



ACROSS THE NET

Melton Table Tennis

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Edition 37

WINTER SEASON ENDS, CLUB CHAMPIONSHIPS, POINTS DIFFERENCE, & GREAT ESCAPES

In this edition we congratulate Leading Players, tell you why you should all attend the Club Championships, ponder over points differences, look at how table tennis helped to save lives, and much more.

AN END TO THE WINTER SEASON

We are already into the finals of the Winter season. I'm not making any predictions about the winners, but the Grand Finals on the 3rd of **August** should be a great night. The Leading Players for the Winter season have already been decided, and the winner in **A Grade** is **Michael Louey**, taking the honours over **Chris Addis**. **Mitch Braini** took out the **B Grade** award, with **Graham Huggett** just behind him, and **Brian Guy** dominated in **C Grade**.

Congratulations to these deserving winners for a great season.

CLUB CHAMPIONSHIPS

The annual **3 weeks of Club Championships** is upon us. This is always a fun time of the year and there are some great trophies on offer.

Week 1 on the **10th of August** is the **Handicap Championship**. Every player has a chance of winning this, regardless of your standing in the club. Each player is given a handicap ranking and matches are played up to **31 points**. Some top players may start on **0** or even a *negative points score*, while the lower rated players may start on up to **25** points. It's fun to watch the top players sweating in these games, as they can't afford to make a mistake.

In **Week 2**, on the **17th of August**, we run the **Doubles Championship** and the **Shootout**. Doubles partnerships are paired on the night, with the lowest ranked player being teamed up with the highest ranked, and so on for other players. This gives everyone an even chance of winning the award. The **Shootout** is a quick-fire knockout competition of the first player to three points. 2 players go in.... only 1 comes out.

Week 3 on the **21st of August** is the club **Singles Championship**. Divided into 3 groups, (A Grade, B Grade and C Grade), it starts as a round-robin contest before progressing to a knockout phase.

The Club Championships are open to **all MTTA members** who have played at least 3 rounds in the grade and have paid all appropriate fees. All players are given the best opportunity to take out one of the 10 awards on offer. Don't miss this chance to stretch your abilities and have some fun.

AS FORETOLD BY... ME

Now, this is getting freaky. In the **June** edition, I wrote that the ITTF had never held a table tennis World Championship in the Southern Hemisphere. **3 days later**, they announced that the 2018 World Junior Championships would be held in Bendigo.

In the **July** edition, I wrote that the ITTF ratings by country showed that China were the top nation, followed by various others, with "... *North Korea charging up like an intercontinental..... umm, charging up very fast.*" On **July the 4th**, **North Korea** test fired an *intercontinental ballistic missile*.

In this edition, I would like to talk about the editor of a small table tennis newsletter who suddenly became a multi-millionaire..... and now we wait.



SAUSAGE SIZZLE SUCCESS



One a weekend of wild Winter weather with more wind than at a Chennai curry-eating contest, members of MTTA were once again representing our club and our sport at **Coles Supermarket**, Melton South, serving sausages, handing out flyers, and talking to anyone who was interested in table tennis. And this was more people than you would think.

With our new banner proudly displayed, it was hard to miss who we were representing. Our thanks go to all those assisting on the weekend; **Larry Hallinan, Dean Camilleri, Glenn O'Dea, Chris Blake** and **Sam Warren**.

AUSSIE OPEN RESULTS

At the start of July, the **2017 Seamaster Australian Open** was held on the Gold Coast. And despite the absence of the entire Chinese Men's Team who had been withdrawn only days before the event (*more details below*), there was still table tennis of a standard rarely seen on our shores. With so many favourites out of the running in the Men's side of the draw, the path was clear for some new names to push their way forward, and for some older ones to show they can still match it with the best.

The Men's Singles final was played out between **Simon Gauzy** from **France**, and **Vladimir Samsonov** of **Belarus**, with the win going to the 41-year-old Samsonov. This victory completes Samsonov's record of having won a major title on every continent where table tennis is played.

The Women's draw still contained the top Chinese players who had not been involved in the controversy surrounding the Chinese men. And didn't they dominate. The final was an all-China affair, as were the semi-finals. In fact, even in the quarter-finals, **6** of the **8** competitors were Chinese. In the end, it was **Chen Meng** taking the title 4-2 over **Wang Manyu**.

