



ACROSS THE NET

Melton Table Tennis

September 2016

SPRING SEASON UNDERWAY, AGM COMING, OLYMPIC WRAP, & PARALYMPIC PREVIEW

In this edition we look at our current season, the upcoming AGM and the Sunbury Challenge, I rant about coverage that was worse than a thin sheet full of holes on a winter's night, and we preview the upcoming Paralympic Games in Rio.

SPRING IS IN THE AIR - AND ON THE TABLES

Our Spring season is underway, and it's great to see new faces at the tables. Once again we have 4 grades in action, and things are looking good for some tough competition. There will be a mid-season break from pennant play for the school holidays, but we still have things going on.

On **Thursday the 22nd of September** Melton Table Tennis will be holding its **Annual General Meeting**. This is an important part of the club's administration where office-bearers are elected to maintain the smooth and correct running of the club for the next 12 months. If you are interested in joining the dedicated group of volunteers, please feel free to nominate for office. At the conclusion of the AGM, the club will be open for practice and social play.

Thursday the 29th sees the annual challenge match between Melton and **Sunbury Table Tennis Club**. This year it will be held at Sunbury and teams will be selected based on the Ratings Central gradings to try to make the competition fair and even. Selection for this event will be made closer to the date.

Over recent years, Sunbury have given us a bit of a caning at these challenges, winning 8 tables to 1 in 2014, and 7 tables to 3 last year, but we hope to put up a good showing at this year's match

LAUNCH OF TABLE TENNIS X-TREME

The **International Table Tennis Federation** has launched a new version of table tennis to try to encourage greater participation from new players.

Table tennis X-treme is designed to be played anywhere there is a table, with more relaxed rules and different scoring from the game as we know it. It will not be a replacement for the traditional version, but a totally new game for recreational play. The intention is to eventually run tournaments for TTX.

In a nutshell, the rules are slightly different. Any type of serve is legal. Hidden, straight off the hand, over the table, whatever you like. And if it clips the net and goes over, that's a good serve as well. Games are played to a 2-minute time limit. Either player can call out "wildcard" before the ball is served, and if that player wins the point they score 2 instead of 1. With hardbats and larger, heavier balls it will be different.

Will it revolutionise table tennis? No. Will it attract more people to the sport? Well, it may be a good way of introducing them to the game.

Will we try it at a practice night? *Hell, yeah !!!*

RIO OLYMPICS : THE GOOD, THE BAD AND THE UGLY - RANDOM THOUGHTS OF A SPORTS NUT

At the **1956** Olympic Games in **Melbourne**, Australian television was only a few months old. The Olympic coverage consisted of three massive cameras mounted around the **MCG**. These enormous devices required the operator to manually change the lenses if he wanted to get a close-up. Footage was rushed from the MCG to the television studio to be processed, with the highlights shown on the nightly news in Melbourne. The tapes were then flown to Sydney where they were shown there on the nightly news the next day.

After watching the Channel 7 coverage of the Rio Olympics, oh, how I envy the people of 1956.

And Channel 7 knew that their coverage of Rio on television was bad. They even admitted it in their own telecasts. When advertising their mobile apps, they said, "*Watch more of the sports you want*". In other words, we'll give you limited coverage on free-to-air television, but you'll have to pay for the stuff you really want to see. And we're stuck with Channel 7 for the Tokyo Olympics as well. But to the Games.

Ahh, Rio. Location of Carnivale, Ipanema, and Copacabana beaches. Spiritual home of the budgie-smuggler. What a perfect setting it should have been for the Games.

The Opening Ceremony was very entertaining. Something of a cross between a samba party and a screening of "**An Inconvenient Truth**", they made their point in an interesting way. The main talking point of the *Parade of Nations* was the bare-chested flag-bearer from **Tonga**. And here's a little known fact. I auditioned for that part, but they said I had the bulges in the wrong places.

A noticeable difference was that the flooring for the table tennis was green, as a representation of the Brazilian flag. This proved so popular that the Diving and Water Polo pools turned the same colour in a show of support. And a media contingent on a bus were attacked by what officials said were rocks thrown by protesters. One of the reporters on the bus said that rather than rocks, the bus was hit by gunfire. And he should know. He's an American. Oh, watch out for falling television cameras, and let's not mention Ryan Lochte.

But table tennis went ahead despite all this. And guess who won all the medals? In the Men's it was **Ma Long** defeating **Zhang Jike** in an all-China final. I'm not sure how I feel about this. Zhang went in as favourite, but looked disinterested from halfway through the second game. Ma Long won 14-12, 11-5, 11-4, 11-4. China have been known to "structure" results in the past. Was this another example? The Women's was another all China affair, with **Ding Ning** taking down **Li Xiaoxia** in a much more entertaining match. The final scores were 11-9, 14-12, 9-11, 8-11, 11-7, 11-7. **China** also won both the Men's and Women's teams events.

