

Table Tennis

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Abstract:

This chapter introduces the history and development of the sport table tennis, as well as its differences than the game ping pong. Table tennis was first invented in England in the 1890s and became a competitive sport when Ivor Montagu found the English Table Tennis Association in 1923 and the International Table Tennis Association in 1926. While Hungary won most of the World Championships titles before the Second World War, Asian countries began to gain competitiveness. China started dominating the sport in the 1950s upon having their first world champion Rong Guotuan, followed by a three-time champion Zhuang Zedong who played an important role in facilitating the ping-pong diplomacy between China and the US. As China's national sport, table tennis was often used to build political relations with the principle "Friendship First." Table tennis became an Olympic sport in 1988 and went through a number of rule changes, although China still maintained its dominance across men's and women's events. Thus far, only one non-Chinese – the Swedish Jan-Ove Waldner – has won a grand slam title. In terms of participation, table tennis has been a universal and inclusive sport across gender, countries, social classes, and ability levels due to the ITTF's efforts.

Keywords: table tennis | ping pong | Ping Pong Association | Table Tennis Association

Chapter:

The history of table tennis, also known as ping pong in some countries such as the United States (US), could be traced back to the 1890s. Despite some evidence that British were trying to create some kind of indoor tennis games, the origin of table tennis could not be identified accurately. After lawn tennis gained popularity during that time, people spontaneously created a table game of tennis for fun using cigar box lids as bats, corks as balls, and a row of books as the net. In 1884, a famous British sporting goods company F.H. Ayres produced a more structured game of "Miniature Indoor Lawn Tennis." Seven years later, this game advanced to a

more modern version when a British athlete carried some celluloid balls from the US in 1891. In this decade, a national craze for “ping pong” began, while bats with a hollow parchment or vellum face were used. Due to the increased popularity, the Ping Pong Association was formed and held a championship before Queen Victoria’s death. After the game was played for 18 years in England, it was introduced to Japan and Central Europe in 1902. A critical developmental period of table tennis happened after the First World War when the Ping Pong Association was replaced by the Table Tennis Association in 1922. Americans, Australians, French, Spaniards, and Swedish took this game to their country after visiting England and seeing table tennis. The game became more competitive after the equipment production and advertisement from major game companies such as Jaques & Son in England and Parker Brothers in the US. Soon after, the International Table Tennis Federation (ITTF) was formed in 1926 by Hon. Ivor Montagu (1904–1984), involving 29 countries in the organization and holding first World Championships in London.¹

Ivor Montagu is a name that everyone who enjoys table tennis nowadays should know. Montagu was a British-born Jew in an upper-class society, a leisure class that gained power largely from state service and land ownership. Whereas most of the upper classes enjoyed “elite” sports such as hunting and fishing exclusively, he was enthusiastic in soccer and table tennis instead. Indeed, he was different than his peers in many other aspects as well. For instance, he believed in left-wing politics and joined the British Socialist Party at the age of 15, which was atypical for the upper class and shocked his parents. Montagu was a brilliant student who mastered several languages, including German, French, Spanish, Italian and Russian, as well as some Chinese and Japanese. He was later admitted to Cambridge University and graduated from King’s College in zoology in 1924 at the age of 20. Furthermore, he was knowledgeable in technology and played a significant role as the director, writer, and producer in the film industry. Combining his interest in both film and sports, Montagu produced the movie *Table Tennis Today* in 1928.²

Montagu had been very actively involved in table tennis when he was in college. At the age of 19 and 22, respectively, he founded the English Table Tennis Association (ETTA) in 1923 and the ITTF in 1926. Additionally, Montagu set the record of holding a president position for any sport by being the ITTF President for 41 years. When table tennis was an upper-class parlor game, Montagu wrote the book *Table Tennis Today* in 1924 in order to set rules and promote table tennis as a competitive sport across social classes. Over the years as the ITTF president, he devoted himself to table tennis in ways that are consistent with his political views—creating opportunities for the middle and lower classes to experience the sport. Montagu wrote, “I saw table tennis a sport particularly suited to the lower paid, above all—since it was played indoors—in crowded towns. Its equipment was relatively cheap, it did not require extensive or expensive special premises.”³ There were followers who helped promote the sport across diverse ethnic groups in England, including Jews and Indians, so the popularity of table tennis continued to grow. The sport even broke through the political division between the socialist and the communist parties and was listed as one of the recreations by a socialist organization—the National Workers Sports Association.⁴ Beyond England, Montagu developed good connections with Hungarian players, especially since Jews were their prominent national champions during the 1920s.⁵ These early events demonstrated that table tennis is a sport not only for leisure and competition but also for political relations and diplomacy.