Of the Aussies in the tournament, only 2 made it through to the main draw of the competition, but neither progressed beyond the first round. **Jian Fang Lay** and **David Powell** were both knocked out against much higher ranked opponents, but it was great to see them gaining this experience in front of a home crowd.

The **2018 Seamaster Australian Open Platinum** event will be held at the same venue in November next year. I'll be there. Who's coming with me?

PARA PLAYERS PROVING POWERFUL

Over the past few weeks, there has been a steady flow of Gold, Silver, and Bronze being imported into Australia, courtesy of the Australian Para table tennis players.

At the Para Open Championship in **Chinese Taipei**, **Nathan Pellissier** went from being an unseeded player in the **Class 8 Men's** competition to standing on the top of the podium wearing a Gold medal. And, in addition to that, he also picked up a Silver medal at the same event when he partnered with **Lien Chung Ching** from **Chinese Taipei** in the **Class 8 Teams** event.

Not content with his haul from Chinese Taipei, the following week Nathan made the trek across to the **Korean Para Open** and again took out the **Class 8 Singles** Gold medal.

Joining Nathan in the medal rush at the Korean Para Open were **Danni Di Toro**, who picked up a bronze in the **Class 4-5 Singles**, **Melissa Tapper** who collected Gold in the **Class 10 Singles**, together with a Bronze when she paired with **Kanlaya Kriabklang** of **Austria** in the **Class 10 Teams** event, and **Sam Von Einem** who won a pair of Silvers in the **Class 11 Singles** and the **Class 11 Teams** where he partnered **Kemal Gayfullin** from **Russia** in the final.



Others competing but not so lucky were **Rosalie Turnbull**, **Amanda Tscharke**, **Steven Gow**, **Caleb Crowden**, **Connor Holdback**, **Yaser Hussaini**, **Jake Ballestrino**, and **Connor Johnstone**. Our congratulations go to the whole team, their coaches and their support crew.



THE CHINESE SITUATION

Like it or not, we have to talk about the events surrounding the Chinese National Teams over the past few weeks. As reported in every table tennis outlet since it happened, the Chinese had a major re-structure of the coaching of the national teams. This was reportedly caused by **Kong Linghui** (pictured right), the head coach of the Chinese National Women's team being involved in a lawsuit concerning an outstanding loan from a Singapore hotel-casino. Apparently, only half of the **S\$1,000,000** loan had been repaid.



This caused the **Chinese Table Tennis Association** to carry out a thorough investigation of the incident, which they say exposed "... several deep-seated problems in the management of the Chinese National Table Tennis Team".



As part of their review, the CTTA removed the positions of Head coaches and Team coaches of the Men's and Women's teams, and replaced them with Men's and Women's Coaching Teams. Due to this, the Men's Head Coach, **Liu Guoliang** (pictured left) was removed from the coaching position he has held since **2003**, and instead was appointed as **Vice President** of the CTTA. This move wasn't based on a lack of performance by Liu. The 1996 Olympic Gold medalist had been voted as the best coach in the past two **ITTF Star Awards**, and his coaching credentials are outstanding.

This review happened only 2 days before the running of the **Chinese Open** in **Chengdu**. Early in the event, world number **4, Zhang Jike** withdrew from the tournament citing an injury, although no clarification of any injury has appeared since then. On the second day of the event, world numbers **1, 2** and **3, Ma Long, Fan Zhendong** and **Xu Xin** failed to arrive for their matches and left the team hotel. They all posted messages of support for Liu Guoliang on social media. Just days after that, the CTTA made the decision to withdraw from the **Australian Open** all players of the Men's team who were due to compete there. Not just the players involved in the protest, but **ALL** of them.

While all of this has been going on with the Men's team, the Women's team, whose coach was involved in the lawsuit which started all of this, have not offered even a murmur of protest and have been allowed to carry on competing.

The **ITTF** have penalised Ma Long, Fan Zhendong and Xu Xin **25 ITTF rankings points** for their indiscretion. No penalty has been announced for the CTTA withdrawing the players from the Oz Open. All members of the Chinese National Men's Team have been named in the Chinese National Games taking place at the end of August.

So, the numbers 1, 2, & 3 in the world have had 25 points deducted from their ranking, which means they drop to... numbers 1, 2, & 3 in the world. Wow. Bet they're sorry now.

