

Just don't call it ping-pong

Few fans but big fun at competitive table tennis' biggest Canadian tourney

ANDREW RENFREE
Sports Staff

A big tournament in Edmonton last week attracted dozens of athletes to compete, but it might not be the one you were thinking of. In addition to the FIFA U-20 soccer tournament, the city was host to the 2007 Stiga Canadian Junior Table Tennis Championships.

While Commonwealth Stadium was being retrofitted, the main gym at Grant McEwan underwent a different kind of change. The hoops and hardwood were replaced by 14 blue tables, and the basketball and volleyball players by a swarm of young men and women with paddles in hand for the junior events.

For the athletes in the Junior tournament, the national championship is the culmination of at least 20 hours per week of -practice throughout the year, and tensions are high.

"The atmosphere is a combination of nervousness and aggression during the matches," said Shirley Yan, a participant from Edmonton. She has competed in national table tennis

events for about seven years and is a member of the Edmonton chapter of Alberta Table Tennis Association (ATTA).

David Jackson, tournament chair and president of the ATTA, attributes the excitement to the mass appeal of table tennis.

"You can play table tennis most of your life—it doesn't matter if you're seven or 77. It's gender-neutral, age-neutral, and a sport the whole family can participate in," Jackson said. "It's an addictive sport and many people stick with it once they get started."

"Table tennis is the largest racquet sport in the world in terms of participation. In fact, it is second only to soccer in terms of number of associations worldwide," added head referee Mike Skinner, who has been involved with table tennis in some capacity for 54 years.

Despite this, most of the fans in the gym at Grant McEwan were friends and family of participants. Those involved think that a lack of publicity is the sport's biggest problem. Even though the sport is easy to pick up—

paddles can be bought for as low as \$20 and any club would welcome new members with open arms—there's a lack of public knowledge about its competitive side.

Yan said that she has seen membership of the ATTA grow over the years, but notes that the organization still struggles to get members.

"There are more kids playing each year, but recruiting can sometimes be a challenge. We never seem to have the right venue for the events because no one knows about the events. We need to attract more people; maybe West Edmonton Mall would be a better venue," she said.

Jackson hopes that this tournament will brighten the spotlight on the sport in Edmonton.

"It's hard to tell if having the nationals in Alberta increases participation each year. We might see a bit more attendance at our clubs, but not much," he said. "However, having [the championships] in Alberta does help the Alberta Table Tennis Association because it provides more opportunity for more athletes to participate."

Blowhard Oil fans need to chill out



NICK FROST

Outside of that aberration, though, what exactly has Kevin Lowe brought us? From what I can tell: three non-consecutive playoff appearances with seemingly average rosters, a superstar-defenceman whose contract should be considered a steal, a Clarence Campbell Trophy, a seventh game in a Stanley Cup Final, a reasonable six-year contract for Ales Hemsky, and the acquisition of a potential future Norris Trophy-candidate named Joni Pitkanen.

Talk further to these particular, pessimistic fans though, and they'll spin every move, no matter how big or small, Kevin Lowe makes—or, sometimes, doesn't make—into the reason that the team is, today, in such disarray.

They unfairly blame Lowe rather than circumstance. Nevermind the fact that when Doug Weight and Bill Guerin were traded, they couldn't afford to sign them; that when Mike Peca, Sergei Samsonov and Jaroslav Spacek all left, it was because they wanted to settle their families in a travel-friendly conference; or that Chris Pronger demanded out because of the lashes from Lauren's whip.

People tend to forget that pulling off the right deal in a major sports league is a lot harder than speculating about it with coworkers or typing it out in an online hockey forum. I mean, we could've signed Scott Gomez to a front-loaded ten-year, \$75-million contract and might still have missed the playoffs. You might want to say, "Gee, Kevin Lowe should trade Raffi Torres, Matt Greene, Taylor Chorney and a pick for Wade Redden and Antoine Vermette," but it's not as simple as it is on NHL 07, when you don't have to worry about an opposing GM on the other end of the phone telling you otherwise. Hockey is business; business isn't exactly easy.

The best thing Kevin Lowe could do—for all of our sakes—is to just come out and tell everyone that the team is being rebuilt. It would probably be more beneficial at this point to let the young kids get some experience at the pro level than to sign a couple of old, banged-up free agents who would probably make us worse before they make us Stanley Cup contenders for years to come. Maybe then we could all take that breather I talked about.



LOOK MA, NO HANDS! Canadian Midfielder Will Johnson tries to get the ball past an Austrian defender during their FIFA U-20 game on 5 July. Austria won the game 1-0, and Canada failed to advance to the round of 16.

Paul Lorieau's University Optical

Free vision test
with purchase of lenses or complete eyeglasses

4 3 3 - 5 5 0 0

Conveniently located at 11170-82 Ave Edmonton AB T6G 2L8

Teach English Overseas

- Intensive 60-Hour Program
- Classroom Management Techniques
- Detailed Lesson Planning
- Comprehensive Teaching Materials
- Internationally Recognized Certificate
- Teacher Placement Service
- Money Back Guarantee Included
- Thousands of Satisfied Students

OXFORD SEMINARS
780-428-8700 / 1-800-779-1779
www.oxfordseminars.com

LSAT MCAT GMAT GRE
Preparation Seminars

- Complete 30-Hour Seminars
- Proven Test-Taking Strategies
- Personalized Professional Instruction
- Comprehensive Study Materials
- Simulated Practice Exams
- Free Repeat Policy
- Personal Tutoring Available
- Thousands of Satisfied Students

Oxford Seminars
780-428-8700 / 1-800-779-1779
www.oxfordseminars.com

St. Vital A Unique Student Dormitory in the Heart of Edmonton
9916 110 Street (viewing by appointment only)

Three storey historical building
Furnished rooms from \$200.00 to \$450.00 per month

- One LRT stop from the U of A and one LRT stop from Grant MacEwan College.
- Two blocks from major grocery store and over a dozen restaurants within a 10 minute walk.
- A block and a half north of the North Saskatchewan River and a block and a half south of Jasper Avenue.
- Free laundry facilities
- Each floor has a TV room and a study room
- Internet access (wireless and cable)
- Recreation/Games Room
- Dining room (microwave ovens & vending machines)
- Food services possible depending on demand.
- Limited parking available at extra cost.

For information and viewing appointments call Ray at 499-7424 or e-mail ray.rozycki@gmail.com

Experience of a Lifetime
* Overseas Job Guaranteed

TEACH ENGLISH OVERSEAS

Free Info Seminar
Tues. @ 7pm
7712-104 Street

GLOBAL TESOL COLLEGE
(780) 438 5704
globaltesol.com

*Edmonton-based