

BLACKMORE VALE TABLE TENNIS LEAGUE

Newsletter – January 2008

Dear B.V.T.T.L members,

The sixth committee meeting at the Saxon Inn took place on Tuesday January 8th – the first of the new year, 2008. The second half of the league fixture table is well underway with the high contenders doing battle for top and second places in the three divisions. In division 1, S.A.S 'A' head the table with Chalke Valley's 'A' and 'B' not too far behind. Compton 'D' find themselves top of division 2 with the 'shifty' fifties (Compton 'B') and Shaftesbury 'A' closely in contention in second and third places. Division 3's Chalke Valley 'D' and 'C' are doing very well in top and second spots with Sturminster Newton juniors currently lying in third place. Come on Sturminster – is it your turn to grasp a win or second place perhaps and slip into the second division? Well done to all four of the Chalke Valley sides who seem to be making a notable impression in the league thus far.

Tournaments: The veterans' open and handicap singles was held at Child Okeford on Friday 25th January and some very good table tennis was played by all those competing. The open event was won by Clive Cornford following a steadily contested match with Rod Fry who took the runners-up spot. The handicap competition was pipped by Les Whittaker who found himself engaged in the tightest of tussles with Steve Ible in a memorable final. It is surely worthy of a few extra words here in January's New Year Newsletter. Steve won the toss and chose to add the optional half point to his tally, though Les was conceding 2 points as a result of the table of handicaps. The first leg went point for point – see-sawing from player to opponent and back again, right to the end when Steve just managed to close it out 21:19. At this point, there was nothing in it and everything was down to the second and final leg. It was much the same scenario for half of the second leg too until Les (who's attacking hits were on top form) went ahead 16:13 and was looking sharp. But then he appeared to lose some concentration and confidence which allowed Steve six consecutive points to take him to 19:16. It seemed the match would be over in the next two or three points. But Les rallied magnificently and suddenly recovered the form he had consistently shown, to also win a clutch of points in a row, equalise, then run out an impressive winner. Very well done to him.

The all-day tournament will be held in Sturminster Newton Leisure Centre on Sunday March 30th 2008, from 9.00 am to 4.00 pm. This is B.V.T.T.L's longest competition with individual events comprising – Open singles: Division 2 singles: Division 3 singles and Handicap singles. Naturally, this event takes more organising than some of the lesser ones and the tournament committee needs to know who will be entering which competitions on that day. Please could everyone give this some thought and submit names to Peter Rolfe, Les Whittaker or Steve Ible as early as possible. By way of a recap, last year's events were won by Paul Colledge: Mark Rendall: Jessica Haddon and Paul Colledge, respectively. A further reference to this tournament will appear in February's Newsletter which will be posted on the turn of February/March. We all look forward to another very successful tournament scheduled for that day at

the end of March. Let's hope the centre itself has a sufficiently bright future in the midst of the present funding crisis which threatens to upset its functioning after 31st March. The situation is still very uncertain, and should things turn out worse than hoped, it would not be so easy to stage this particular annual tournament and the prospective loss of the Sunday morning open table tennis facility would be great indeed.

Who's who: The B.V.T.T.L is attempting to compile an historical directory of **all** players past and present, deceased and still playing. If anyone has knowledge of the origins of the league (dates and nature of amalgamations) please contact any member of the committee with names, dates, developments etc.

Venue postcodes: A request has been made for the post codes of all the league's playing venues to be made known for purposes of satellite navigation. Please could captains and club organisers assist by forwarding this information to any member of the committee.

Laws of the Game: If anyone requires an up-to-date copy of the E.T.T.A approved laws of the game (leaflet 6083/12/RHS) please let David know. There is a limited supply available.

Gary Gray was in hospital in Southampton (22nd to 24th January) for an investigative biopsy. They quickly zipped him back up – chin to navel, shoulder to backside, and groin to toe-bone, and sent him off home with a small bottle of sewing machine oil for the lubrication and the general maintenance of his newly installed access hatches. Seriously, Gary will be on 'go-slow' for two or three weeks, so don't run him around too much when he next steps out at the table. Take it easy for a fortnight or so Mr G. Also, our very best wishes continue to go out to Stuart and Jenny Spetch. Get well soon our C/O 'C' team skipper.

Sec's Sagacity

The Newsletter of September 2007 included a feature about the Japanese player, Hiroji Satoh and his use of a sponge covered racket at the 1952 World Championships at Bombay. History of course now records that Satoh became the world singles table tennis champion on that occasion with many questions being raised about his ability and his mysterious 'weapon.' It is probably not the desire of many people to dwell deeply in the past as far as this great sport is concerned since present-day table tennis is a highly developed affair compared to the 1950s and prior and a very different kettle of fish indeed. And apart from the occasional hardbat tournament, it is this modern game that we all now play and enjoy – fearsome pace, spin and all. But even so, there's a very significant history of the game from the late 1800s through to the mid 20th century before inverted pimples (i.e. flat sponge rubber) became the order of the day, and it is fascinating and perhaps captivating to look back at it from time to time.

