



# **ACROSS THE NET**

## **Melton Table Tennis**

June 2016

### **OZ OPEN, CHINA NAMES TEAM, HANDS ACROSS THE WATER, PLUS MUCH MORE**

In this edition, we tell you where you should be on the Queen's Birthday weekend, look at the strongest team at the Rio Olympics, try to help a small nation in trouble, and we look back at someone you've probably never heard of who has had an impact on your life.

### **CRAIG SAYS "HI"**

Paid a quick visit to Craig a week ago and found him in good spirits. As can be seen in the photo, Craig has been practicing hard and is now able to generate a bright halo above his head.

Still restricted in the use of his right side, Craig has been working on his left-handed backhands and is talking up a return to table tennis in the para's.

If you can find a few spare minutes, drop in to Sunshine hospital, Ward 3E, and have a chat with Craig. I'm sure he'll appreciate it.



### **AUSSIE OPEN IN MELBOURNE**

From the 8<sup>th</sup> to the 12<sup>th</sup> of this month, the **Australian Open Table Tennis Championships** will be played at the **Melbourne Sports and Aquatic Centre** in Albert Park. The list of players reads like a who's who of great table tennis with some of the best in the world doing battle with the best in Australia.

For a start, the entire **Australian Olympic team** will be attending, as will some members of the **Australian Paralympic team**. As if that's not enough, the Men's draw will feature *World number 6, Jun Mizutani* from **Japan**, and players from as far afield as **Panama, Romania, Vietnam, and France**.

The Women's side of the competition will include world number 6, **Feng Tienwei** from **Singapore**, *world number 7, Ai Fukahara* from **Japan**, *world number 17, Mengyu Yu* from **Singapore**, and *world number 38 Elizabeta Somara* from **Romania**.

This sort of quality rarely comes to Melbourne, and the next time Victoria gets the rights to hold a major championship, there is no guarantee it will be held in the state capital. This could be your last chance to see this type of quality for quite some time. A final between **Feng Tienwei** and **Ai Fukahara** could easily emulate an Olympic Quarter-final and should not be missed.

Entry is free for the Wednesday, Thursday and Friday matches. Tickets are still available for the weekend, and are can be purchased from **TicketMaster**.

If you want to see this standard of play come back to us, we must support and attend these events when the opportunity arises.

## **CHINA RIO TEAM**

China has announced its playing squad for the **Rio Olympics**. The Men's team will feature world number 1, **Ma Long**, world number 3, **Xu Xin**, and world number 4, **Zhang Jike**. What happened to the world number 2, you ask? **Fan Zhendong** has been named as an emergency. Imagine being the world number 2 and only getting a gig as an emergency in a 3-man team. How embarrassing.

The Women's team is just as impressive, with world number 1, **Liu Shiwen**, world number 2, **Ding Ning**, and world number 5, **Li Xiaoxia** filling the main spots, and world number 3, **Zhu Yuling** taking the emergency position.

Obviously, both the Chinese Men's and Women's teams are at the top of the Olympic Teams ranking by the ITTF, but the other places are not quite so obvious. In the Men's section, **Germany** is ranked second, with **Japan** ranked in third place. Other countries in the top ten are **Hong Kong, Portugal, Korea, France, Sweden, Austria, and Poland**.

**Australia** is ranked **55<sup>th</sup>**, just behind **Venezuela**, and just ahead of **Algeria**.

The Women's Team Rankings for Rio have the same top 3, but in a slightly different order. **China** are again on top, with **Japan** in second place, followed by **Germany**. The rest of the top 10 are **Singapore, Hong Kong, South Korea, Chinese Taipei, North Korea, The Netherlands, & Romania**.

**Australia** is ranked at **32**, just behind **Egypt**, and just ahead of **Italy**. But that's not a bad place to be when you consider the strength of the Egyptian women's team. They have been forging ahead over recent years and look like progressing higher in the rankings.

With **128** countries listed to compete in the Men's events, and **109** in the Women's, Australia's rankings don't seem to bad. With China's Men's listed at **254** points, Australia's **144** puts our place in world table tennis into perspective. In the Women's we look even better. Australia has **154** compared to China's **216**.

Take pity on **Djibouti** on the Men's side and **Kuwait** on the Women's side. Both have been listed with **0 points**. I wouldn't put money on them to pick up a medal.

## **JUNE TOURNAMENTS**

It's a big month, with something on every weekend.

Sunday the **5<sup>th</sup> of June** sees the running on the **Ballarat Open Veteran's Tournament**. If you haven't entered by now, it's too late, but it will still be a great day to watch the Vet's put on a show.



