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THE PRESIDENT OF ITTF VISITS NEW ZEALAND

"I come to New Zealand with a simple agenda", said Ichiro Ogimura, President of the International Table Tennis Federation, when he met Ron Merch and Merv Allardye at Sports House on Wednesday, 12 October. "The items I wish to discuss are 'How to produce a world champion from your country' and 'How to double your table tennis popularity'".

Two pertinent questions. The first reaction of New Zealanders to question one, would be polite laughter - it is hard enough to win the NZ Championships alone, but what about the Australian Championships, or the Indonesian Championships or any other international tournament which, apart from Griffith's success at last year's Australian Championships, have not been prominent with New Zealand successes.

The ITTF President is no fool. He had the answers to this negative thinking. "The present NZ standard is about equal to many other continental areas, except Europe and Asia", he said, "but even in those regions there would be countries of the same level as NZ. You have to strive for the highest goal standard, not the same level goal - you need a New Zealander to be world champion to create the greatest incentive and drive for your players", he added.

Kiwi Sports Programme

On the second question, President Ogimura was extremely interested in the Kiwi Sport Programme which is aimed at school participation and pupils. The opportunity was taken to introduce him to Gregory Aim, Chief Executive of the Hillary Commission for Recreation and Sport, and Dr John Shuttleworth, General Manager Sportscorp, as well as seeing and participating in a set-up involving school children at the Empire Club, Petone.

Two blue top tables of a lower height with a net of light yellow, in contrast to normal size dark green tables with green nets, were available. The children were given normal weight balls, soft balls and large orange balls to demonstrate which were easier to hit over the net. President Ogimura explained that the narrow table width made it more difficult for the younger players than the normal width table. Because of this, it was important that soft balls or larger balls were used to give more reaction time for the child-learner.

The President joined in, showing the children the positioning of their elbow in front of the body and the movement of the arm to return the ball with a simple backhand. All this was televised for local regional news as well as personal interviews. The afternoon was one of the highlights of the President's brief visit.

Earlier in the day, courtesy calls had been made to the Minister of Recreation and Sport (Hon Peter Tapsell) and to the Opposition spokesman on Sport (John Banks) who labelled the visit as a good public relations effort by the New Zealand Table Tennis Association.

THE PRESIDENT OF ITTF VISITS NEW ZEALAND (Cont'd)

Cuckoo Project

The discussions with the officials of the NZ Association ranged wide. I would like to refer to two items which caught my attention. One was the President's use of the "Cuckoo Project" which was an analogy of a bird bringing its egg to another nest for upbringing. The President was saying that efforts should be made to send the best players overseas for a long term project, playing in the country's league club competition and finding employment in the country to augment personal hospitality expense. Countries like Sweden, England and Italy were mentioned.

It was interesting to note that President Ogimura was not in favour of sending two players together to the same country. It was better for one player to strive for excellence on his own. It made the effort more demanding and more successful. Two players were inclined to be supportive of one another. The system applies to girls as well as to boys. While overseas, should the player become homesick or dislike the training and dedication, the player should be brought home and another player given the chance. That the first player did not have world champion potential, was the cruel and correct analysis.

The path to the top is not easy and the President should know because he trod the path and achieved his goal of being a world champion in the fifties.

How to attach girls

The second interesting facet, was that women and girls are attracted to the sport when the facilities are bright coloured and through the opportunity of wearing soft, colourful garments. A professional survey undertaken in Japan a few years back, brought this fact forward through question-samples taken from a wide group of women and girls. This is worth thinking about and well within the reach of association owners of table tennis stadiums through the country. Bright background colours and a warm atmosphere will not only attract female competitors but will also attract public interest. Bright colours also refer to the outside decoration of the stadium and the layout of the area leading to the entrance of the stadium.

Two other ideas President Ogimura left with the NZ officials

- 1) if you have a strong project which could lead to more people playing table tennis, the ITTF would be interested in contributing in some way or other. All that has to be done is to submit a case outlining the objectives, the budget proposals and the funding required. The stronger and more national the project, the better chance of support from the ITTF;

- 2) write to the Japan Association and seek a tour of New Zealand by corporate table tennis teams, particularly a company which has NZ links, such as Japanese motor vehicle distributors. A Citizen watch agency would be another.

Through a press conference arranged by Merv Allardyce, journalists from the NZ Press Association, Radio NZ and Wellington Newspapers (Dominion and Evening Post) were able to cover the visit the President of a world and olympic sport which has nearly 140 country affiliates.

Biography

Ichiro Ogimura, 56, won his first world men's singles title in 1954. He repeated the win in 1956 and was runner-up to fellow champion, Tanaka, in 1957. In all he has won 12 world titles including three successive mixed doubles in 1957-59. He has, of course, won numerous Asian and Japanese titles.