Whilst there is absolutely no doubt that sponge or aerated foam was in use long before 1952, such use was not universal so the world championships of that year laid down a very real milestone that altered the game for ever. Again, it was not the intention to cover old ground in quick succession, but when thinking about Satoh and his assault on the Bombay Worlds half way through the century, a number of tantalising questions immediately spring to one's mind. The main one asks whether it was solely the use of the sponge bat that defeated so many strong opponents on that occasion? Or was Satoh a better player than people imagined and simply rose to the occasion? How did that particular bat come into being – i.e. who made it? What did it look like? Was it a one-sided racquet? Did the lack of impact noise have a serious effect upon Satoh's opponents? Where is the bat now? All these are fascinating questions which seem to have been shrouded in mystery and uncertainty for a long time, exacerbated by people like Reisman who have presented totally contradictory views on-screen and in writing - the construction of the racquet is just one example. He also appears to believe that it was the racquet alone which enabled Satoh to win his world singles crown in 1952. "Satoh's racket did the work for him. All he had to do was place his racket on the ball and it would absorb it, then hurl it back. I was playing an attacking game against myself, and I was doing all the work. No one could give him – or rather his racket – any competition whatsoever." [*The Money Player – 1974*].

A very recent trawl through the E.T.T.A archive at Liverpool University, has unearthed some remarkable finds including a letter penned by the former, long-standing president, Ivor Montagu who it seems felt the need to address this very matter in a direct and open manner on 15th March, 1952. It is as result of this amazing find that we now return to the subject of Satoh, his sponge-covered racquet and his famous World Championship win of that year.

"The decisive victory of H Satoh in the World Championship Mens' Singles using a soft rubber racket has led to an agitated propaganda against this type of play. Most of this agitation derives from panic or sensationalism on the part of the ill-informed. A review of the facts should be helpful.

1. *Satoh's racket surface is made of soft, spongy, aerated rubber about 5/16" in thickness. For half its thickness it is embedded into the surface of its square wood blade, as a picture in a frame. The rubber, like soft India rubber, is very easily abraded or broken, and to prevent its abrasion by shaking during carriage, Satoh keeps it in a soft-lined box, as ordinary rackets are kept in canvas covers. The effect of the soft rubber is:*
 - a. *to impart an unfamiliar degree of spin.*
 - b. *to impart an unfamiliar speed.*
 - c. *to heighten the surprise in speed and direction of a hit by the lack of sound in the stroke."*

In his section numbered (2), Montagu speaks of the Laws of Table Tennis which allowed the use of a racket of any material, size, shape or weight. It is interesting to read his subsequent statement about players bemoaning the ruination of the game (as some do today in relation to speed glues and certain rubbers etc) with the advent of thin pimped rubber versus bare wood. "It is well to remember that so late as 1926, devotees of wood were demanding the banning of thin hard rubber on the ground that it 'spoiled the game.'"

In his section numbered (3), Ivor Montagu goes on to speak of the fact that the use of soft rubber was not new at the time of Satoh and the Bombay Championships of 1952.

“Soft rubber of the Satoh type, and the Satoh-type game, are no novelties. To hear some people talk, one would suppose they did not remember that last year in Vienna, Fritsch of Austria, using sponge rubber, beat a succession of the world’s top players. One would suppose also that English fans had forgotten Charlie Dawes of Bristol who not long ago beat three internationals in succession at the English Championships, using soft rubber. The racket of our respected Vice-President, P.E Warden (now 81) was home made, of pimple-studded rubber with a layer of thick velvet posted between the surface and the wood. He started with it in 1900 – 1904, and already elderly in 1926, was then still pushing to the limit the first of the moderns with exactly Satoh-type defence, namely persistent floating spinners, but without the lethal Satoh hits. G.W Decker long used cotton wool or sponge rubber padding. So did I, for over 20 years. Sponge rubber is used by contemporary players in France as well as Austria and England. Nishimura used it in Bombay for continuous hitting. Satoh’s victory was not due to this racket but to his skill and cleverness in exploiting its potentialities.”

Clearly, Montagu does not write off Satoh as the young man who managed to get his hands on a magic wand but one who had great skill and cleverness. He continues by defending him further in section (4) of his document.

“Some people say that because Satoh is not the top player in his own country (he is ranked No 5) he is a lucky winner and not a worthy champion. This is poor logic and poor history. World titles, and not only at Table Tennis, are repeatedly and worthily won by players who rise to chance and the occasion.”

Section (5)

“It is suggested that the way in which Satoh won his matches spoiled the game for the spectators. This is silly. The denigrators, their attention drawn to the obvious excitement of the spectators and delight in his matches, insisted this was only due to novelty, and if his play became general, crowds would melt away. This is a speculation based on a speculation. Anyone can get a Stitch racket, but how many can play with it as well as Satoh? They argued that it gave an ‘unfair’ advantage which spoiled the game and must therefore be barred. But a player cannot be outstanding with a soft racket unless he is outstandingly intelligent and skilful as an all-round executants. They argued that Satoh’s method of ‘blanketing’ his opponent – swathing him as it were, in a large, soft pillow case – is unbeautiful and unspectacular. It is true that two hitters came to grief against Satoh – Sido and Reisman. The former in particular after he seemed to have solved the puzzle and had the game well won. But Reisman has lost this year to Ehrlich, Roothoft, Amouretti and even Freundorfer. But the main exclamations were evoked by Satoh’s thoroughness in dealing with world-renowned players who tried to push him – Bergmann, Leach, Amouretti and Roothoft. Is it any crime to puncture reputations? Satoh very competently floated back their efforts at attack, and when they tried to play steadily, lulled them to sleep with ultra-gentleness and then suddenly punched them as full of holes as cheese. How anybody unbiased (or indeed anyone except the victims) could honestly say this was not fascinating, skilful, and about ten times as

exciting as any of the said victims' wrestling matches with each other, has me beaten."