WHAT'S THE POINTS OF IT ALL

If you play well at club level, you may win a trophy or two. And if you're happy enough to play exclusively at club level, that's fine. But many players want the challenge of competing at tournament level and pushing themselves against different opponents. Some players move to a different location and take up play at a new club. Some move to a different state, and some may move to a new country.

A few games at the new club will work out what level they are, but surely there's got to be an easier way to compare players from different clubs, different states or, as happened with us, different countries?

A few years ago, **Victoria** was using its own ranking system which was totally incompatible with other states. But now all Australian states are linked together on the **ratingscentral.com** system, making the job of tournament directors much simpler. All clubs throughout the state should be submitting their pennant results to the website so that a player's points can be accurately maintained.

It would appear that some European countries are using this system almost exclusively, but other countries are still using their own systems. A few **French** players pop up on ratingscentral, but these seem to be the ones who play in outside tournaments. I've tried to get onto the **French Table Tennis Federation's** website to find out how they do their rankings, but it was all in French, which is all Greek to me. I guess I should have paid more attention to Mrs. Prendergast in high school. *Merde. Quel imbécile j'étais.*

The players who compete at the very top level have their own system for points which bare no relation to ratingscentral either. Details of these can be found on the ITTF website and only applies to international competition, but surprisingly, these players can also be found on ratingscentral even if their own country doesn't use it.

Confused yet? Just wait. Looking at specific examples will blow your mind.

World number 1 Men's player, **Ma Long** has an **ITTF** rating of **3427**. His **ratingscentral** points are **3191**, a difference of -7%. Women's number one, **Ding Ning** is a bit further off. Her **ITTF** rating is **3456**, and **ratingscentral** is **2844**, a difference of nearly -18%. Looking locally, Australia's top player, **David Powell** has an **ITTF** ranking of **1486**, but is on **ratingscentral** at **2113**, a +42% difference.

It gets more confusing. The **USA** have their own ratings system for all internal matches. And they rely on it heavily. I have often heard of U.S. players trying to "*break the 2000-point barrier*", which seems to be the difference between good and very good. But their top players also have an ITTF rating, and because of that, they also have a ratingscentral points score.

A couple of examples for you. Top American player, **Kanak Jha** is on **2708 USATT** points, **2763 ratingscentral** points, and **1685 ITTF** points.

His teammate, **Jack Wang** is on **2573 USATT** points, which is 95% of Kanak's points. He is on **1919 ratingscentral** points, which is 69% of Kanak's points, but he is on **1012 ITTF** points, which is only 60% of Kanak's.

My head hurts.

ESCAPE VIA TABLE TENNIS

Many times I have mentioned **Ivor Montagu** in articles on these pages. He was the son of **Baron and Lady Swathyling**, and the person who, before his 25th birthday, had formed the **ITTF** and codified the rules of table tennis. Without Ivor Montagu, we would most likely have nothing to do on Thursday nights.

And while Ivor Montagu was a fascinating character (and one I will write more about soon), his brother and his brother's counterparts were just as interesting, and quietly famous for totally unrelated careers which, strangely, include links to our sport.

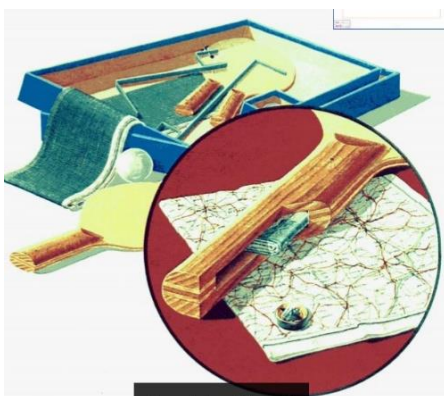


Ewen Montagu, or to give him his full title, **Captain Ewen Edward Samuel Montagu, CBE, QC, DL, RNR**, was a barrister prior to the war, and a British Naval Intelligence officer during the war. It was Ewen's idea to have a body dressed as a British officer with false battle plans dropped into the sea in an attempt to fool the enemy into thinking that an attack was coming from a different direction. After the war, Ewen wrote a book about the deception called "*The Man Who Never Was*", which was eventually made into a film of the same name. But it is the ideas of his fellow officers of the Military and Naval Intelligence which has our interest in this story.

