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2001 Hawaii Senior Open

Honolulu, Hawaii, USA

January 25-26, 2001

By Tim Boggan

This quite successful Senior Open, held at the Hawaii Convention Center opposite Waikiki Beach, was promoted by the Japanese TTA for Over 40 through 80-aged players. Participants could play with either the 40 or 44 mm ball. A very great majority (say, 85%) of the more than 600 entries listed in the Program (a number of whom didn't show) consisted mostly of hundreds of vacationing Japanese who yet took their table tennis seriously. Of these, 75% were women--60% of whom played with the 40 mm ball. Also participating by invitation, playing almost exclusively with the 40 mm ball, were a much smaller contingent from the U.S.--perhaps 40 or so island locals and a dozen or more players from the mainland.

2-time U.S. Men's Singles Champion Eric Boggan (son of author Tim) didn't play in the tournament - he's not old enough yet - but he did have a good time at the beaches with his feathered friends!



I've nothing but praise for the organizers and sponsors of this tournament. It was a class

production. Congratulations to Tournament Chair Hajime Shigemura, to Tournament Director Yuki Yoshi Motomatsu and his three Vice Tournament Directors, Masanori Yamada; the U.S. mainland's Shonie Aki, recovering from a successful hip operation and ready for another; and Hawaii's Billy Kanae who, with John Romoa's help, did indefatigable managerial work to insure the tournament would proceed smoothly. My own liaisons were Co-Vice Tournament Chair Y.C. Lee, who personally took my entry and urged my wife Sally and me to attend the elegant evening Buffet Party at the swank Ala Wai Hotel that would precede the opening day's play, and our 5-time U.S.

Champion Sean O'Neill, who, among his other duties, was responsible for securing the contributions of 130 Honorary Sponsors whose names he displayed prominently at the tournament site.

Tournament Referee Noboyuki Shirakawa and his Deputy Azmy Ibrahim, assisted by a bevy of International Umpires, were on call--but smiles, bows, photo-friendly competitors made any question of dispute over decorum moot. One of the Japanese women's doubles teams, in what appeared to be de rigueur matching outfits for many, requested that Miles and I practice with them because they wanted to play against Americans. More color was added to the tournament by the Aloha playing shirts provided each contestant (I also received a quality commemorative sports shirt, which, come summer in New York I'll wear out on the links.)

The lighting, the tables, the barriered-off courts were all first-rate. Thank China's Double Fish Co. and USA's Lily Yip Sports for that--"Take a note, Tim," said Lily, striding here and there to accommodate customers behind her wares of neatly placed-out piles of rackets and rubber, "biggest booth in history!" Yes, it probably was, but she hadn't an exclusive--walk a little further and there was distributor Mike Bochenski behind the Nittaku booth, eager to start his post-tournament-play in this envied islanded-vacation-land, and Nittaku's Koichi Hirose, whom I'm happy to have known and admired for decades, making the rounds with, it might be, special presents of honey cake.

The Program showed the care with which the JTTA prepared for this tournament. All the draws in every event were reproduced with all the players' names (most of course in Japanese), and also their numbers (how nice, if one has to have them pinned on, to see and feel they're in oil cloth not that flimsy paper that often flaps up, folds, and can't be read). Since every match was time-scheduled, the tournament ran quite smoothly. Among those on hand to present medals to the winners was Co-Vice Tournament Chair Koji Kimura, 1963 and '65 World Mixed Doubles Champion.

I have to say at the outset that for two reasons I can only mostly report on my own rather revolving-door involvement at this Convention Center venue. First, because I was at the tournament only for one day--desirous of course of playing matches, but also of making continual sightseeing arrangements since Sally and I and our younger son Eric were in Hawaii for the first time primarily for a vacation and to visit our friends Dick and Mary Miles (Dick having spent winters in Waikiki for years). And, second, because there were relatively few U.S. players whom I knew by name here at the Center (Hi, Irina Borisova, Wiley Butler, Tom and Marilyn Miller) and even fewer medal winners to deservingly acknowledge.

However, I will say--though you'd not find any mention of anything about the tournament in the local papers--that in the Over 40's New Jersey's Barry Dattel, though he lost in the semi's of the singles to the Japanese winner, Matsuoka, did pair with singles runner-up, fellow mainlander Tao Xiaobin to take the doubles over Hawaii's Allen Kaichi and Paul Wessel. And that in winning the 50 singles over contending Hawaiians, runner-up Hermann Chinn and 3rd-place medalist Peter Pan, Nevada's Ralph Stadelman left no doubt he'd not gone to Never-Never Land but was alive and well. Bronzed he was too...in the doubles, as were islanders Frank Correa and George Komatsu; while Chinn and fellow Hawaiian Youn Eun Moon were awarded the silver. In the 60's, USA's James Chan did well, placing second to Japan's Yamauchi.

I myself began the tournament playing in the 4-team round robin 70 doubles with a U.S. pick-up partner, Bernard Berger, a retired doctor, who proved to be a very steady player. After losing the 21-19 1st game of our opener against Bob Partridge and a much-improved Byng Forsberg, we played better and were undefeated going into our final match with the Japanese players who would finish 4th behind the U.S. pair of Hiroshi Koshimoto and S. Chason Koh. Unexpectedly, we were match-point down to this Japanese team, but righted ourselves just in time. So Bob and Byng, looking on, came within one point of winning, but were denied the tie-breaker that would have given them the title.

In the 70 singles, I got to the semi's without losing a point. Very strange. Two default wins in my original round robin. Then, though I know definitely a match was played in my adjacent round robin, no one advanced out of it to meet me (perhaps because the match played should not have been played, and by the time the winner had been moved back to his correct position in the draw, the loser, unaware that he could have advanced, had gone home). In both the semi's and the final I was extended. First by the Japanese Tanaka (illustrious name, that), who I'd thought earlier, in jacket, trousers, and carrying a strapped camera bag, might have been a reporter observing me. Then in the final by the Island's Hon Ming Yeung, a surprisingly athletic septuagenarian who'd knocked out Forsberg in the semi's, and who seemed to take boundless delight in bounding into the ball, while various members of his family watched from the sidelines, filmed him for posterity, and eventually congratulated me with such warmth that everyone, including Yeung, seemed just as pleased he'd lost as won.

Sally watched, cringed as I not so silently mouthed my displeasure on missing shots, and continued knitting a baby blanket for a young relative. "Oh," says a nice Japanese woman apparently admiring the blanket. "That's dirty." Which rather astonished Sally until she realized the woman meant, "That's pretty."

Of course Sally, Eric, and I had a great vacation. Like everyone else, we had to see the film of the Dec. 7, 1941 attack on Pearl Harbor at the Visitor's Center and then go on to the USS Arizona Memorial. Much of the time we spent not in Waikiki but in traveling about O'ahu by foot, car, bus, submarine, and helicopter. Finally we spent a day touring Hawai'i, the Big Island, where we were quite struck by the huge volcanic craters and the surreal landscapes.

All who participated in this fun tournament have undeniably aged over the years--but I'm sure there isn't one of us who's seen everything yet...certainly not in Hawaii.

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