonnaye appointed table tennis sport manager for the Paris 2024 Olympic and Paralympic Games.

Fri 17th Dec: Geraldo Campestrini and Alaor Azevedo accepted the Sou Do Esporte Award. The Brazilian Table Tennis Confederation was named the country's best governed confederation.

Wed 26th Jan: A ten day Para table tennis educational course under the direction of Cédric Rouleau concluded at the Centre Christus in Remera, Rwanda, a total of 29 students attended.

Sun 6th Feb: Her Royal Highness, Princess Zeina Rashid played Amy Wang at the Westchester Table Tennis Center in New York to celebrate the fifth anniversary of Ping Pong Parkinson.

Tue 8th March: Under the direction of [Massimo Costantini](#), an eight day ITTF High Performance Training Camp for players in the under 15 and under 19 age groups concluded in Doha.

Tue 8th Mar: On their YouTube channel, the Hellenic Table Tennis Federation paid a photo tribute to Kalin Kreanga to mark his 50th birthday.



## National Championships

### Austria

#### Sat 5th – Sun 6th Mar: Klagenfurt

MS *W*: Daniel Habesohn *RU*: David Serdaroglu  
 WS *W*: Sofia Polcanova *RU*: Karoline Mischek  
 MD *W*: Dominik Habesohn/Simon Pfeffer *RU*: Maciej Kolodziejczyk/André Pierre Kases  
 WD *W*: Ines Diendorfer/Karoline Mischek *RU*: Elena Pöhl/Amelie Solja  
 XD *W*: Alexander Chen/Sofia Lu Chen/ *RU*: Jonas Promberger/Karoline Mischek

### England

Fri 25th – Sun 27th Mar: Nottingham  
 MS *W*: Tom Jarvis *RU*: Sam Walker  
 WS *W*: Maria Tsapsinos *RU*: Tin-Tin Ho  
 MD *W*: Tom Jarvis/Sam Walker *RU*: Joe Cope/Chris Doran  
 WD *W*: Tin-Tin Ho/Maria Tsapsinos *RU*: Charlotte Bardsley/Emily Bolton  
 XD *W*: Sam Walker/Maria Tsapsinos *RU*: Joshua Bennett/Lois Peake  
 U21MS: *W*: Shayan Siraj *RU*: Louis Price  
 U21WS *W*: Charlotte Bardsley *RU*: Molly Patterson

### Finland

#### Sat 5th – Sun 6th Mar: Helsinki

MS *W*: Alex Naumi *RU*: Samuli Soine  
 WS *W*: Marina Donner *RU*: Anna Kirichenko  
 MD *W*: Alex Naumi/Sam Khosravi *RU*: Pasi Valasti/Aki Kontala  
 WD *W*: Marina Donner/Anna Kirichenko *RU*: Anni Heljala/Aleksandra Titievskaja  
 XD *W*: Johan Pettersson/Marina Donner *RU*: Lauri Laane/Aleksandra Titievskaja

### Hellenic

#### Sat 26th – Sun 27th Feb: Piraeus

MS *W*: Ioannis Sgouropoulos *RU*: Dimitris Papadimitriou  
 WS *W*: Konstantina Paridi *RU*: Katerina Toliou  
 MD *W*: George Konstantinopoulos/Konstantinos Konstantinopoulos *RU*: Dimitris Papadimitriou/Gerasimos Chatzilygeroudis  
 WD *W*: Malamatenia Papadimitriou/Aliki Kioufi *RU*: Katerina Toliou and Konstantina Paridi

### Japan

#### Mon 24th – Sun 30th Jan: Tokyo

MS *W*: Shunsuke Togami *RU*: Kenta Matsudaira  
 WS *W*: Mima Ito *RU*: Hina Hayata  
 MD *W*: Yukiya Uda/Shunsuke Togami *RU*: Tomokazu Harimoto/Masataka Morizono  
 WD *W*: Mima Ito/Hina Hayata *RU*: Eka So/Ayami Narumoto  
 XD *W*: Tomokazu Harimoto/Hina Hayata *RU*: Maharu Yoshimura/Rika Suzuki  
 BS *W*: Ryoichi Yoshiyama *RU*: Sora Matsushima  
 GS *W*: Miyuu Kihara *RU*: Miwa Harimoto