A contemporary of Ewen Montagu was **Christopher Clayton-Hutton** who, together with a team of people formed the **MI-9** division of **British Military Intelligence** and worked at "*Pre-Capture*" and "*Post-Capture*" aids for British personnel during World War II. It was their job to provide soldiers and airmen with the aids to avoid capture and, in the event that they couldn't avoid it, to assist in escaping. The most common of the "pre-capture" aids took the form of maps drawn on silk and miniature compasses hidden in clothing or boots.



"Post-Capture" aids were in the form of parcels sent to prisoners of war. These were sent separate from the **Red Cross** food parcels which were never compromised. The parcels contained the type of activities which would keep prisoners amused and occupied and, as such, were approved of by the German authorities. Board games, draughts, chess sets, dominoes, and other indoor diversions were popular, but sporting equipment was also sent over. Tennis, badminton and table tennis sets were among items sent.



The table tennis sets, manufactured by **Waddington and Jaques**, included 24 table tennis balls, 4 bats and 2 nets. A set of instructions was also included. These instruction books contained hidden coded messages to help prisoners escape.

The illustration on the left is taken from a book written by Christopher Clayton-Hutton titled "*Per Ardua Libertas*" which was published in 1942 by the War Office, and shows a table tennis set with a hidden section in the bat handle which contained a map and compass. This book was only distributed to individuals within the intelligence sector

of the British and American Armed Forces.

The photo to the right shows a table tennis bat with the veneer peeled back to reveal a hidden map and escape instructions beneath. This bat was on display at the museum in **Colditz Castle** in Germany.



And let's not forget the story I've reported previously of the Austrian world champion, **Richard Bergmann** who moved to England prior to the commencement of World War II.

Richard was finally allowed to enlist in the British RAF towards the end of World War II and to serve as a physical training instructor. While stationed on the south coast of England, the reigning world table tennis champion stood as one soldier among 160,000 awaiting D-Day. Bergmann had also qualified as a signals officer, '*... directly responsible for giving information to our front line fighters and bombers as to the strength, positions and types of enemy aircraft likely to be encountered during any specific flight*'.

On the **3rd of June 1944**, amid all the chaos of the invasion preparations, Bergmann was lost on the base, looking for the right building to drop off his application for the job of sports officer. Bergmann opened the wrong door. He saw a large room filled top to bottom with shiny white table tennis balls. He closed the door. Then he opened it again to make sure he wasn't hallucinating. Finally, he understood why his table tennis supplies during the last five years had been so limited. Table tennis balls had been produced exclusively for the RAF to pack into the wings of seagoing aircraft as an inexpensive floatation aid.

It's amazing that the game we play has had far-reaching effects and has saved lives thanks to ingenuity caused by such hardship.

AN AGE OF DIFFERENCE

An interesting fact from the **China Open** played in late June. In one of the first round matches, **Tomokazu Harimoto** of **Japan** came up against **Vladimir Samsonov** of **Belarus**. Coming from 2-3 down, Harimoto won the match, 4 games to 3.

At **41** years of age, Samsonov is a veteran of the circuit. His earliest victories in the big leagues include **European Championship** Gold medals in **1996, 1998** and **2003**, **World Cup** Gold in **1999** and **2001**, and **World Championship** medals in **1995, 1997**, and **1999**. He also made seven consecutive **Olympic Games** appearances starting in **1996**, placing 4th in **1996** and **2000**.

Harimoto was born in **2003**.



AUGUST TOURNAMENTS

You'll need to rack up the k's if you want to go to any tournaments this month. On **Saturday the 5th**, **Yarrowonga** will be holding their **Senior Open**, followed by the **Junior Open** the next day.

Shepparton have their **Veterans Open** tournament also running on **Sunday the 6th**.

At the end of the month, the **Geelong Senior & Junior Open** is on **Saturday the 26th**. I've checked the entry form. You don't have to be a Senior *and* a Junior to get in. The following day they will be holding the **Geelong Veterans Open**. You have to be a Veteran for this one.

ON THE WEB

Ben Larcombe is a professional table tennis coach, author, and blogger from the UK. He runs www.experttabletennis.com which includes his podcasts with various people of note in the table tennis world, his regular blogs on many interesting topics, and his tips and tricks on playing table tennis.

His book, "*Expert in a Year*" follows the journey of **Sam Priestley** who became the object of an experiment by Ben to take a below-average player and turn him into an expert over 365 days. Well worth a read.

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