



ACROSS THE NET

Melton Table Tennis

October 2018

Edition 49

SUNBURY PARTICIPATION, PARA'S PARTICIPATION, WORLD PARTICIPATION, AND THE COST OF IT ALL

Thank you for your participation in the reading of this newsletter. In this edition, we review our participation in the challenge against Sunbury, wish success to our para team's participation in the World Championships, discuss participation and points scoring at the highest level, and pass on data about participation in sports of various kinds. It's a total participation-fest this month in *Across The Net*.

MELTON PREVAIL ON GRAND FINAL EVE EVE

Did you know that **Melbourne** is the only city in the world to have *two* public holidays declared for sporting events? Other places have sporting events on public holidays, but we do it different.

The **Melbourne Cup** is one of the world's most famous horse races, and since **1875** the two-mile race has been held on the first Tuesday in November. It has also been a public holiday, declared because of the race, since **1876**. Much more recent (**2015**) is the state-wide **Grand Final Eve** public holiday, held usually on the last Friday in September to allow people to get involved in the celebrations for the **AFL Grand Final** the following day. At MTTA, we celebrate this by pitting our best table tennis players against the best that **Sunbury Table Tennis** have to offer. Well, no-one said we had to celebrate by playing football.

This year's event was held at Sunbury, and **30** brave souls from Melton travelled across to face our foes and try to redeem ourselves after last year's loss. In a fantastic night of table tennis, our players performed brilliantly in taking home the trophy by the margin of **8 tables to 2**.



On a few of the tables, the victory was only secured in the final match, and in fact on two tables Melton were behind by 3 matches to 4, winning the last two pairings to take the table victory.

Looking over the original trophy awarded for the **Melton-Sunbury Challenge**, it reminded me of how rarely our name troubled the engraver over nearly 2 decades of this event. Seeing "**MELTON**" as victors on 2 of the last 3 challenge matches shows a steady improvement in our club's performance of which we should all be proud.



Our thanks go to our hosts at Sunbury for their generous hospitality and for their competitive spirit in these challenge matches, and our congratulations go to all players from Melton who made this such a memorable night.

AUSSIE PARA'S TAKE ON THE WORLD

From the 15th to the 21st of **October**, over 330 athletes will converge on the city of **Lasko** in **Slovenia** for the **2018 World Individual Para Championships**. **54** countries will be represented by players based on their current world ranking within their class, and performances at the regional qualification tournaments, plus a few Wild Card entries.

The championships, like all Para competitions, are played within classes, depending on the amount of function the athlete has. **Classes 1 to 5** are for wheelchair-based athletes, and **Classes 6 to 10** are for standing athletes. **Class 11** is defined for players with an intellectual disability.

China will have the most participants at the championships with **31** athletes. **Korea** has **21**, and **France** are sending **19**. **Australia** is well represented with **10** athletes competing, so let's have a look at our team.

Amanda Tscharke from South Australia was given a Wild Card entry into the **Class 3** Women's event. Originally a talented junior athletics participant prior to her accident, Amanda took up wheelchair javelin before switching to table tennis. Amanda is the current Women's Class 1-3 Australian champion.



Jessy Chen from NSW qualified through the Oceania Qualification Tournament held in Fiji, and will be competing in the **Class 3** Men's events. Jessy has been putting a lot of time into his training and is a good future prospect for the para's. Jessy is the current Men's Class 3 Australian champion.

Danni Di Toro will be remembered by all who attended our presentation night last year and were inspired by her presence. Competing in the **Class 4** Women's events, Danni received a Wild Card entry into the championships.



Caleb Crowden hails from South Australia and secured his place in the **Class 4** Men's events at the championships by winning at the Oceania Qualification Tournament which were held in Fiji. Caleb is the current Men's Class 4 Australian champion.

Rebecca Julian was the first Australian woman to compete at a Para World Championship in 2006. Rebecca, from Victoria, has qualified through the Oceania Qualification Tournament in **Class 6**. Her experience at major events, including Paralympic Games will be an advantage to her in these championships.