Thirty-one years ago, in 1957, New Zealand had its strongest playing tour when Toshiaki Tanaka and his rival runner-up, Ichiro Ogimura, toured the country. Ogimura remembers the occasion well, citing that in the 31 days he was in New Zealand, he had 26 playing engagements.

Ichiro Ogimura was elected President of the ITTF in February 1987. He promised that in his first year as President, he would visit associations throughout the world, collecting opinions and listening to their development plans. By this means he would have a better understanding of world table tennis administration. This he has done, visiting some 80 countries. In many cases, like New Zealand, he has been the first President or member of the ITTF Executive Committee to visit the country and to have talks with the NZ officials on-the-spot.

He compares the physical requirements of playing table tennis at the highest level by saying 'it is something like running the 50 metre dash and playing bridge and chess at the same time!'

The success of its first outing at the 1988 Olympic Games showed that table tennis is a world sport and cannot be labelled a minor sport. President Ogimura has plans to see that the sport meets the challenges of the future by providing better gymnasiums and facilities for the player, spectator and newsmedia.

Ken Wilkinson
ITTF Council Member, Oceania

NEW ZEALAND OLYMPIC TABLE TENNIS RESULTS

All members of the table tennis section felt privileged to be part of the Olympic Games; the atmosphere generated by so many world class athletes in so many disciplines had to be felt to be appreciated. There was a tremendous feeling of friendship generated by everyone in attendance which will remain an experience never to be forgotten.

New Zealand can be proud of the efforts of Barry Griffiths and Peter Jackson even though they did not win any medals.

Singles (Barry Griffiths)

- Beat P. Birochaeu (FRA)
21-16, 18-21, 17-21, 21-16, 21-18
- Beat G. Hosnani (MRI)
21-14, 21-16, 15-21, 21-13
- Lost G. Boehm (FRG)
12-21, 21-18, 15-21, 17-21
- Lost Xu Zengcai (CHI)
18-21, 10-21, 13-21
- Lost Chih Chin Long (TPE)
13-21, 20-22, 18-21
- Lost T. Meringgi (INA)
21-19, 16-21, 17-21, 21-13, 19-21
- Lost J. Waldner (SWE)
18-21, 12-21, 17-21

Doubles (Barry Griffiths and Peter Jackson)

- Beat Ding Yi & Baer (AUT)
23-21, 22-20
- Lost Chih Chin & Chih Chin (TPE)
14-21, 21-23
- Lost Kim Ki Taik & Kim Wan (KOR)
16-21, 16-21
- Lost Alvarez & Fermin (DOM)
20-22, 12-21
- Lost Boehm & Rebel (FRG)
17-21, 11-21
- Lost Waldner & Appelgren (SWE)
19-21, 20-22
- Lost Andrew & Douglas (GBR)
20-22, 10-21

NOTES ON THE APPLICATION OF THE SERVICE LAW

Consistent application of the service law continues to present difficulties to umpires, perhaps because the changes that have been made over the years have made it fairly complicated. These notes have been prepared by the ITTF Rules Committee to give guidance to umpires on the principles to be observed in applying the law.

Most problems seem to occur during the initial stages of service, up to the point at which the ball is struck, and relate to the way in which the ball is held and thrown. This part of the law is meant to preclude finger-spin and to prevent players throwing the ball directly on to the racket so as to gain an advantage in the amount of spin or speed imparted to the ball.

The requirement for the ball to rest freely on the palm of the server's hand, with fingers together and thumb free and with the hand stationary, open and flat, is intended to ensure that the ball is not gripped in any way before being thrown, thus restricting as far as possible, the player's ability to impart any spin to the ball as he throws it.

Umpires should be less concerned with checking details such as the degree of flatness of the server's free hand than with satisfying themselves that the ball is resting freely on the palm. To help them, the law stipulates that the free hand must be stationary and must remain above the level of the table surface while it is in contact with the ball.

It follows that the free hand may not be held stationary and then dropped below the table surface before being brought upwards with a continuous sweep of the arm. If the hand on which the ball is resting does go below the table surface, it must be brought again to a stationary position above the level of the table surface before the ball is thrown upwards.

The server is not now required to throw the ball upwards at a specific angle but it must rise at least 16cm after leaving his hand and must have fallen from the highest point of its trajectory before being struck. The purpose of this restriction is to prevent the ball being thrown directly on to the racket so as to produce extra speed or spin.

This lower limit was introduced to counter service actions in which the ball rose such a small amount from the free hand that umpires could not be certain that it had been thrown upwards, let alone judge its direction. The figure of 16cm was chosen because it is roughly the height of the net, which provides a convenient reference point.