Our Aussies put up brave performances. In the Singles contest, **Melissa Tapper** got knocked out in the Preliminary round by **Caroline Kumahara** of **Brazil** who is ranked over **200** places ahead of Melissa. **Jian Fang Lay** made it through to the third round where she came up against world number 13, **Yu Mengyu** from **Singapore**. A great effort to get that far. Both **David Powell** and **Chris Yan** were taken down in the Preliminary round.

In the Teams event, the Aussie girls were unlucky to be drawn against **North Korea** in the first round. Facing chopping defenders is not something that they have much experience against, and this showed in the result. Similarly, the Men's team went down to **Hong Kong** without much troubling the scorer.

Regardless of the results, Australian table tennis was represented and experience was gained by the group. Let's not forget that the **2018 Commonwealth Games** will be on home soil at the **Gold Coast**. And the Chinese won't be there.

BY THE NUMBERS

The Olympic Games are a showcase of talent, perseverance, determination, and extraordinary effort. Athletes from all over the globe come together in the true spirit of sportsmanship and to humble their opponents with their dominance in their given field. Sorry... I meant to say to compete in a friendly manner with their fellow athletes from other nations. Thousands of athletes living in harmony in a village set up especially for them. Or, if you're an American basketball player, on a privately chartered cruise ship at anchor in the harbour.

Starting with the **Opening Ceremony** and the **Parade of Nations**, their prowess is on show. And they will compete, all trying their best. Some will achieve a personal best. Some will be glad to have battled against better opponents and to have gained experience. Some will achieve greatness and will proudly wear a Gold medal around their neck. Some will have the honour of carrying their country's flag.

But remove all of the pomp and circumstance, take away the ability of the few to laud over the many, take away the personal triumphs and tragedies, and what do you have left? *Numbers, my friend. Beautiful numbers.*

So let's assume for the sake of discussion that you are an Olympic athlete. Congratulations. Would you like to carry the flag for your country at the Opening Ceremony? Yes? Well, what sport should you be competing in to give you the best chance of doing this?

58 of the flag-bearers at Rio were from **Athletics** (or Track and Field if you prefer). That was by far the largest number. But that was out of **2,389** athletes in that group. 1 flag-bearer for each **41** competitors.

Table tennis had **5 flag-bearers**. **Timo Boll** from **Germany**, **Liu Jia** from **Austria**, **Ian Lariba** from **The Philippines**, **Olufunke Oshonaike** from **Nigeria**, and the always-smiling **Yoshua Shing** from **Vanuatu**. This was **5** from a group of **172** athletes, or 1 for each **34** players.

Don't take up **Beach Volleyball**, **Rowing**, **Diving**, **Synchronised Swimming** or **Triathlon**. They had no flag-bearers at all. I'd even avoid **Water Polo** with 1 flag-bearer from **260** athletes or **Indoor Volleyball** with 1 from **385**.

So if you want the glory of carrying the flag, you should probably take up **Taekwondo**. With only **128** competitors, they had **7 flag-bearers**, or 1 for each **18** of them. **Judo** also did very well, with **17** flag-bearers out of **392**, or 1 for each **23** of them. There were also **11** flag-bearers from **Shooting**. Obviously, if you carry a deadly weapon or can kill the selectors with your bare hands you have a better chance of carrying the flag.

And if all you want is a Gold medal? Well you'll still need to train, practice, hone your skills, and be the best you can be at your chosen sport to get to the Olympics. But should the numbers influence your choice of sport?

There are a couple to avoid. **Tennis** presents only 1 Gold medal for each **61** competitors, and **Golf** presents 1 for each **60** competitors.

Table Tennis is much better, presenting **8** Gold medals in all (2 Singles and 2 Teams of 3), or 1 for each **21** competitors, although it helps if you're Chinese as well.

The top few sports are interesting. **Rowing**, **Diving**, **Fencing** and **Canoe Sprint** present 1 Gold medal for each **11** competitors. **Track Cycling** goes 1 better with 1 for each **10** riders. But leading the pack with 1 Gold medal for each **9** competitors is **Artistic Gymnastics**. So, who's up for some tumbling?

PARALYMPIC HISTORY . . .

Table tennis was introduced into the Olympic Games in 1988. Any idea when it was introduced into the Paralympic Games? Or for that matter, any idea when the Paralympics started?