Trevor Hirth is well known to many at MTTA through his competing for **Sunbury** at our annual challenge matches. Trevor, a **Class 6** athlete, has a wide range of experience and has been attending training camps and competing in Europe in preparation for these championships. Trevor qualified through the Oceania Qualification Tournament in Fiji. He recently won a Bronze medal in the Team's event at the Czech Open. Trevor is the current Men's Class 6 Australian champion.

Nathan Pellissier is another “almost local” to us, hailing from Williamstown. Nathan is the current Australian Champion in **Class 8**, and is spending much of 2018 living and training in Europe to further his career in table tennis. Nathan qualified through the Oceania Qualification Tournament where he won the Gold medal in his class. He recently won a Silver medal in the Team’s event at the Czech Open. Nathan is the current Men’s Class 8 Australian champion.



Melissa Tapper’s story is well known to many in table tennis. Originally from Hamilton in western Victoria, and now living in Melbourne, Melissa was the first Australian to play table tennis in both **Olympic** and **Paralympic Games**, and is the only Australian to have played in both Para and abled-bodied events at a **Commonwealth Games**. Competing in **Class 10**, and ranked number **3** in the world, Melissa qualified through the Oceania Qualification Tournament.



Andrea McDonnell grew up in a table tennis family with both of her parents playing. Hailing from Queensland, her experience at national, Oceania, and Paralympic levels makes Andrea a strong competitor in **Class 10**. Andrea won the right to compete at the World Championships due to her world ranking of **20th**.

Sam von Einem played junior tennis until his family moved to **Abu Dhabi** in the **United Arab Emirates**. To avoid the heat, Sam started playing table tennis and has never looked back. Competing at the 2016 Rio Paralympics, Sam took the Silver medal, the first Paralympic table tennis medal for Australia since 1984. Competing in **Class 11**, and currently ranked **4th**, Sam won entry to the championships based on his world ranking.



The playing group will be accompanied by **Sue Stevenson**, the National Program Manager (Para) for Table Tennis Australia acting as Team Manager, National Para Head Coach, **Alois Rosario**, and the newly appointed Assistant Coach **Miao Miao**.

We wish the team well and look forward to celebrating their successes in the next edition of *Across The Net*.

THE WORLD WAS WATCHING

The **World Team Championships** held in **Sweden** during May achieved a massive global media audience, once again proving that table tennis is by no means a minor sport.

A global audience of **291 million** in **140** countries tuned in to watch with **862** hours of coverage. In **China** alone the audience figure was an impressive **170.95 million** viewers. In **Japan**, nearly **40%** of all TV viewers were watching the event. The ITTF’s live streaming site, **ITTV.com** was viewed **3.61 million** times during the event.

There were **27,595** media articles on the championships, **27.3 million** Facebook impressions, **3.5 million** Twitter impressions, and **13.3 million** Instagram impressions. YouTube videos of the matches were viewed **977,000** times, and Weibo (the Chinese version of Facebook) had a staggering total of **490 million** impressions.

PARTICIPATION NUMBERS INCREASING? WHO KNOWS

In an article in the last edition, I raised the hope that with the increasing number of world-class tournaments being held in Australia, table tennis participation figures may grow. You can't measure growth unless you know the starting point, so this is an opportune time to look at the figures for registered players in Australia and some other countries.

To get the Australian figures, I have had to sacrifice my sanity while I read through copies of Annual Reports from **Table Tennis Australia** as well as from each of the state bodies for past years. No need to thank me. I know you would have done the same for me.

Within Australia, we have had a **49%** increase in registered player numbers from **2002** to **2017**. And **Victoria** is leading the way. Our percentage increase is not as great as some other states, but by player numbers, we are way out in front with over **4,300** compared to the next best, **Queensland** with **1,852**. In total, **Australia** currently sits at just under **10,500** registered players.