So then, a very considerable defence of the Japanese number 5 of 1952 by a very notable authority, which flies strongly in the face of published views from the likes of Marty Reisman and Jerome Charyn. Montagu's conclusions also seem to be borne out when one watches the treasured but fleeting snippets of original black and white film footage of Satoh in action in Bombay. He does indeed float the ball back beautifully in contrast to the obvious 'hitting' technique of say Reisman – this is clearly evident. There seems little reason to doubt the rest of Montagu's observations which suggests that when a high ball appeared on Satoh's side of the net, he would promptly put it away with some 'lethal' hits of his own, exercised with particular skill and expertise.

Incidentally, some of the answers to the afore-mentioned questions are still uncertain. But what about the whereabouts of the famous bat? Well, one man believes he knows where it is to be found and is apparently attempting to track it down. That man is Chuck Hoey of the I.T.T.F table tennis museum, who we're told, is trying to acquire the racquet for the unique and highly cared-for display cabinets of Lausanne. Wonder if he'll be successful.

Take a look at - www.ittf.com/museum and in particular, the Table Tennis Collector. Click on any edition and the entire content will download for your perusal. Remarkable!

Mystery Player Revealed

A player of notable experience indeed, even though coming into the game relatively late. The upright forehand block style (when observed from the sidelines) gives one the impression that victory might prove easy. Wrong!! 'Broadly speaking' and 'chalked' up were not in fact references to this person's achievements, rather gave a clue to her whereabouts – Broad Chalke. Her achievements at the table are impressive in a totally specific sense without the slightest need to speak broadly of them. Just take a look at her trophy cabinet. And as for her cover – well, I know she won't mind me saying she's not quite the twenty one year young something of a decade or two ago. But as mentioned previously, drop your concentration or lose your own confidence for one instant and your goose will be well cooked. Well done that lady – keep it up Nells.

Some facts and curiosities:

Damage to the Racket.

You are allowed to have small tears or chips anywhere in the rubber (not just the edges) provided the umpire believes they will not cause a significant change in the way the rubber plays if the ball hits that area. This is at the umpire's discretion, so that

means that one umpire may rule that your bat is legal, while another may rule that it is not legal. You can protest against the decision of the umpire (*Point 7.3.2 HMO*), and in that case the referee will make a final decision on whether your bat is legal for that competition. (*Law 2.4.7*)

How does spin work?

Spin puts a force on the ball which is at right angles to the direction it is moving. This force will affect the flight of the ball.

If the opponent's bat is moving to your left at contact, the ball will curve to your right, and kick off your bat to your left.

If the opponent's bat is moving to your right at contact, the ball will curve to your left, and kick off your bat to your right.

Hitting the ball flat.

A top player hitting the ball as hard and as flat as possible (without spin) will result in the ball dropping due to gravity about one and a half to two centimetres during the time it takes to cross the table. So if the ball is hit at the same height as the top of the net it will be physically impossible to hit the ball at top speed and still land the ball in the opponent's court - the ball will simply not drop fast enough. It gets worse as the ball gets lower, since the ball must now be hit upwards to get over the net, and then there is only gravity to pull it back down onto the table.

The ball could only be hit at full speed and power if the ball was high enough to draw a virtually straight line between the ball and a point on the opponent's side of the table, without the net getting in the way. This is roughly 30cm above the table if the ball is hit at the endline.

The longest period.

The longest career in the world championships is that enjoyed by Ivor Montagu. He played during a 27-year period; his first appearance was in 1926, his last in 1953.

Asian dominance.

In the past 30 years, out of a possible 320 medals available at the world championships in mens' singles and mens' doubles events, Europe has won only 38 (12%). In the mens' singles event Europe has 19, the most recent being the bronze medal won by Michael Maze in 2005 in Shanghai, whilst in the mens' doubles the number is 19; the 19th being the silver medal captured by Timo Boll and Christian Suss, also in Shanghai.

Perplexing puzzles:

Who was Erwin Klein? Who is the President of the E.T.T.A? Who returned home a national hero after a world championship final, never to be seen on the stage of world table tennis again? Who won six ladies' World Championships in a row?

(Answers next month)

David Hughes

A month into the second half of the season and the table of matches surges on in the three divisions. The team handicap competition also makes a welcome return with the first sorties being keenly contested during the week of the 14th January. We hope everyone's having a thoroughly enjoyable season and becoming involved in some great table tennis.

The Committee