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## Houston to Host 2021 World Table Tennis Championships

The United States and China both selected, will celebrate the  
50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Ping Pong Diplomacy



HOUSTON, TX – International Table Tennis is coming to Houston.

The Harris County – Houston Sports Authority has been selected to host the International Table Tennis Federation's 2021 World Table Tennis Championships. It is the first time the event will be hosted in the United States.

The announcement was made today at the 2019 ITTF Annual General Meeting and World Championships in Budapest.

The ITTF also awarded the Chinese Table Tennis Federation the 2022 Championships, which will be held in Chengdu. Houston and China collaborated in what was, essentially, a joint-support bid.

The announcement comes 50 years after the USA Table Tennis Team arrived in China for a friendly Table Tennis exchange and wound up changing the world. The 1971 event, dubbed Ping Pong Diplomacy, brought the USA and China to the table, thus establishing diplomatic relations.

The event utilized the Chinese athletic slogan "Friendship First, Competition Second," and eased diplomatic tensions enough to allow President Richard M. Nixon to travel to Beijing in 1972.

"We're thrilled not only to be hosting the 2021 World Table Tennis Championships but also to have the chance to help commemorate that historic moment," said Harris County – Houston Sports Authority CEO, **Janis Burke**, said. "In 1971, China and the United States came together and helped change the world."

Houston **Mayor Sylvester Turner** agreed. "There is no better way to celebrate 50 years of diplomacy between these two great countries than to bring the first of these back-to-back championships to the most diverse and welcoming city in the nation. The leadership of the Harris County – Houston Sports Authority has brought another incredible international event to Houston.

“I encourage both local and global Table Tennis fans to make plans to watch the competition and enjoy the hype and festivities connected to the event.”

The United States and China agreed to support each other’s efforts with these back-to-back championships, with Houston and China both getting support from former Houston Rockets player, **Yao Ming**, as well as Nixon’s grandson, **Christopher Nixon Cox**.

“I’m excited the event is finally coming to the U.S. and to Houston,” Cox said. “There is no better way to recognize my grandfather’s work with Chinese-American relations.”

USA Table Tennis and the United States Olympic Committee supported Houston’s bid.

“The event will spotlight the sport of Table Tennis - a sport for a lifetime - and provide dreams for our youth,” said USATT Chairman of the Board, **Anne Cribbs**. “It’s also a sport has the ability to bring the world together as we celebrate what unites us rather than what divides us.”

The two table tennis players most associated with 1971’s Ping Pong Diplomacy, which inspired China’s invitation to the U.S. team, were Glenn Cowan and Zhuang Zedong. The two met each other on a bus which had been reserved for the Chinese team during the World Championships in Nagoya, Japan, in 1971. It was the first time China had publicly emerged since the Cultural Revolution began in 1966. At the time, Zedong was a three-time world champion (1961, 1963, 1965). During the short trip to the training venue and competition hall, Cowan, who had missed the U.S. team bus and was allowed to ride with the Chinese, spoke passionately about his desire for friendship between the two countries.

Morocco had also put in a bid to host the 2021 World Championships, while Japan and Portugal also bid for the 2022 Championships.

### **About Harris County - Houston Sports Authority**

The Harris County-Houston Sports Authority maintains the facilities and services the debt of the world-class, professional sports venues it was created to build. To support this primary mission, Houston Sports serves as a leading proponent for attracting sporting events to Houston and for promoting the city as a home for sports-related activities, to ultimately enhance Houston’s economic development and bring better quality of life for its residents. Houston Sports also created the annual Houston Sports Awards to honor the area’s outstanding athletes. [www.houstonsports.org](http://www.houstonsports.org)

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