The figures I've quoted for Australia are based on players registered at clubs. In our state, these registered player figures are the basis of the charges made to a club by **Table Tennis Victoria**. The higher the number of registered players, the higher the registration fees for the club. While there are funding benefits for the sport to have the most accurate (and highest) number, let's be honest, some clubs may not be entirely accurate with the registering of players. This could reduce the figures I'm looking at but, in the grand scheme of things, not by much. However, it would be nice to be able to, hand on heart, say that these numbers are 100% accurate.



And while the registered numbers for Australia are good, before we start patting ourselves on the back we need to look at what other countries are doing.

It's not easy to get these figures. I went straight to what I thought was the source and asked the **ITTF** if they could provide me with membership numbers from each of the **226 countries** associated with them. I was told that they didn't keep those figures and I should probably use my best guess.

WHAT?!?!?! They don't keep those figures? I would have understood if they had told me that they couldn't release those figures, but to tell me they don't keep them? It just doesn't make sense. If we in Australia, club-by-club send participation figures to our state bodies, and the state bodies forward them on to the national body which publishes them in its Annual Report, surely this chain of responsibility would continue with Table Tennis Australia forwarding these figures to the International Table Tennis Federation who would be using them for forward planning. For the ITTF to say that they don't keep them is a nonsense.

In my ongoing investigation of these facts I ran into another obstacle. *What is a player?* Is it someone who is registered and is competing at pennant level in a club? Is it juniors who is receiving coaching privately and don't play competition? Is it people who have a table set up in their garage? Well, to all of the above, yes, no, and maybe.

I believe that the **USA** only consider “registered” players to be those who compete in tournaments. Local club-only players don’t get calculated in their figures. I contacted the **USATT**, and after a few email exchanges communications stopped without a definitive answer. Further investigation revealed a form linked to their website which shows that in **2016** they reported more than **250 clubs** with just over **6,000 members**. Before we get carried away and tell ourselves that we have more players than the USA, let me remind you that these figures only include tournament players, not general club players.

New Zealand produce some interesting figures. Their 2017 Annual Report shows the number of participants at nearly **16,000**, but this includes school competitions as well. The **Auckland Table Tennis Association** reports that they have **4,500** players with **207 tables** over **52** venues, but **48** of those venues are in schools, and over **3,600** players are of school age. They don’t report on how many of the juniors are involved at club level, but **Table Tennis New Zealand** do list a national total of **4,700** players 18-years-old and over.

From there, the figures just get higher and higher. The website of the **English Table Tennis Association** states that they have **42,000 members**. **France** has nearly 3,500 registered clubs with about **206,000 members**. The website of the **Japan Table Tennis Association** states membership figures of over **350,000**, and **Germany** list more than 9,300 clubs and over **590,000** active members.

Any way you look at the figures, we have a long way to go. A long, long way.

I DON'T GET IT

Last year, the ITTF changed the formula used for calculating the rankings of the top players to encourage participation. If players didn’t compete, they would lose points or be removed from the listing altogether. Participation as well as performance over higher ranked players was the key to moving up the rankings. Well, twelve months on there has been movement, but there doesn’t seem to be any consistency in the outcome.

Now, I must admit that I’m still confused by the exact details of how the new ranking points are calculated, but an article published on the ITTF website has indicated that a player needs to better their result from the same event in the previous year to maintain parity on the rankings. Japanese player, **Kenta Matsudaira** was the runner-up in the **Bulgarian Open** in **2017**, but didn’t play there this year. His ranking dropped from **19th** to **23rd**. Fair enough.

Ma Long moved up a place in the new rankings, despite his only match during the month being a loss to the **31st** ranked **Liam Pitchford** of **England**. Pitchford has claimed a new high by defeating Ma Long. The other explanation for Pitchford’s rapid rise is that he has to play in the qualifying matches to make the main draw in major tournaments and, therefore accumulates points faster, but he’s playing lower ranked opponents.