It is less important for the umpire to be able to discriminate between, say 15cms and 17cms, than for him to be sure that the ball clearly rises and is falling again before the server strikes it. Although the ball may be thrown upwards in any direction, the nearer to the vertical it is thrown, the easier it will be for umpires to see that the requirement is met.

Most players who fail to comply with the service law do so out of carelessness rather than with an intention to deceive or to gain an unfair advantage. However, the umpire has no discretionary power to ignore an infringement of the law on the grounds that it does not appear to give the server any advantage.

Equally, there is no merit in overlooking a first offence in the hope that it was a temporary lapse. An umpire who does so might be faced with taking the same decision at a critical stage of the match, and a player who was penalised then could justly complain that there had been no earlier indication that the action was illegal.

An umpire can sometimes detect potential problems by watching the players during the pre-match practice period and a tactful word of advice at this stage may avoid trouble during the match. It is a good idea also for the umpire to make clear to the players before play starts how he is required to apply the service law.

In any circumstances, a clear failure by a player to serve in accordance with the requirements of the law should be penalised, firmly but not officiously, by the loss of a point. It should be remembered that it is the responsibility of the player to serve so that the umpire or assistant umpire can see to correctness of his service action.

The service law allows more scope than others for variation in the way in which it is applied and it is natural for an umpire to pay most attention to those aspects which he finds easiest to check. To offset this tendency, umpires should try to bear in mind the purpose of the various requirements and ensure that the spirit and not just the letter of the law is observed.

Colin Clement
Chairman, ITTF Rules Committee.

SUBSCRIPTIONS

The National Council decided that this second issue should be a further complimentary copy.

Future issues will be on a subscription basis of 4 copies per year at a charge of \$10 for four issues (includes GST and postage.) A subscription form is enclosed. Simply complete it and send it, together with your remittance of \$10 to NZTTA, P O Box 867, Wellington.

Those who have already taken out a subscription will now receive the four issues in 1989.

READERS' WRITE:

How We Select Teams

In response to the article in the first Table Talk Magazine, I was really interested in how the selectors select their teams to represent New Zealand. In the article, it said they took the Rating System as one of the main conditions for selection as you had to play in those rating tournaments to get points.

I would like to point out to the selectors one or two points also that work against using the Rating System that is in use in its form today:

1. Place of Residence

It takes a fair amount of money to travel to the Rating Tournaments, so if you live in Northland/Southland and other out of the way places, it costs you financially. I agree that it costs the big city players too, but they don't have to travel to every tournament and stop in motels because it is too far to travel home afterwards.

For example, if you lived in Northland the following is what time and travel you would have to do to play in the Rating Tournaments:

South Island - held in Christchurch; 2 days travel, 3 days tournament, 4 nights accommodation or billeted if available.

North Island - held in Wanganui; 2 days travel, 3 days tournament, 4 nights accommodation or billeted if available.

Top 12 - Senior, held in Auckland; 2 days, 1 night accommodation or billet if available. Under 19 Girls, held in Christchurch; 2 days travel, 2 days playing, 3 nights accommodation or billet if available. Under 19 Boys, held in Hutt Valley; same as Girls.

Region 1 Rating Tournament; Auckland, 1 day tournament.

New Zealand Championships, Junior and Senior; 7 days tournament, 7 nights accommodation and double that if you are a junior good enough to play in the senior tournament as well. Approximate cost, including accommodation is \$2500. On top of this amount, you have all your meals to pay for, plus all entry fees, as well as the loss of wages if you work.

2. Economic Situation

Time off work is very difficult if you live in an area with a 15% unemployment. As you can see from the above it takes a fair amount of time to travel and play in these tournaments. Employers take a dim view if you keep asking for time off.

Perhaps the selectors, in their wisdom, could select teams in a slightly different way. Here are some suggestions:

Write to the top twenty or so players at the beginning of the year, asking their intentions for the season. For example, their availability if selected for certain teams, what tournaments they will be attending and playing; send them a training schedule that could help them to keep fit and practice.

If a selector has a tournament in their area, go and watch the players and judge for themselves how that person is playing. This way, you should get the best players as your representatives, not the ones that can afford to attend all the Rating Tournaments.

D.E. Woodman.
(Northland)

National Computer Rating List for Veteran Players

I would like to see a national computer rating list compiled for veteran players. It was possible to do it at the nationals for those in the over-40 team contest, so it should be possible for it to be worked out in the same way as the seniors. I would like to see it published in Table Talk.

Glenn Haszard
(Canterbury)

DEFINITION OF A CLUB PERSON

A lot of club members are like WHEELBARROWS,
not good unless pushed!

Some are like CANOES,
they need to be paddled!

Some are like KITES,
if you don't keep a string on them, they fly away!

