

**Umpire Report**  
**2013 World Table Tennis Championships**  
**May 13-20, 2013**  
**Paris, France**

**Location**

This edition of the World Championships was an anniversary of two events. First of all, ten years ago the World Championship individual competition was held in Paris in 2003 – the first World Championships that did not have both team and individual competition, and the last to be won by a player from Europe. Second, twenty years ago, Jean-Philippe Gatien was the only French player to ever win a world singles title (in 1993). The French players and fans have high hopes for the future with many strong young players such as Marie Migot and Simon Gauzy. However no French players were able to reach the final 16 of any event this year.

This was my second time visiting Paris and thus I was somewhat prepared for the general environment before I arrived. I took a flight several days before the tournament began because the plane ticket was about \$400 cheaper this way, and this time helped me get used to the time change.

**Facilities**

Competition was mainly held at the Palais Omnisport de Paris Bercy (POPB), a sports arena with a capacity in the 10,000-15,000 range. One distinguishing feature of the building was its exterior walls which are covered with grass and tended by hand. This venue held 8 tables in the arena (reduced to 4, 2, and later 1 table in latter stages), 8 tables in a secondary hall, and 16 practice tables in a tertiary hall which happened to be a skating rink.

From what I understand this tournament had the highest participation count of any World Championships; the ITTF web site lists over 800 players. As a result, an additional facility was used in the first two days of competition: l'Institut National du Sport, de l'Expertise et de la Performance (INSEP), a large multisport athletic facility. 22 additional competition tables were used there. I am told that this was the first Worlds that took place in two facilities.

Playing conditions varied across the different halls. The first three tables in the arena were beautiful, and the action on those tables was easily viewed even from the worst nosebleed seats, with scores on giant LCD displays and instant replay on the main arena display. The five additional tables in the arena had only slightly worse conditions but were not as visible. The secondary hall in POPB had direct lighting shining from two main rows of lighting to the left and right of table orientation, and two tables had noticeably inferior lighting compared to the rest. The competition hall at INSEP also had varying quality of light. Both of the secondary halls had limited seating for spectators; most of those seats were used by competitors on break. Also, there seemed to be little ventilation in the secondary halls. The number of practice tables seemed to be insufficient for the first few days of competition.

The main arena:



The second hall in POPB:



The practice hall in POPB:



The hall in INSEP:



## **Transportation and Accommodations**

Players, delegations, volunteers, and other staff were housed at 18 different hotels around the city. A few hotels were within walking distance of the playing facility, but chartered buses were required for most. The transit time was probably the biggest complaint of the tournament. For example if I had a match scheduled at 10:00am, I would need to be at the briefing on site at 9:15am (likewise the players need to practice and check in for their match ahead of time). Buses were scheduled to depart every half hour, and transit time varied from 15 minutes to 40 minutes depending on traffic; therefore to make the 9:15am briefing I would need the 8:30am bus. However right from the beginning it was apparent that the bus service was unreliable, so to be safe I needed to take the 8:00am bus. A couple days I found myself and other umpires unhappily waiting for a 6:30am bus. The problem was worse when we needed to travel to the second facility at INSEP; to get there we first needed to go to POPB and then take a connecting bus to INSEP – an additional 30 minutes. This made days longer for everyone and lasted through the end when the bus driver taking me and ~20 others to the airport appeared to get lost somewhere along the way.

All umpires were housed at a hotel which, on the map, appeared to be the furthest away from POPB. However I was very surprised when I arrived at the hotel as the room I shared with Kenny Tien had separate rooms for each bed. It was perhaps four times as large as the single room I stayed at prior to the tournament; much larger than one expects from a hotel in Europe. Others at the tournament reported that their room had two narrow beds that were right next to each other.

## **Officials**

The officiating crew was led by referee Petr Bohumsky, who did an excellent job from what I saw. He had 6 deputy referees, as well as several officials who served as “Umpire Control” helping in the match call area. 60 umpires worked the main competition, plus an additional 80 umpires recruited by the French federation (FFTT) who only worked the first two days. There were also three ITTF competition managers on duty, mostly serving the main arena.

