

## Big Rewards for Table Tennis Family



The demands on table tennis parents can be huge, particularly when their children excel in their chosen sport. Just getting them outfitted and transported to training, interclub matches and tournaments is a second job in itself. But, on top of this, there is a large financial and emotional commitment required for them to aspire to 'be the best'.

Sometimes the rewards make it all seem so worthwhile. Such was the case in the **Rao** household during the NZ Junior Nationals, held recently at the North Harbour Table Tennis Stadium.

Mum, **Linda** says it is so exciting to see both her son **Roger** and daughter **Ruofei** playing. What made the Junior Nationals event so exciting was seeing both winning so many titles. Between them they won a staggering 11 events, 6 for Ruofei and 5 for Roger.

Roger, who does not turn 15 until November, won the boys under 15 and under 18 titles, beating Australian Dominic Huang and arch-rival **Kevin Wu** in the respective finals. This caps a tremendous past twelve months in which: he won the National Senior Men's title in October 2010; was invited to participate in the prestigious 'Close to Karlsson' training camp in Sweden in February; qualified in Guam in April for the Oceania team for the Global Cadet Challenge; and won the North Island under 18 title in Palmerston North in May.

Twelve year-old **Ruofei** won both the under 13 and under 15 girls titles. She was identified as a prospect by the ITTF when she was selected for their World Hopes (under 12) event in 2010. Ruofei comments that "it is nervous and fun, one has to overcome the tense feeling and enjoy the playing process. And, so many friends get together, like a competition party."

Both Roger and Ruofei represented their Auckland Under 15 'A' squads in the teams event, with both teams winning the overall titles. They combined to win the under 15 mixed doubles. There was further doubles success for Roger in the under 18 mixed event and for Ruofei in both the under 13 and under 15 girls event.

The Rao family is fortunate to live in Epsom, close to the Auckland Table Tennis Association facility at Gillies Avenue. It is just a short walk from Auckland Grammar, which Roger attends.

It has been a long time since a brother and sister have produced such dazzling results at a national event. In fact, it was 1978 when Kerry and Shelly Palmer won the Senior Men's and Women's titles concurrently. Since 1987 we have seen two sisters, Li Chunli and Karen Li dominate in the Women's events.



It will be interesting to see whether the Rao name eventually acquires the same volume of national titles that other families like the Jacksons, Palmers, Li's and Fogarty's have done. They have certainly got off to a flying start!