The first Paralympic Games were held in **Rome** in **1960**. It would appear that precious little thought had been put in to the running of these games, as the athletes village was comprised of houses built on stilts with steep stairs as the only access. Even with the laying of a ramp over the stairs, most athletes required the help of 2 people pushing to enable them to access their rooms.

At that time the Paralympics were a totally separate competition and not run in conjunction with the Olympics. In fact, the first Paralympic Games were only open to wheelchair competitors. It was not until the **1976** Paralympics that the games were opened up to other classes. In **1988** the Paralympic Games became aligned with the Olympics and were held at the same venue.

Table tennis has been a Paralympic sport right from the start, as has Australia's involvement with the Games. In fact, at the **1960 Rome** Games, Australia won a Gold medal in the Men's Doubles thanks to **Bruno Moretti** and **Bill Mather-Brown**. **Tokyo** in **1964** saw our biggest haul of medals, with **Daphne Ceeney** and **Marion O'Brien** combining for a Women's Class C Doubles Gold medal, **Allan McLucas** winning Bronze in Men's A2 Singles, **Elaine Schreiber** winning Bronze in Women's Class B Singles, and **Marion O'Brien** winning Bronze in Women's Class C Singles.

Interestingly, in a show of great diversity, Daphne Ceeney also won a Silver and a Bronze in Swimming events, a Bronze in Archery, a Bronze in Wheelchair Fencing, and also competed in several field events including javelin and shot put. Daphne passed away in July this year.

The **1968** Games were scheduled to be held soon after the Summer Olympics in **Mexico City**, but were moved to **Tel Aviv** due to political tensions. And if political tensions force you to move an event to Tel Aviv, you can imagine how bad things were in Mexico City.

Accommodation was not of the highest standard, with the entire Australian team forced to sleep on military-style camp beds in an underground car park. But that didn't stop the medals coming our way. In table tennis we struck Silver thanks to **Marion O'Brien** and **Elaine Schreiber** in the Women's Class C Doubles.

The **1984** Games were interesting in that they were held in 2 different countries. **Stoke Mandeville** in England held competition for wheelchair athletes with spinal injuries, while **New York** had the Games for wheelchair and ambulatory athletes with cerebral palsy, amputees, and "*Les Autres*" (the others) conditions as well as blind and visually impaired athletes. At the first chance for cerebral palsy athletes, Australian **Terry Briggs** grabbed a Gold medal in the Men's C1 Singles.

Australia didn't field a table tennis team in either **1996** or **2004**, but have participated at every other Paralympic Games.

At the Olympics just concluded in Rio, **172** players competed for medals in **4** categories. At the Paralympics, **276** players will compete in **29** medal events.

Paralympic sport is now taken much more seriously. And so it should be. Our Para athletes compete at the highest standard, adapting their skills to make the most of their abilities. Disabled? *You must be joking.*

"Olympians show you what the human body is capable of. Paralympians show you what the human spirit is capable of." - Bradley Snyder

... AND OUR TEAM

Australia will continue its involvement at Paralympic table tennis events by sending a team of five to Rio in September. And what a great bunch of people they are. With playing credentials that most of us would be proud of, these athletes are striving for greater things; things that to most of us are a distant dream.

Sam Von Einem - Class 11

Sam started to play table tennis at the age of 5 and quickly showed his talent and determination for the game. In **2011**, at the age of 16 he represented Australia in the Under-18's Junior Team competition in **Guam**. After that tournament, Sam was classified as a Class 11 Para athlete. He won the Gold medal in Class 11 at the **2015 Spanish Para Open**.



Sam is the current Australian Para champion and is ranked the 2nd player overall in South Australia. He competes at the Woodville Districts Table Tennis Club in Adelaide. Sam was awarded the Table Tennis Australia **Para Athlete of the Year** in **2014**. With a World Ranking of 6 in Class 11, Sam will be giving it all in an effort to bring home a Paralympic medal.

Barak Mizrachi - Class 8

Like so many of us, Barak was introduced to table tennis by playing with his family. Progressing his game through high school, Barak became involved with the **Maccabi Club** in Melbourne. His debut for Australia was at the **2003 Maccabi Pan American Games** – a multi sport tournament for Jewish competitors from around the world. He has gone on to represent Australia a number of times at the Maccabi Games.



In **2015**, Barak beat the favourite to win the **Oceania Para-Table Tennis Championships**. He also took home the award for best and fairest player from the event. Also in 2015, Barak made history as the first athlete with a disability to be selected in the Australian table tennis team to compete at the **Summer Universiade in Russia**. His current world ranking in Class 8 is 45th.

Barak holds a degree in Chemical Engineering. He is a mad-keen Carlton supporter, but apart from that is a really nice guy.

