

Referee Report

2012 College Table Tennis National Championships

April 13-15, 2012

Plano, TX, USA

Tournament Staff

The tournament officials consisted of NCTTA technical delegates David Del Vecchio and Willy Leparulo, competition manager Ed Hogshead, referee Kagin Lee, and deputy referee/chief umpire Scott Ryan. Volunteers were recruited to serve various functions: venue setup, registration, media, video production, competition management, and match officials. The majority of the volunteers came from the local organizations, particularly the Plano Table Tennis Club. Other volunteers and many of the expert staff were filled by NCTTA volunteers from around the country – each NCTTA board member had a job, plus their regional directors, division directors, etc. volunteered to fill in the gaps. In total, over 150 volunteers helped make this competition possible.

In addition to the competition, the Championships provides an opportunity for collegiate players across the U.S. and Canada to meet each other, for NCTTA divisional and regional directors to collaborate, and for the NCTTA board of directors to hold board meetings.

Facility

The playing venue was the PSA2 (Plano Sports Authority) facility in Plano, a rich suburb of Dallas. This athletic facility is a city recreational center with 8 basketball/volleyball courts, plus a snack bar, and an indoor turf field that we did not use. The basketball courts had wood floors that were (as usual) glossier than desired for table tennis, but serviceable. The lighting was adequate but not exceptional. I heard no complaints about air movement or temperature.

Upon arrival for setup, it was discovered that the lighting at one of the courts – the one we had designated for the main show court – had inadequate lighting, much lower than the other courts, and an electrician had to be called in to fix it. Also there were exterior windows all around the gymnasium, which were to be covered with black paper before we arrived for setup, but we found that about a dozen high windows along the west wall were not covered, which would create an acceptable level of glare. Ed Hogshead had to personally use a 20 foot ladder and 40 foot scissor lift to cover the windows from the outside with no help from the facility staff.

Equipment, Playing Conditions, and Presentation

Butterfly tables, white Butterfly balls, and Butterfly and Newgy barriers were used. 8 Europa stationary tables and 10 Centrefold rollaway tables were used for competition; Europas for the front courts that would have more spectators, Centrefolds for the remaining courts and for the wheelchair players. An identical set of 8 more Europas and 10 more Centrefolds were used for practice courts. Competition courts were 23'x40' in size, fully barriered with umpire tables, scoreboards, towel boxes, and designated coaching areas. During team competition there were also team scoreboards with team name signs at each table. The two show courts were 30'x46'. Practice courts were 17'x30', partially barriered – the practice courts were larger than the courts at some USATT tournaments.

Umpires were provided for almost every match. A few matches did not have umpires, but a scorekeeper was provided. This tournament normally has about 2/3 matches umpired and 1/3 with a scorekeeper, but due to the efforts of Scott Ryan plus Jon Liu of the Plano TTC, many new umpires were recruited and trained this year, and I believe there are 28 new USATT certified umpires as a direct result of their efforts. The umpire shifts were very long and busy; umpires generally had only a short break to wolf down their lunch between matches.

Overall, I think this is the most professionally presented tournament in the country, excepting perhaps those tournaments with only a few courts. Players were required to be in uniform during competition. Players were not allowed to practice on competition courts; they could only practice in the practice area, where there was also a practice ball check-out system. Separation of spectators from competitors was maintained throughout the tournament. The two show courts had 4-high bleachers around three sides, and a corner scorekeeper for each court in the later rounds. The entire competition was streamed live through the Universal Sports web site, using the same video equipment, owned by David Del Vecchio, that used at the US Nationals and Trials. There were two video commentators/interviewers, two arena announcers, and perhaps 8 more video operations staff.

Spectator tickets were \$5 per day, though the gate did not seem to be tightly controlled. The two show courts were placed at the main entrance, the first courts seen by spectators as they walk in. All matches played on the show courts were hand-picked to benefit the spectators. Player introductions within the arena were limited because there was not much isolation between the arena and the remainder of the competition courts, so there may have been times when spectators did not know who the players were. However this was somewhat alleviated by the fact that all players had uniforms. The total number of spectators was lower than I expected.

One side effect of the uniform requirement is that there is no immediate solution when two opponents are wearing the same color. Teams are required to have a uniform, but not two different uniforms for "home" and "away", and if both players are wearing blue it can sometimes be hard to distinguish them. Only a couple schools had two different uniforms. This problem cannot be easily resolved in the future either. Requiring two uniforms of each team is an additional cost to the team. In many sports, home and away uniforms usually involve white (for example white for home, red for away), but this doesn't work in table tennis with a white ball.

Competition

There were 7 events held over 3 days: Men's, Women's, and Para singles; Men's and Women's doubles, and Coed and Women's teams. The team events had a group stage and a progressive knockout stage for final placement. Singles events had a group stage and elimination, including a consolation bracket for those who don't make the main draw. Draws were made live on a projector as usual. After qualifying through divisional and regional competition, a total of 228 participants from 50 schools participated in the championships. This year's champions were:

Coed Team – Texas Wesleyan University

Women's Team – Lindenwood University

Men's Singles – Fernando Yamazato, Lindenwood University

Women's Singles – Jiaqi Zheng, Northwestern Polytechnic University

Though this tournament is listed on the USATT calendar, it is run under NCTTA and ITTF rules, not USATT rules, so for example green hardbats are not permitted. NCTTA ratings (maintained by Ratings Central) rather than USATT ratings are used for both qualification and seeding. There were a number of cases in which a player with a lower NCTTA rating won a match by “upset” over a player with a higher NCTTA rating, but the winner’s USATT rating was actually higher than the loser’s USATT rating; the match would not have been an upset if USATT ratings had been used. I have also heard comments from coaches and players that an NCTTA rating is not a reliable indicator of an opponent’s level of play.

Accommodations, Transportation, and Amenities

The Southfork tournament hotel is an older hotel but it was adequate. The provided breakfast was above average. The hotel wifi was average. There was a hotel restaurant and bar but I did not eat there. There was also a sports bar/restaurant next door that I did not go to.

Shuttle service from the airport to the hotel was provided by NCTTA but I did not use it. The hotel was one or two miles away from the competition venue, and the shuttle service using large buses seemed acceptable except for the early morning rush on Sunday morning when players were bringing their luggage with them.

Athletes were provided box lunches during the competition. They could also buy their own food at the concession stand (hamburgers and the like) and I think many did. There was also an awards banquet for all athletes and coaches.

Competition Rules

The NCTTA team competition has particular rules on top of the standard rules of table tennis. During the tournament there were several instances in which there was confusion on the part of teams, officials, or both. In general there is no remedy for this other than more education and better attention to detail, but this can be difficult when the umpires are new and still getting used to the normal routine involved in umpiring matches.

Racket Testing

USATT graciously allowed us to use their RAE device for VOC testing. Voluntary racket testing was open for four hours on the day before competition, and at various times during the competition. Compulsory tests were performed at random, pre-match only. Though there were several people available who could have served as racket testers, I thought it more important for them to umpire, and therefore I performed all racket tests myself. The test procedure was simple: find the players immediately before the match or immediately after the players have brought their rackets to the umpire, and test the rackets at the umpire’s table.

A total of 89 voluntary tests were performed with 16 failures: 6 due to excessive thickness, 6 due to high VOC emissions, and 4 due to excessive damage. 38 compulsory tests were performed with 1 failure due to excessive thickness.

Respectfully Submitted,
Kagin Lee, Tournament Referee