To further promote internationalization of table tennis, Montagu invited other countries to participate in the first World Championships in London after he established the ITTF in 1926. The World Championships was intended to be a European Championship in the first place, but was renamed due to the presence of Indian representatives who indeed lived in England. In the

tournament, four players formed a team to compete in men's singles, women's singles, men's doubles, and mixed doubles. Eventually, 50 men and 14 women from nine countries participated: Austria, Czechoslovakia, Denmark, England, Germany, Hungary, India, Sweden, and Wales. Hungary won the first team title and the following eight (except 1932 in which Czechoslovakia won) due to their male players' dominance. Separate team events by gender started in 1934. Through-out his presidency and championship organizations, Montagu imposed two principles that might be attributed to his amateur upbringing. First, the ITTF members were not defined as national representatives but table tennis entities or organizations. Second, national flags and anthems were discouraged outside the world championships, because he emphasized friendships between players as human beings instead of their nationalities. His viewpoints fostered a harmonious environment that not a single entity (e.g., Rhodesia, Taiwan) has been excluded from the World Championships. The following ITTF President Evans as well as table tennis historians claimed that table tennis became a universal sport because of Montagu. Perfect though as he may seem, Montagu was criticized by some for his sense of superiority and dictatorship. Even Montagu referred to himself as "a crotchety old cross-patch" and stated his reasons for a long presidency as political.⁶ Regardless, his commitment to both socialism and sports has greatly contributed to the East-West relations.

By now, you may have realized the terms of both "ping pong" and "table tennis" in this chapter. So, how should we call this game and/or sport? Well, both terms may work depending on the context. "Ping pong" was the most widely accepted name under the trademark of Jaques and Son and was later bought by Parker Brothers, which produced equipment for the game at that time. USATT historian Tim Boggan wrote:

think "Ping-Pong" and think what you might of yesteryear "family" entertainment— of bygone board games stretched over an all-purpose dining-room table ... Table Tennis, in having its own World Championships since 1926 and in participating in the Olympic Games since 1988, is undeniably, a sport.⁷

The division between ping pong and table tennis in the US occurred in 1930, when the American Ping Pong Association (APPA) spokesman Schaad attributed the origin of the game to Parker Brothers, which began to promote tournaments with a commercial mind such that every participant could only play with Parker Brothers' equipment.

Parker Brothers worked with the New York Metro Ping Pong Association (MPPA) to organize the first national tournament in 1929 in order to build up the sport with the first National Champion. The rules of the ping pong tournament are very similar to those of modern table tennis, except that players would have to use an underhand one-bounce "tennis serve" with the ball struck from anyplace up to the server's waistline. Four hundred participants entered the tournament, and Marcus (Mark) Schussheim won the first national title. Since then, Schussheim had won all important leagues and tournaments organized by Parker Brothers. After playing these tournaments, some table tennis players wanted to use other equipment that is superior to the one manufactured by Parker Brothers. At a meeting in New York City in 1931, therefore, the MPPA members voted to form another organization— the New York Table Tennis Association (NYTTA). To adapt to this change, the ITTF immediately transferred its allegiance to the NYTTA. At the same time, Schussheim went along with the NYTTA instead of the APPA, because he did not like the upper-class, black-tie image of Parker Brothers. The NYTTA then organized their first

National Championships in 1932, and Schussheim won the national title again. He also went on to play in the World Championships for the US team later.⁸