The first few days of competition were the toughest, as we often worked back-to-back matches. In the new scheme of racket control, all players are expected to check in with the umpire ~30 minutes before match start so umpires can inspect their rackets, clothing, player numbers, etc. However with back-to-back matches it is impossible for an umpire to be working one match and simultaneously checking in players for a different match, so some umpire shifts were given in which the umpire would umpire matches at a particular table, and in other umpire shifts the umpire would work only in the call area, checking players prior to each match and then handing the players and rackets over to the umpire at the table. This was reasonably efficient as it was a sort of assembly-line system, but sometimes the performance of the umpire at the call area was not compatible with the umpire on table (for example the call area umpire permitted a racket or clothing that the umpire at the table was not happy with). A couple umpires would also be assigned to assist and supervise racket control in each shift, and the results of this were also mixed as some umpires had a lot of experience with racket control, and some umpires were completely unfamiliar with it.

As a series of single elimination brackets, this umpire demand for this tournament drastically reduces as the week progresses. Only 14 umpires were needed for the final two days of competition, and there were 32 blue badge umpires on duty – I was not one of them – therefore I was one of the many umpires who had the final two days off. Umpires who did not have “blue badge in progress” status found that they had the final three days off. It was nice to be able to watch some of the matches, as I find it almost impossible to watch while I’m working.

Personally, I umpired 3 matches and assisted on 3 matches on the TV courts in the main arena. The conditions for the umpire on these courts were very different from a typical court in several ways:

- Both the umpire’s and the assistant’s chairs were elevated, presumably so the umpire could see the center line in doubles. However this had the side effect that it was difficult to judge net serves properly due to the height. This problem was made worse by a decorative globe on the desk that served as camouflage for the ball. Here is the view from the umpire’s chair:



- The umpire’s and assistant’s desks were very large. They got in the way when tossing the ball to the player to begin each game. I also umpired a match in which a player almost collided with the massive desk, which probably would have resulted in injury as well as damage to the electronic display.
- The umpire and assistant were further from the table than usual, which made depth perception much more difficult when judging serves.
- The assistant operated a standard manual scoreboard; however volunteers updated electronic scoreboards that were also in the court. There was some lag before the electronic scoreboard was updated, and sometimes it was incorrect. Sometimes one of the electronic scoreboards was incorrect and the others were correct.
- There were small cameras mounted to the table, seen in the picture in front of the globe. The referee instructed us to treat the cameras as part of the net assembly if the ball hit one of them.
- Birds appear to live in the facility and I was fortunate that no birds left any “gifts” in the court during matches that I umpired. Others were not so lucky.

Nevertheless, being on one of the main courts in the arena was always exciting, especially when a French player was in action.

**Amenities**

The biggest amenity that the umpires noticed missing was a secure room for officials. The food in the cafeteria was acceptable, but there was limited variety over the course of the tournament. I was pleasantly surprised at the end of the tournament when the FFTT invited all officials as well as others in the ITTF family to a post-tournament dinner cruise on the Seine. Despite the rain this was a very nice touch that probably cost over \$100 per person.

**Other Activities**

Like our USATT National Championships, the ITTF World Championships is not just a tournament; it is also a sort of table tennis convention where colleagues from around the world meet after working via email throughout the year. In addition to meeting tournament officials from around the world, I also met former acquaintances who were attending to meetings and other business. Mike Cavanaugh's post on the USATT web site summarizes our association's extra-competition activities at this year's Championships. Personally, I met a number of people involved with ITTF work that I had only known about by reputation, and was favorably impressed by almost all of them. The referee was kind enough to make my schedule in a way that allowed me to attend a meeting of the ITTF Equipment Committee and a meeting with both the committee and the manufacturers' association, FIT.

I also ran into a number of people I knew from the US, who were visiting as spectators or participating in one way or another.

Thank you to USATT for selecting me and helping fund my participation at this tournament. I would also like to thank the ITTF and the FFTT for their hospitality. I learned that the World Championships is a larger event than I expected with many moving parts. I would not be surprised if there were over 1000 volunteers and an additional 1000 staff members in various functions required to make this event happen. Despite some problems the tournament seems to have been a great success. This was a valuable experience for me.

Respectfully Submitted,  
Kagin Lee