### Spain

#### Sat 5th – Sun 6th Mar: Santander

MS *W*: Marc Duran *RU*: Francisco Miguel Ruiz  
 WS *W*: Sofia-Xuan Zhang *RU*: Sofia Barba  
 MD *W*: Marc Duran/Oriol Monzo *RU*: Iker Gonzalez/Norbert Tauler  
 WD *W*: Ainhoa Cristobal/Eugenia Sastre *RU*: Sofia-Xuan Zhang/Silvia Coll  
 XD *W*: Jesus Cantero/Maria Xiao *RU*: Carlos Caballero/Sofia-Xuan Zhang

### Switzerland

#### Sat 5th – Sun 6th Mar: Crissier

MS *W*: Barish Moullet *RU*: Elias Hardmeier  
 WS *W*: Elmira Antonyan *RU*: Alexandra Tchalakian  
 MD *W*: Elias Hardmeier/Mauro Scharrer *RU*: Simon Schaffter/Yoan Rebetez  
 WD *W*: Céline Reust/Salomé Simonet *RU*: Ludivine Maurer/Alexandra Tchalakian  
 XD *W*: Elias Hardmeier/Céline Reust *RU*: Yanick Taffé/Alexandra Tchalakian



**Abdelrahman El-Sallawi (1956-2021)**

Admitted to Khartoum Hospital, suffering a heart attack, [Abdelrahman El-Sallawi, President of the Sudan Table Tennis Association](#), a position held for some 30 years, died on Tuesday 2nd November. He was 65 years old. Organiser of the 2016 Africa Cup, an African Table Tennis Federation Council Board member from August 2008 to June 2021, in 2017 he became a member of the ITTF Equipment Committee and ITTF Board of Directors. In the early 1990s he was elected a member of the Sudan Parliament, from 2012 to the present, a member in Sudan National Olympic Committee, from 2017 the Deputy President.



**David House (1935-2021)**

Resident in the United States, David House passed away on Tuesday 30th November; he was 86 years old. Originally from Bath, in 1952 he was a member of an England junior team that toured Sweden. In 1954, he won the Daily Mirror men's singles title, before in 1958, against Yugoslavia, making his senior international debut. Later, he married Welsh international Shirley Jones. They sailed to New York on the "Queen Elizabeth", David starting a three year assignment with British and Irish Railways. He never left, he moved to Chicago and opened "Inter Trav", now run by two of his sons.

**Mauricio Kobayashi (1947-2021)**

Falling ill at the TMB Platinum-Campeonato Brasileiro tournament in Joinville, Mauricio Kobayashi passed away on Wednesday 10th November. He was 74 years old. Performing the tasks he knew best, sitting courtside advising players, rushed to the local hospital, he suffered two cardiac arrests. A celebrated coaching career that started when 28 years of age, a longtime member of the São Bernardo do Campo club in São Paulo, in the 1980s, he was very much responsible for the progress made by Brazilian teams, instilling belief and confidence. In particular, players such as Hugo Hoyama and Claudio Kano benefitted from his expertise.



**Brian Nielsen (1967-2022)**

Resulting from injuries sustained by a fall on Tuesday 25th January, admitted to hospital and placed on a respirator, never able to recover his ability to breathe independently, Denmark's Brian Nielsen died on Friday 11th February; he was 54 years old. A teacher by profession, competing in class 6, he was twice a Paralympic Games gold medallist, men's team in 1992, men's singles in 1996. In the same category at the European Para Championships, he won the men's singles title in 1991, men's team in 2013. In 1998 he ascended to top spot in the men's class 6 world rankings.



**Zlatko Novakovic (1945-2022)**

Born in Zagreb on Wednesday 19th September 1945, Zlatko Novakovic died on Monday 10th January; he was 77 years old, in 2020 he had been diagnosed with brain cancer. He was the head coach of "Mladost" Zagreb at a time when the club was the most dominant force in Yugoslavia. Under his guidance such players as Jasna Rafter, the former Jasna Fazlic, and Zoran Primorac achieved success on the world stage. Married to Amela, Jasna's sister, later in Germany, he was the coach at Bayreuth and Ochenhausen; more recently he spent 10 years coaching at the Aspire Academy in Doha.

**Cornelius Joseph Warren (1940-2021)**

Suffering from Parkinson's, Cornelius Joseph Warren, always known as "Connie", passed away on Tuesday 12th October, he was 81 years old. A popular figure, a quick wit, he represented England at the 1966 European Championships. The following year was to be the pinnacle of his career. He was a member of the successful England team at the Quadrangular tournament involving Ireland, Scotland, and Wales. He won the men's singles title at the Welsh Open, emerged the runner up at the English National Championships, progressed to the no.3 spot on the national rankings and gained selection for World Championships in Stockholm.



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