

Deputy Referee Report
2014 German Open
March 26-30, 2014, Magdeburg, Germany

Invitation

It felt unusual to be invited to serve as a deputy referee at this tournament, and this was confirmed by others who asked me if a US referee was needed in Germany due to a shortage of officials in Europe. Far from it; there are many referees in Europe, and therefore there was an additional cost borne by the tournament host to bring me in rather than a more local official. I believe the biggest reason I was invited was due to the efforts of Michael Zwipp, who had been chair of the German URC when the selection of officials was made, and I am grateful to him for this experience. When I received the invitation I knew this was a rare opportunity which I had to accept, even though it would affect the preparation of my most complex tournament of the year (the TMS 2014 College Table Tennis Championships) scheduled to take place immediately after I returned home. The German Open might be considered the biggest and most popular of the World Tour tournaments, with the next step up being the major tournaments such as the World Cup or European Championships. The German Open would be the highest level tournament where I have been a deputy referee.

Facility and Equipment

The tournament site was GETEC Arena. In the US when a sports facility is called an "arena" I typically imagine a professional or large college facility designed for basketball or hockey, with a capacity of 15,000 or more. GETEC Arena was built for team handball and has a capacity of about 7,000. It was a good size for table tennis, with the proper spectator capacity and good visibility for everyone. The arena was never completely full, but at peak hours there were no big gaps in the seats and it could be quite loud, especially when a German was playing a late round match.

While table tennis is not a major sport in Germany, it is, unlike in many countries, considered an actual sport. Combining that with the German reputation for order and efficiency, I had high expectations for all aspects of this tournament. With that in mind, I was surprised to see sunlight appear in the playing hall, through many small uncovered glass windows in the ceiling. Eventually a crew was sent onto the roof to cover the openings with plastic sheeting, but it took time and disrupted the schedule a bit. This was probably the biggest problem area that I was aware of.

Twelve competition tables and nine practice tables were used, with courts 54' x 27' at the beginning. As the tournament progressed the number of courts was successively reduced to 8, 4, 3, and eventually 1 main court. The crew was able to rearrange the courts quickly, including the handling of the always troublesome floor advertisements.

Tournament Staff

The referee was Markus Baisch (GER), the new chair of the German URC. The other deputy referee was Albert Rooijmans (NED), a member of and former chair of the ITTF URC. Three German referees (IR or NR) served as umpire controllers, along with a full time racket controller and 31 German and 9 visiting umpires. All members of the lead staff were quite competent; there were many times when I saw a potential problem developing, and upon working to prevent or resolve it, found that another official had

identified the very same issue and was working on it. The German umpires, including the national umpires, were generally very good. I was somewhat surprised that more umpires were not used, as the Handbook for Tournament Referees recommends 48 (4 X number of tables) and while in the US we have difficulty fulfilling this due to a lack of willing and qualified personnel, I do not expect this to be the problem in Germany.

Karl Jindrak served as competition manager, supported by a fair number of core staff. There were also about 140 additional volunteers working in a variety of roles. About ten were dedicated as the court service personnel, ready to adjust the flooring or barriers when needed, or collect a stray ball, or direct a player to the proper location. Others worked in areas such as hospitality, competition results, and other services. There may have been as many people working at the tournament as there were playing in it. Almost everyone was kind and friendly, and most could speak English.

Hospitality

I arrived in Leipzig airport, connecting through Frankfurt. Upon arrival I was driven by car to Magdeburg, and my return trip was also by car. The trip was about 80 miles each way, and considering the price of gas in Europe, this was quite an expense. At GETEC Arena, there was an office dedicated to the coordination of transportation.

One minor inconvenience at this tournament was the time required for meals. Lunch and dinner were served in one of the hotels, which required a short trip on the shuttle service. However the shuttle was quite punctual and if a person timed things just right, the round trip plus lunch could be done in less than an hour. The food was better than I expected, considering that it was always served in buffet trays.

The ITTF standard hospitality package for umpires and referees is to give \$20 per day for miscellaneous expenses plus three meals per day, and one or two meals on the arrival/departure days. At USATT tournaments, officials are given \$20 per day for miscellaneous expenses and \$30 per day for food. At this tournament, the three meals were certainly worth much more than \$30 per day. Other officials here noted that the US practice of giving money instead of meals was one of the specific deterrents to officiating in the US. The lack of social events for staff in the US was also cited; in Magdeburg there was an informal reception for officials as well as a party for volunteers.

Competition

With only 12 competition tables, there were no U-21 events, only men's and women's singles and doubles. Participating in this tournament were former world champion and top seed Wang Hao, along with several younger Chinese players. The surprise performance of the tournament was Steffen Mengel of Germany (ranked 144), who was responsible for beating three Chinese players including Wang Hao, before losing in the semifinals to Jun Mizutani. Sofia Polcanova of Austria (ranked 99) also had a career best performance in reaching the semifinals. Both men's and women's singles titles were won by German players, Dmitrij Ovtcharov and Shan Xiaona.

Respectfully submitted,
Kagin Lee

GETEC Arena



Advertisement on an outdoor LCD billboard in town



Match walk-in with cheerleaders and the mascot, Rackedino



Main live streaming camera on day two, right in front of the control desk. Later replaced with a large camera on a tall platform



12-court setup



Women's doubles final, won by a pair of 13 year olds from Japan

