

ITTF Equipment Committee, 2013-2015 Mid-Term Report to the USATT Board of Directors

Presented by Kagin Lee, Corresponding Member

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The ITTF Equipment Committee is responsible for the equipment-related sections of the ITTF Handbook, the accompanying technical leaflets which describe the specific details of table tennis equipment, and the corresponding authorization, approval, testing, regulation, etc. of said equipment.

The committee consists of 8 full members and 6 corresponding members. There are also two full-time employees who manage equipment authorization and other equipment issues. They work in the ITTF office in Singapore. Both the committee and the staff coordinate with equipment manufacturers in an effort to improve the quality of all table tennis equipment.

I was selected as a corresponding member of the ITTF Equipment Committee in the 2013 AGM. As a new member I lack the history of committee issues that are decades old, and it would be unreasonable to take the time of other busy committee members and have them explain everything to me, so I am trying to get the relevant information as it becomes necessary for the task at hand.

Some committee members have specific areas of responsibility, and the domain of racket coverings (rubber sheets) is mine. As a new member and a corresponding (not full) member, I was surprised to be given this responsibility, as I consider this to be the most complex part of equipment regulation – the only regulated piece of equipment that players purchase themselves. The other specific areas (tables, balls, racket control etc.) are all handled by full members.

The authorization of rubber sheets requires constant work – there are over 1000 different makes and models of authorized rubber, and the number continues to grow. This work is performed by the ITTF staff; I provide support when necessary. This July I spent a week in the Singapore office with the staff and the former committee chair, to learn the details of the approval process. During that time I was also able to learn a variety of other details about some of the equipment issues that we face.

I am attempting to tackle a few complex issues regarding the legality of rackets. There are several equipment regulations which, for one reason or another, are not properly enforced. I believe these regulations should be modified or removed such that honest players are not at a disadvantage, but not everyone shares my point of view. I am working on an initial round of proposed regulation updates in 2014. They will be small, detailed, technical changes; but hopefully they will clean things up a little.

For table tennis equipment as a whole, the biggest current event is the arrival of the “poly” ball. Though we are still missing a lot of information about the ball, I am hopeful that, given time, the poly ball will be superior to the celluloid ball in almost every regard. It is quite amazing that people speak of boycotting the new ball before they even have a chance to try it; meanwhile some top players are sorting through dozens and dozens of the best quality celluloid balls to find a single ball that they deem worthy of their use. Almost every other use of celluloid in the world has been phased out in favor of newer plastics which are cheaper, safer to make, easier to work with, etc.

The committee continues to revise regulations and specifications to improve some things, fine tune other things, and to keep up with equipment technology. A new technical leaflet, describing the entire field of play, is in the works. Another new technical leaflet for the approval of net gauges is being developed. Racket control continues to evolve. The approval process for flooring is being revamped. Quality control of nets is being reviewed.

Overall, I feel that table tennis equipment is still rather 20th century, but there are islands of progress.

Thanks to chair Fede Lineros, deputy chair Paul Schiltz, former chair Odd Gustavsen, and ITTF staff members Vicky Eleftheriade and Mingfa Cheong for their help and patience.

Respectfully submitted,

Kagin Lee