



ACROSS THE NET

Melton Table Tennis

March 2017

SUMMER SEASON UNDERWAY, HALL OF FAME RECOGNITION, PARA WRAP, & MORE

In this edition, we look at the standings half-way through our first season of the year, add to the accolades of a champion, talk about the winners and winners at the Para Open, discuss my idea for changing the scoring system, and look back at someone who never won a world championship.

SEASON MIDWAY POINT

As we approach the half-way point of our first season of the year, the sound of creaking limbs and straining muscles is decreasing as we all start to regain some sort of match fitness after the break.

The Leading Player standings in **A-Grade** have returned to the status quo, with **Matt Camilleri** on top, but being closely chased by a pack including **Brad Gibson, Dan Heaney, Chris Addis & Marc Camilleri**.

B-Grade is a little bit clearer with newcomer **Michael Kiki** having a narrow lead over **Jim Scott** and **Syed Ahmed**.

The Handicap competition in **C-Grade** is still anyone's, but **Annemarie Rothwell, Anna-Marie Jurkovic** and **Sharyn Ciberlin** currently at the top of the table.

TTV PARA HALL OF FAME

Table Tennis Victoria have since 2000 been inducting players in their **Hall of Fame**. In 2015, these awards were expanded with the creation of Halls of Fame for **Veterans** and **Juniors**, and in 2016 with a specific Hall of Fame for **Country** players. This year the corridor of commemoration has been extended with the addition of the **Para Hall of Fame**.



At the National Para Championships, in February the first group were inducted into the **Para Hall of Fame**, and Melton Table Tennis player and coach, **Chris Addis** was one of these Inductees. Making the announcement was **Dennis Makaling**, CEO of Table Tennis Victoria, with the awards presented by **Bruno Moretti**, winner of Australia's first Para Gold medal at Rome in 1960. **Players are inducted into the Hall of Fame based on outstanding performances in state, national and international tournaments.**

The others to be inducted were **Rory Carroll, Cathy Geffke, Trevor Hirth, Rebecca Julian, Sarah Lazzaro, Barak Mizrachi, Catherine Morrow, Nathan Pellisier, and Melissa Tapper**. Melissa has already been inducted into the Junior and Country Halls of Fame.

Melton Table Tennis congratulate all of these deserving inductees whose efforts have been recognised by their inclusion.

2017 PARA NATIONALS WRAP

Basketball coach and author John R. Wooden said, *“Things work out best for people who make the best of how things work out.”* If you want to see the essence of what this means, go and stand in a room full of the best para table tennis players from Australia and our region. You can actually breathe the inspiration.

The **2017 Australian Para Championships** were held at Mornington in early February, and on display was some amazing table tennis. With entrants from every state as well as participants from **Thailand and Indonesia**, there were some amazing skills being shown. The entire Australian Paralympic team from Rio were in attendance and demonstrated their class, both on and off the court.



Of most interest to MTTA was **Will Corluka** appearing at his first national Championship. While having limited success on the scoresheets, Will (seen here with Olympian and Paralympian, **Melissa Tapper** and Paralympic Silver medalist **Sam Van Einem**) competed well and managed to impress with his improving skills.

Victorians featured in the medals of most categories, and took 41 of the 102 medals on offer. In fact, of the 25 categories being played only 4 had no medals awarded to Victorian players.

Among players known to MTTA members was **Melissa Tapper** taking 3 Gold and a Silver medal, **Trevor Hirth** with 2 Gold and a Bronze, **Nathan Pellissier** with 2 Gold, **Rory Carroll** with 1 Gold and 1 Silver, **Jake Ballestrino** with 1 Gold, **Barak Mizrachi** with 2 Silver & 2 Bronze, **Danni Di Toro** with 1 Silver and 2 Bronze, and **Sy Pham** with 1 Silver. Best & Fairest awards were taken out by **Melissa Tapper** and **Jake Ballestrino**.



Together with the game as we know it, it was fascinating to watch **Swish** being played. This is a version of table tennis for the visually impaired using a larger ball with bells in it on a modified table with the ball being struck or pushed on the table rather than over a net. And they don't muck about. The ball is struck with tremendous force and can travel at speeds in excess of *100 kmh*.

It took a couple of games of watching Swish before I realised that as well as the competitors, the umpires were also visually impaired. They were ruling on the game and calling the scores based on what they heard.

All-in-all, the weekend spent at the para championships is something that I'm glad I had the chance to attend, and something I'm looking forward to the next opportunity I get. The Victorian Closed Para Championships will be held at MSAC in May. I urge to all to attend and be inspired.