As discussed earlier in this edition, the **Australian Open Championship** will be held at MSAC from Wednesday the **8<sup>th</sup> of June** through to the finals on Sunday the **12<sup>th</sup>**.

On the same weekend, there is a Team's Championship being held in **Bendigo**.

The **18<sup>th</sup>** and **19<sup>th</sup>** of June is the weekend to get to **Albury/Wodonga** for their Open Junior Tournament on the Saturday, and the Open Seniors Tournament on the Sunday.

On Sunday the **26<sup>th</sup>**, **Mornington Peninsula** will be running their Open Senior Tournament.

## **2022 COMMONWEALTH GAMES GRANTED**

**Durban, South Africa** has been granted the **2022 Commonwealth Games** after **Edmonton, Canada** withdrew its bid. More interesting for us is that table tennis has been confirmed as one of the compulsory sports, and para table tennis is to be included in the list of optional sports.

Sooner than that, at the **2018 Commonwealth Games** on the **Gold Coast**, the ITTF have confirmed to the Commonwealth Games Federation that they have endorsed the nominations of **2** Para table tennis standing events to be played.

## **A NATION NEEDS MY HELP**

**4401** is an interesting number. It's the postcode for **Oakey** in Queensland. It's the number of a diesel locomotive originally ordered by the NSW government in 1957, and now retired. Its prime factorization is  **$3^3 \times 163$** .

OK, so it's not that interesting. But *4,401* is the number of individual players who took part in ITTF tournaments during **2015**.

The ITTF publish on their website the list of entrants in the majority of ITTF sanctioned tournaments, including World Championships, Open Championships, Junior and Cadets, and Hopes tournaments. This list is not totally complete, as some governing bodies still haven't updated the list of participants for their event, but in the main, you can see who and how many have entered each tournament. And if you calculate the number of individual players, (yes, I did) you come up with 4,401.

I won't name all the players, but the list of countries they come from is interesting. Of the **222** countries affiliated with the ITTF, **159** had players at major competitions. And the country with the most participants? China, right? *Not even close.*

**Russia** tops the bill with **184** players competing. This is mainly due to the very large number of Junior and Cadets who only competed at the Russian Championships, but they still got their names on the list.

Other countries with more than 100 participants were **Korea (141)**, **Egypt (133)**, **Chinese Taipei (112)**, **Poland (106)**, and **Japan (102)**. The remaining countries in the top 10 were **China (97)**, **Hong Kong (94)**, **France (92)**, and **Spain (88)**.

So put your hand up if you said that China would be **7<sup>th</sup>** on the list and Egypt would be **3<sup>rd</sup>**. Anybody? No? Well, did you guess that **Nigeria (72)** would have more participants than **Germany (70)** or **Sweden (68)**? Or that **India (63)** and **Australia (62)** would both have nearly double the participants of **England (32)**?

And it was good to see the number of smaller nations competing as well. A total of **31** nations had **5** participants or less attending Championships during the year, including **4** from the **Oceania** region.

But my focus is on one very small nation that clearly needs some assistance. This tiny country had only **one** person participating at these events last year, and I am going to make it my mission to find out why. This country, only **3.21 square kilometres** in size, is barely big enough to house a table tennis table.

With funding from you, dear readers, I pledge myself to finding out why **Monaco** is so poorly represented at ITTF championships. Once you have donated the suitable amount of funding, I will travel to Monaco (probably around the time of the Formula One Grand Prix), and do my best to promote table tennis.

And when you donate, don't forget to add a little extra for my spending money at the casino as well.

## C'MON - GET HAPPY

Anyone who can remember watching television or listening to the radio in the early to mid-seventies has been affected by Ruth Aarons. How? We'll get to that later.

**Ruth Hughes Aarons** was born in 1918 in Connecticut, USA into a wealthy family. Her mother was an opera singer and her father was a Broadway theatrical producer and theatre owner.



Originally a tennis player, Ruth was introduced to table tennis by mere chance. At the age of 15 in the summer of 1933, Ruth was playing tennis on a roof-top court in New York. During a storm which ended the tennis match early, she went to the basement of the building where a group of people were playing table tennis. Ruth quickly became fascinated by the game. She started playing more seriously at her school and soon won her first tournament. With that victory, she was ready to compete in earnest.

Ruth joined the **Parker Brothers' American Ping-Pong Association** in 1933 and began touring the country playing tournaments, always accompanied by one of her parents.

**Sam Silberman**, her doubles partner, took to coaching Ruth. He explained, *"I came cheap. In return for being a practice partner, I used to get a sandwich served by the butler and two tickets to a Broadway show."*

Ruth was selected to represent the U.S. at the 1936 World Championships in **Prague**, and also played exhibition matches in other European cities on the tour. As conclusive proof that gender-bias was alive and well in the mid-1930's, a British reporter said of Ruth, *"Such brilliant defensive footwork by a woman player has not been seen in this country before."*

Winning the Women's Singles at the 1936 World Championships, Ruth controversially refused to shake the hand of **Astrid Krebsbach**, her opponent from Germany, proclaiming: *"I am Jewish"*.