If participation is important why, then did **Tomokazu Harimoto**, who participated in *15 out of the 16* tournaments, winning the **Japan Open**, and defeating the likes of Ma Long and **Zhang Jike** along the way, drop 2 places on the list? And if participation counts, imagine how high **Romania’s Bernadette Szocs** could have got. She played in only seven of the 16 rounds of the world tour, never getting past the Round of 16, but jumped from **32nd** to **26th**.

I just don’t get it.

PARTICIPATION COSTS OUT OF CONTROL IN MANY SPORTS

In a recent article written by **Michelle Cull**, a senior lecturer in accounting and financial planning, and **Keith Parry**, a senior lecturer in sport management, both from **Western Sydney University**, they mentioned that according to the **Australian Sports Commission**, Australians spend nearly **\$11 billion** a year on sport and physical activity participation fees.

Some experts are warning of a "growing grassroots divide between families able to afford junior sport" and those who cannot. The research done by Michelle and Keith looked at the impact sports participation fees are having on families in **New South Wales**. They found that people were paying an average of **\$1,100** to play a sport each season. On top of this, they were spending **\$450** on transport, bringing the total sport participation cost to about **\$1,500** per person per season

The largest expense reported by the survey respondents was registration fees levied by sporting organisations. These amounted to an average of **\$225**. Added to this were fees for coaching, uniforms, and footwear, each listed at an average of over **\$200** per year.

A listing of the top sports in New South Wales show participation costs of **\$1,641** for **Golf**, **\$1,559** for **Swimming**, **\$1,281** for **Tennis**, and **\$1,142** for **Cricket**. At the lowest end of costs from these top 16 sports, **Rugby League** had an annual cost of **\$342**, **Netball** was at **\$435**, and **Australian Rules Football** came in at **\$565**.

The impact of rising participation costs is being felt in a number of ways. The study showed that about **10 per cent** of respondents had borrowed money (not including credit cards) to participate in sports at an average of **\$5,000** per person. Some **35 per cent** of respondents also reported greater credit card debt due to sport fees.

Worryingly, participation costs were also found to be a major barrier for many children wanting to play sport. As one respondent told the survey, *"We have two sons. Only the eldest gets to play sport because of the cost. There was absolutely no way we could find \$1,000 for registration two weeks after Christmas. The youngest just misses out. Totally unfair, but the fiscal reality is, we have a mortgage to pay."*

Table tennis was not one of the 16 sports covered in the survey, but if it was the cost of participation would have come in well below the average figures quoted for the other sports. At **MTTA** players are required to register with **Table Tennis Victoria**, and part of these fees cover you for insurance purposes. Our club has no membership fees, and the average cost of play is **\$8** per night, and even less for juniors. Even though these costs are spread over a 12-month period, annual participation costs could be as low as **\$300**.

We need to get the word out that participation in a Commonwealth Games and Olympic sport can be affordable. Table tennis costs very little to play, and what costs there are don't come in a single hit at the start of the year.

With the ITTF having the aim of making table tennis one of the top 5 sports in the world, the general public needs to be made aware of the fact that there is an affordable alternative to the more "traditional" sports that parents encourage their children to play. A sport for All. A sport for Life.

So, table tennis anyone?

THE QUESTION OF COLOUR

Are you a **Red** forehand player or a **Black** forehand player? Or do you simply pick up the bat without caring? Do you have matched or different rubber on each side? Does it really matter?

Well, yes, it does. There are so many options these days that we would need too much room and too much time to discuss them all. So I'll leave that to the experts and keep to the simpler question. *Red or Black?*

In the 1977 World Championships held in **Birmingham, England**, two Chinese players, **Liang Geliang** and **Huang Liang**, reached the semi-finals in the Men's Singles. Both were choppers, with long pips usually on the backhand. These two Chinese players had the same colour rubber on both sides, as most players did in those days, and flipped their bats both when serving and during rallies. Opponents couldn't tell which side they were hitting with, and it caused havoc.