INTERNATIONALS VISIT MELTON

After the 2017 Para Championships, the international players from **Thailand and Indonesia** together with some of the Australian players visited a number of schools around Melbourne promoting the benefits of the game. On Friday the 10th, they paid a visit to the **Melton Special School** where they were joined by **Chris Addis**.

Running demonstrations and training, the players were very warmly received by the students who thoroughly enjoyed the experience. This sort of activity can only be positive and raise awareness of our sport. Information on our club was handed out. Hopefully the experience may encourage some of the students to continue with playing the game.



Australian and International Players at the training camp held after the National Championships.

SI GOING STRONG

Ever heard of **Si Wasserman**? No, I didn't really expect you to have. From Oceanside, California, Si is planning on becoming one of the thousands of competitors at the **2018 World Veterans Championships** which will be held in **Las Vegas**.

Si trains on table tennis for 2 hours, 3 times a week. He says that his backhand drive is his best shot, however his forehand is improving. Si married his long-time love and fellow table tennis player Patty Martinez last year. Having recently moved into a new larger home, the pair have just bought a new table tennis table and are about to invest in a training robot to help Si's game.

Oh, did I mention that Si turns **95** in April?

Originally introduced to table tennis as a 12-year-old in **1934**, Si started to play tournaments in **1949** and entered his first U.S. Open in **1950**. In **1959** he led the U.S. team at the **World Championships** in **Dortmund, Germany**. He stopped playing in **1964** until he was encouraged to start playing again in **1994** at the age of **72**. A member of the USATT Hall of Fame, Si credits table tennis for his longevity.



"The thrill of the competition, anticipation of being able to practise and at the same time working on your health and well being is something that I enjoy the most about the sport of table tennis"

This is further proof that table tennis is a "whole of life" sport. When there is a 12-year-old ranked as the best under-18 player in the world, and a 94-year-old who says that his forehand is improving, you have to believe that not only can you love table tennis your whole life, you can play it your whole life as well.

HOW TO MAKE MONEY PLAYING TABLE TENNIS

I recently saw an article which was published in the **New York Daily News** concerning table tennis. It was about 64-year-old **Tommy (Tommy Shots) Gioeli**, former Colombo crime boss who is suing the U.S federal government for **\$10 million** over injuries sustained while playing table tennis at the **Metropolitan Detention Center** in Brooklyn, New York.



According to the papers filed, Gioeli slipped and fell because of the prison officials' negligence. He says they knew, or should have known about the hazardous wet floor around the table tennis table due to its proximity to the shower area and an alleged leaky sink pipe. Gioeli fractured his right kneecap and required surgery.

The government rejects the charges of negligence, and claims that there is risk in playing table tennis, and Gioeli chose to take that risk.

Gioeli was in the detention centre awaiting trial for racketeering, conspiracy, and murder, including the killing of a police officer.

TIME FOR ACTION ON REACTION

There is a part of our game which for too long has been ignored by umpires, tournament directors, coaches, and ITTF officials. This skill is often unseen at lower levels, and becomes less prevalent at the highest level, but many players in-between the lowest and highest seem to spend the majority of their time at it and I believe they deserve to be rewarded for it. I am talking, of course, about the **win/loss reaction**.

Broken down into two basic sections, the “Win” component can be as simple as a knowing smile that you got the better of your opponent. As skill increases, this can be upgraded to a softly-spoken “Yes”, sometimes accompanied by a small fist-pump.

The higher-level player may try to imitate the Chinese masters by shouting “*Cho*”. Although no definitive answer could be found to the question of its meaning, the most likely equivalent is “good shot” or “good point”, or “fight”, or a description of some kind of vegetable. It seems strange then, that players who don’t speak Chinese should try to use a Chinese expression, *n’est-ce pas*?

On to the “Loss” reaction. Players of all levels seems to find it easier to express themselves at this end of the scale. When a bad shot is made, players have a greater range of vocal and facial expressions to call upon.

Even inexperienced players find it easy to contort their face into an expression clearly understood as disappointment. As experience increases, the disappointment-displays can be expanded into vocal performances as well. From the simple “*Aw come on*”, to the more complex “*You \$#@%&^* idiot!*” (obviously said at greater volume), the range of available dummy-spits increases with experience.



Which brings me to my point. I recently read an article published in 1936 concerning players who were disturbing other competitors with their antics during play.

If this type of performance has been going on in our game for over 80 years, is it not time to do something about it? It obviously can’t be stamped out or it would have been done by now.

When a series of smashes end with the ball missing the end of the table by a centimetre, and the player’s expression is reminiscent of someone who has just lost a close relative, should we not reward them for the artistic content of the display?