Andrea McDonnell - Class 10

Growing up in Townsville, Andrea followed her parents into table tennis. A talented player, she was the **Australian Under 14 Girls Champion** in **1974**. Although giving up competitive play, Andrea continued to enjoy recreational play and mentoring, coaching 2 of her nieces at junior national level.



A work accident left Andrea with impaired movement and, after a number of years she decided once again to take up the sport. In **2013**, she was approached to compete and made her debut for Australia at the **Oceania Para Table Tennis Championships** in Canberra that very same year.

Andrea will be making her Paralympic debut in Rio at the age of 56.

Danni Di Toro – Class 4

When an accident forces you into a wheelchair at 14 years of age, it would be easy to give up your sporting dreams. Danni was a promising young tennis player before her accident and, thankfully, found support and assistance to pursue her goals in tennis after her accident. That persistence took her to **11 Australian Open** wheelchair Singles titles (*9 of them consecutive*), **6 Japanese Opens**, **3 Belgian**, **3 British**, **2 US**, **2 French**, **2 Austrian**, **2 Dutch**, **1 Korean**, **1 Swiss** and **1 New Zealand Open** Singles titles.



Twice named **World Singles Champion**, competing in **5 Paralympic Games** and winning a **Silver** and **Bronze** medal, Danni finally realised that table tennis was a much better game and switched sports in 2014. In her first attempt, Danni won her class at the **Australian Open** in **2014**.

In **1999**, Danni was named the **Australian Paralympian of the Year**. In **2000**, she received an **Australian Sports Medal**, and in **2001** she was named the **Young Victorian of the Year**. In **2010**, she was nominated as the **Most Outstanding athlete with a disability** by *Tennis Australia*.

Danni will be representing Australia at her **6th Paralympic Games** and will serve as **co-captain** of the Australian Paralympic Team together with **Kurt Fearnley**.

Melissa Tapper - Class 10

So much has been written about Milly in recent times that this seems superfluous. Starting her playing career at the Hamilton club, Melissa is probably most famous for her battle with **Craig Archman** in a *Country Championship* match about 10 years ago. If you need more details on this legendary encounter, just ask Craig.



Never regarding herself as having a disability, Melissa made her first state team at **12** and her first Australian junior team at **14**, laying the foundations for a successful career in able-bodied table tennis. By **18**, Melissa had become the number one junior female table tennis player in Australia; she was also the **U18 Oceania champion** and **U21 Australian champion** and was moving her way up the world rankings.

Encouraged to try Para table tennis, Melissa gained a position on the Australian team and in **2011** alone won a string of singles gold medals at the **Hungarian**, **Italian** and **British Opens** and the **Arafura Games**. At the **2012 London Paralympics**, she finished 4th in her class. Melissa became the first Australian Paralympic table tennis athlete to qualify for an able-bodied national team. Competing at the **2014 Glasgow Commonwealth Games**, she won bronze in the women's team event and made the second round in the mixed doubles.

Melissa has made sporting history by being the first Australian to compete at both the **Olympic and Paralympic Games**. In an interview given when she won her selection into the Olympic team, Melissa said that she would be using the Olympics as a warm-up event for the Paralympics. Let's hope the warm-up pays dividends.

SEPTEMBER TOURNAMENTS

The main tournament for September is the Paralympic Games in Rio which run from the 7th to the 18th. Let's hope we can see some of it on TV. *Go Aussies!!!!*

On the local scene, there are only 2 tournaments this month. **HWATT** are running the **Melbourne Junior Open** at MSAC on the 3rd of September.

On the 11th, **Geelong** are holding their **Open Veterans** tournament

ON THE WEB / TV

As with the last edition, we'll look at how you can enjoy the Paralympics without actually going there.

Channel 7 has guaranteed **14 hours** per day coverage on free-to-air channels. We will have to wait and see exactly how and what they cover.

The table tennis events in Rio take place from the 8th to the 16th of September. We can only hope that our sport gets some air-time so we can all enjoy it.

Some websites which you may find useful over the next few weeks :-

www.paralympic.org/Rio-Paralympics

[http://www.ittf.com/ front_Page/ittf.asp?category=para](http://www.ittf.com/front_Page/ittf.asp?category=para)

www.tabletennisdaily.co.uk

www.tabletennista.com

www.tabletennis.org.au

What's your favourite table tennis site on the web? Let us know so we can share it with other members.

Are you a member of our facebook page? Search for **Melton Table Tennis** on Facebook and join in our conversations. Don't forget, you can find our web page at **www.meltontabletennis.com**. Make us your home page.

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.

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

If you would like to unsubscribe from this newsletter, please email meltontabletennis@gmail.com with the Subject of Unsubscribe.