Some are like FOOTBALLS,
you can't tell which way they'll bounce away!

Some are like TRAILERS,
they have to be pulled!

Some like you, thank heavens,
are like a good watch, open face, pure gold,
quietly busy and full of good works.

COACHING with Hal Stiehl (the Coach's Coach)

First off let me say we welcome correspondence from this column - the response from last issue's column was terrific. Any enquiries on highly technical table tennis strategy theory will be happily dealt with.

I should perhaps deal with a few of the letters before getting into the real teeth of the column. Mr A. Tomlinson of Auckland, writes that he still wakes up sweating in the night over his loss to Otago's Yik Chung Kwong in the crucial A Grade teams final in 1970. Was I psyched out of that one, asks Mr Tomlinson, or did I employ the wrong tactics? Relax Al, I remember the game vividly. Yik Chung Kwong was simply a much better player. Alan also wishes to know why TABs aren't open on Thursdays, but as this isn't a table tennis question, I cannot answer it!

Mr R. Lee of Auckland, writes that while brushing his teeth recently, he discovered he was a natural right-hander! As I have played all my table tennis as a left-hander, asks Mr Lee, would it be possible for me to replay all my desparately unlucky tournament losses of the past twenty years right-handed? Seems fair enough to me, Rich, tho' it could take a remit for next year's New Zealand AGM to get all the people together and stuff. Good luck!

And on the subject of left and right-handers, I should have pointed out that the last column was written for right-handers. Belinda of Petone, a left-hander, followed the instructions for the desparately difficult 'Mid Air Overhead Long Table Slice Smash' very carefully and is now in traction in Wellington Hospital. The doctors expect she will be able to resume her table tennis career in 1991. Get well soon, Belinda!

And so to this month's shot, which for want of a title, we will refer to as the 'Backhand Blade Edge Tenth Ball Attack'. This shot requires a fantastic eye, lightning reflexes, the ability to count to ten and a phenomenal amount of luck. Unlike last month's shot, the Backhand Blade Edge Tenth Ball Attack can be played from any position on the table, the only restrictive proviso being that exhaustive tests have proved it works best on the tenth shot of a rally. It is therefore of exceptional use to expedite players.

As the title implies, the blade meets the ball on the edge of the bat, and again as the name implies, the shot really must be played on the backhand. The beauty of this stroke is that the degree of your opponent's spin is completely irrelevant - this can be played off the heaviest chop, or alternatively, off the most vicious leaping, dipping loop, though in the case of the latter, the need for a fantastic eye becomes paramount.

One simply lets a rally run its course, counting quietly, and when the tenth ball arrives - remembering your opponent must have served at the beginning for you to actually have the tenth ball yourself - you spin back ninety degrees and bury the ball with the blade at eight hundred thousand miles an hour.

Ideally the shot will travel absolutely flat and straight at a speed virtually indistinguishable to the naked eye - the key is to make sure it (the ball) makes contact with the table on the other side of the net before zinging away over the backdröpp into the far bay of the hall. You must never telegraph your intention to play this shot, the essence of its effect is surprise.

I should perhaps point out that I developed this shot after hundreds of hours of practice with the legendary Barna 3-Crown ball, and I have found results to be far less impressive with the Nittaku 3-Star currently in vogue (in fact I believe that Nittaku ball has primarily been accepted as a major tournament ball in this country as a buffer against the revolutionary potential of the Backhand Blade Edge Tenth Ball Attack).

I should also point out one other vital point with this shot - the bat must be gripped very firmly. I found this out to my considerable disadvantage one year when I was playing in the Eastern Southland OPen. I had put 'partner required' in the men's doubles as I am invariably forced to do at open tournaments in the lower South Island, and I drew a player with one leg who was drunk. I suspect in fact he had nothing to do with the tournament but had simply taken a wrong turning in the street outside the hall (this was confirmed during tactical talk just before our first game when he leered in my face and asked if we won, would we get any money?).

Anyway, it was clear that for me to progress any further in the Eastern Southland men's doubles that year, I would have to pull something really special out of the bag - the Backhand Blade Edge Tenth Ball Attack seemed my best chance. Unfortunately due to my partner's inability to play, we had great difficulty making it thru to the tenth ball, so I was forced to try and play the shot early - a major mistake. I also forgot to grip the bat tightly, my second major mistake.

The bat left my hand at monumental speed and travelled in a completely flat trajectory right thru to the far wall of the stadium, where it made a neat incision later used as a mail delivery hole, and on into the carpark, where it rocketed into the mouth of the tournament referee, a distant relative of Rob Garrett, who immediately took on the appearance of a man attempting to swallow a plate. Strenuous moves to have me disqualified from the tournament were immediately upheld by the referee in question.