While some prefer silent self-vilification, or staring at their bat as if it had taken on a malevolent life of its own, should we not award style points or a degree of difficulty to those who prefer to ensure that the entire playing arena is aware of their misfortune? Perhaps the umpires should have a series of numbered cards to indicate the additional points to be awarded to that player for the entertainment value.

And what an opportunity for coaches to expand their businesses. After a vigorous 45 minute training session on the table, an additional 15 minutes of “artistic expression” would nicely round out the hour.

So let’s all strive to get this new form of point-scoring approved by the ITTF. If this is implemented, many more players might have a chance to be a world champion. *Would you?*

THE BEST TO NEVER BE WORLD CHAMPION ?

Li Furong never won the Men's Singles World Championship. But it wasn't because of a lack of talent or ability. It was a question of politics.

Born in Shanghai, China in 1942, he started playing table tennis at the age of 15. His early doubles partner was **Zhuang Zedong** who would later become Li's fellow team-member in the Chinese National team, and 3-time World Singles Champion. Within 2 years of starting to play the game, Li had shown enough talent to be invited to join the national team.



His talent was unmistakable. A right-hander, he played with a pen-hold grip and, like so many using that grip at the time, was attacking on the forehand and defensive on the backhand. He helped the Chinese men's team win four **Teams** titles at the World Table Tennis Championships in 1961, 1963, 1965 and 1971. He also won 3 bronze medals in **Men's Doubles** and 1 bronze in **Mixed Doubles**. But it was in Men's singles competition that our interest with Li Furong lies.

Table tennis in China was intricately tied to politics. **Mao Zedong** and **Zhou Enlai** were both very interested in the progress of the national table tennis team, as they saw it as a method of promoting Chinese ideals to the world. Individual gold medals would be decided upon by the Chinese government, as recognition of the player's standing in the team, and as rewards to be gifted by the leaders.

In the 1961 *World Championships* in Beijing, it was decided that, because of his victory over **Ichiro Ogimura** to snatch the Men's Teams gold medal from the reigning world champion Japanese team, Zhuang Zedong would be allowed to claim the Men's Singles gold medal by defeating Li in the final.

The 1963 *World Championships* in Prague saw Zhuang win more matches than any of the other Chinese team-members, and so it was decided that he should again win the Men's Singles final. Again, Li played his part and lost the match.

In the 1965 *World Championships* in Ljubiana, Li starred, winning more matches than any other Chinese player. Once again, facing Zhuang Zedong in the Men's Singles final, the message came down that Li was to lose the match. It had been decided that it would reflect better on China to have a 3-time World Champion so, again Li had to bow his head to receive a silver medal rather than the gold.

It would have been of small consolation to Li that he was the crowd favourite and that his ovation always overwhelmed Zhuang's.

In the book, *Finding a Husband for Chinese Traitor*, **He Zhili** wrote:- "*I have chatted with Zhuang Zedong and he was displeased. He said, 'I can beat Li Furong on skill alone. When the leaders told Li to throw the match, I was discouraged. So now people are saying that all my world championships were fixed'; Li Furong was also angry: 'I could have beaten Zhuang Zedong but the leaders wanted me to lose.'*"

Li Furong served as **President** of the **Asian Table Tennis Union** from 2001 to 2009. In 2010 Li was awarded the title of **Honourary Life President of the ATTU**. He is the current deputy director of the National Sports Bureau of China.



MARCH TOURNAMENTS

Saturday the 4th of **March** see the running of the **Ballarat Senior and Junior Open**. I've checked the details and discovered that these are 2 separate events. You don't have to be a Senior as well as a Junior to play.

The following weekend, all the excitement is in Croydon. Saturday the 11th is the **Croydon Masters Veterans Open**. Sunday the 12th is the **Croydon Masters Junior Open**, and Monday the 13th (the public holiday) is the **Croydon Masters Senior Open**. This is one of the few events with graded competition going down far enough for most casual pennant players to find a grade. A well run event, it's worth a visit if you haven't tried tournament play before.

On Sunday the 19th Bendigo will be running the **Bendigo Senior & Junior Open**. Apparently the same rules apply in Bendigo as in Ballarat.

ON THE WEB

www.tabletennisvic.org.au is the website of our controlling body. There is a (semi) regularly updated news page highlighting what's happening around the state. You will also be able to find a section giving a brief history of table tennis in Victoria, listing of Halls of Fame with details of the inductees, and a section where you can catch up and read copies of the Annual Reports going back to 2010 (no, I'm serious).

This page also links to their facebook page and their twitter feed.

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To contact Melton Table Tennis, email meltontabletennis@gmail.com

To contact Glenn O'Dea, email glenn.odea@bigpond.com

To contact Matt Camilleri, email matthewpcamilleri@hotmail.com

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