Players all over the world copied this. At the time of the 1977 Worlds perhaps **10%** of players had combination rackets, and most of them were with short pips on the backhand, rarely if ever flipping. By 1983 **over 70%** of players had combination rackets, nearly all of them with long pips or antispin. Rallies were getting worse and worse, and players quit the sport in droves. The ITTF changed the rules in 1983 to require two "**clearly different**" colours, but soon after specified that the colours must be red and black.

Is there a difference between red and black? In the early days of the red and black rule the red side was a bit faster. The problem was in the black dye, which apparently slowed the rubber down. And so for the first few years most top players put the red on the forehand. After a few years the problem with the black dye was fixed, and the two colours now apparently play the same. However, for years afterwards most top players were in the habit of red on forehand, black on backhand, and many amateur players copied them.

What do the big boys and girls do now? I have listed the top ten men and women players based on the September Rankings so you can see which players use which colour on their forehand

MEN - Forehand Colour

Fan Zhendong (China) – BLACK

Xu Xin (China) – BLACK

Timo BOLL (Germany) – BLACK

LIN Gaoyuan (China) - BLACK

Dimitrij OVTCHAROV (Germany) – BLACK

Tomokazu HARIMOTO (Japan) - BLACK

MA Long (China) – BLACK

LEE Sangsu (Korea) - BLACK

Hugo CALDERANO (Portugal) - BLACK

WONG Chun-Ting (Hong Kong) - BLACK

WOMEN – Forehand Colour

ZHU Yuling (China) - BLACK

LIU Shiwen (China) - BLACK

CHEN Meng (China) - BLACK

Kasumi ISHIKAWA (Japan) - BLACK

WANG Manyu (China) - BLACK

Mima ITO (Japan) - BLACK

DING Ning (China) - BLACK

CHENG I-Ching (Taipei) - BLACK

Miu HIRANO (Japan) - BLACK

CHEN Xingtong (China) - BLACK

So what colour do you use on your forehand now? *Thinking about changing?*



AGE IS NO BARRIER

Some people think that age is a barrier to good performance. Wrong on so many levels. It's true that many of the top table tennis players retire in their early to mid-thirties, but that doesn't have to be the case, and it doesn't mean that you can't still compete past that age.

And just to prove the point, at the **2018 ITTF Women's World Cup** held last week in **Chengdu, China**, Australia's **Jian Fang Lay** managed to beat much younger and much higher rated opponents to top her qualification group and progress to the Round of 16.

Jian, aged 45 and with a world ranking of **74**, progressed by beating the World number **36**, **Georgina Pota** of **Hungary** (4-3), and the World number **22**, **Mo Zhang** of **Canada** (4-1).

Moving into the Round of 16, Jian came up against the world's most attacking defensive player and World number **12**, **Sun Hyowon** of **Korea**. Jian's tournament was ended in this match, but only just. Sun won 11-6, 11-4, 11-13, 11-4, 6-11, 9-11, 11-6.



This was Jian's seventh appearance at a Women's World Cup, and the *first time* she or any other Australian has progressed past the Qualifying round.

What a performance. What a performer.

OCTOBER TOURNAMENTS

Internationally, there's a clash of major tournaments this month. As previously discussed, the **2018 Para Individual World Championships** will be held in **Lasko, Slovenia** from the **15th** to the **21st** of **October**.

Also from the **15th** to the **21st** of **October** is the **2018 Men's World Cup**. This prestigious event combines the winners of the various regional qualification tournaments, together with a player selected from the host country and a wild card entry. **Heming Hu** (another Victorian) will be representing the **Oceania** region. The tournament will be held at **Disneyland** in **Paris**. There will be no comments about Goofy. That would be beneath me.

And do we need to have something else clash with these dates? Of course we do. From the **12th** to the **20th** of **October**, the **National Veterans Championship** will be held in **Bendigo**. Local traffic has been warned of the likelihood of the Calder Freeway being blocked by slow-moving mobility scooters at this time.



YOUR FEEDBACK

This is *your* club and *your* opinions are valid and valued. If you have any comments to make on the contents of this newsletter, or if you have any suggestions or information for future editions please let us know.

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