Clearly show business was in the Aarons' blood, and so Ruth, no doubt helped by her father's connections, quickly turned her title into stage bookings at some of the most renowned theatres and exclusive supper clubs in America. These were a 15-minute exhibition act with **Michael French**, a World Doubles Champion, as her partner. As it was reported at the time, *"One of the novelties of this attraction is the way in which the latter half of the match is presented in the dark, the players being disclosed in silhouette form by means of special lighting. The ball [as well as the net] appears to be illuminated, while the players can be picked out by their white berets, white gloves, and white shoes."*



The rules governing the sport at the time forbade any payment being received for this type of event, and Ruth was eventually suspended by the ITTF in 1937. With the intervention of ITTF President, **Ivor Montagu**, the suspension was lifted after a month, and the exhibition matches were allowed to continue.

Ruth again represented the U.S.A. at the 1937 World Championships in **Baden, Germany**. Playing in the final against **Gertrude Pritzi** of Austria, the match was suddenly stopped because of a "game duration limit" set at 1 hour and 45 minutes. Both contestants were disqualified and the title was declared vacant. It was not until 2001, well after the deaths of both players, that they were each awarded the Gold medal for that championship.

Ruth retired from competitive play soon afterwards. She moved into acting and made her debut in the Warner Brothers table tennis movie short, "**Table Manners**," starring **Eddie Foy** and a supporting cast which included World Champions **Sandor Glanz** and **Laszlo Bellak**.

After the War, Ruth who'd earlier dabbled in dramatics at the **Neighborhood Playhouse School of the Theater** in New York, and had also tried her hand at writing songs, now abandoned table tennis totally.

In 1966, she was inducted in the **USATT Hall of Fame** for her contributions to and success in the sport of table tennis.

On June 6, 1980, just five days before her 62nd birthday, Ruth Aarons was found dead in the shower of her Beverly Hills home, presumably after falling and hitting her head. According to a friend, her use of prescription drugs was so profound that her muscles often atrophied, which rendered her unable to leave her bed, much less to stand.

She is still the only American to have won a Singles World Championship.

And the reason people from the 70's were affected by her? After her table tennis career was over, Ruth Aarons became a theatrical manager and booking agent who looked after the careers of, among others, **Shirley Jones**, **Susan Dey**, and **David Cassidy**.

If it wasn't for Ruth Aarons, we may not have had ***The Partridge Family***.



### **MAJOR CHANGE TO WORLD TABLE TENNIS**

It is yet to be confirmed, but I think *Across The Net* may be on to a major change in the world of Table Tennis. Due to recent world events, the balance of power is shifting, with enormous repercussions which will reverberate around the globe.

In an effort to emulate the **Eurovision Song Contest**, the **European Table Tennis Union** is poised to invite **Australia** to compete in the European Championships. Of course, this will mean that Table Tennis Australia CEO, **Peter Marriott** will have to be replaced by **Dami Im**, but this will be a sacrifice I'm sure Peter will be willing to make.

In the new format, exhibition matches will be played before a small jury who will vote on the strokes, style and grunts of the players, and the public will then vote for the European champion in a televised event where competitors will mime their shots.

Australia stands a very good chance of winning this format. European countries are unlikely to vote for their neighbouring table tennis nations due to simmering hatreds built up over centuries, and most Europeans have a friendly cousin in Australia who they would love to visit someday.

I believe that this move will be supported by other table tennis nations around the world. The other countries in the **Oceania** region would be happy to get rid of their major competition, **Asian** nations will still be confident of beating Australia, no matter where they belong, and it will ease confusion in **America** because most of them already believe that Australia is in Europe.

We await further news.

## **ON THE WEB**

Larry Hodges has to be one of the hardest working people in the world of table tennis. A full-time coach at the Maryland Table Tennis Club (a club which he formed in the 1980's), author of table tennis and science fiction books, tutor in maths and English, tournament director, board member of the USATT, and possibly other things that I've missed, Larry still finds time to write a very entertaining blog 5 days a week.

[www.tabletenniscoaching.com](http://www.tabletenniscoaching.com) is primarily about coaching, but covers much more than that. It is well worth visiting this site each weekday to read the daily blog, but also to check out all of the links and other interesting bits Larry includes.

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This is *your* club and *your* opinions are valid and valued. If you have any comments to make on the contents of this newsletter, or if you have any suggestions or information for future editions please let us know.

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