Table tennis is a relatively inclusive sport that has been played by diverse populations. The 1933 APPA National Championships was the first time that Black players entered a table tennis tournament in the US. In the same year, both APPA and the NYTTA organized the Women's National Championships and attracted 40 local Illinois players to participate. Whereas most men used a penhold grip to gain an advantage on the one-bounce serve, women began to switch to a shakehand grip that requires less strength for an average woman to handle.⁹ With a ball weighing less than three grams, table tennis is designed in a way that muscle mass does not play as much of a role, so men are not necessarily favored over women in the sport.¹⁰ There are three traditional competition formats divided by gender: men's and women's singles, doubles, and team events. In addition, there is mixed doubles, which will be held for the first time in the Olympics in Tokyo, Japan in 2020.¹¹

After the hard rubber paddles were invented in the 1930s, the sport totally changed to a different level in that players were able to put spin to the ball and use various strategies with spin. This change led to more league and club establishment in Europe and the US. The Communist Party in China also instilled a "passion for the English game of table tennis." More international events were held and more table tennis books were published compared to the previous decade.¹² The United States Table Tennis Association (USTTA; now USATT) was founded in 1933 and helped promote the sport in the country. About 1,500 players signed the Articles of Agreement to form this non-profit, non-commercial association dedicated to amateur play in a "sportsmanlike" manner. Soon after, the US national team won a few World Championships titles, including the US's only world men's team title in 1937 and only women's singles title earned by Ruth Arons in 1936.¹³

Despite the growth of table tennis participation in various countries, the development of the sport stopped and no World Championships were held between 1940 and 1946 due to the Second World War. In 1946, the ITTF was reactivated and held a conference meeting after the war to discuss a few important issues that pertain to harmony and fairness in table tennis participation. Some established rules included suspending ITTF membership of the associations that were opposed to the Allies during the war, restricting of World Championships participation to only ITTF members, and forbidding ITTF affiliates to discriminate against race, skin color, or religion. In the same meeting, the issue whether table tennis should be added to Olympics was raised and discussed. Alongside President Montagu, the majority of the ITTF committee members were against the idea due to a potential overlap between the Olympics and the already established World Championships.¹⁴

For people who play or watch table tennis, it seems clear that table tennis is an "Asian sport." Thus, many may be surprised to know that Asian countries started competing in the sport and experiencing successes later than Western countries. In the 1950s, the modern game of table tennis finally began after the invention of sponge or sandwich rubber, so an offensive style of play was made possible. With a thin covering of pimples rubber, Japan was the first country that was able to dominate the sport with great speed and spin for a decade in the 1950s by training players with powerful strokes. In 1951—two years after the People's Republic of China (PRC) was established—the ITTF recognized the Communist Chinese government and invited the country to enter the World Championships. This recognition led Mao Zedong, the Chairman of the PRC, to promote table tennis as the national sport. China then became a member of the ITTF in 1953. Because of this move, China was able to catch up in the international arena and defeated Japan to

win their first World Champion title in table tennis and any sport, led by Rong Guotuan (1937–1968) who won the men’s singles in 1959. In fact, Rong was born in Hong Kong and represented its team as a junior player. He only moved to China two years before he won the World Championships. This triumph resulted in the brand name of the famous table tennis manufacture today– Double Happiness– first happiness representing the first World Champion in China and the second happiness indicating the 10th anniversary of the PRC. Under the order of Zhou Enlai, the first premier of the PRC, Double Happiness started making equipment the next year that popularized table tennis across different social classes due to the low equipment cost. After winning the world singles title, Rong further helped the Chinese men’s team win the first team title by defeating Japan and Hungary in 1961. Afterwards, he coached the women’s team who won the first team title at the 1965 World Championships.¹⁵

The defeat of China over Japan in the 1961 World Championships team finals meant more than just a world team title, but a symbolic revenge of Imperial Japan’s invasion of China in 1930. Once again, it showed that achievements in sports did not only represent athletic strength but also political power and relationships among different countries. Chairman Mao even claimed victories in table tennis as China’s “spiritual nuclear weapon.” Since then, table tennis tables could be found everywhere in China, such as in train stations, schools, parks, for the general public to hit a few balls when they need to take a break or kill some time. Even Mao Zedong and Zhou Enlai would play table tennis for fun. China took a dominating role in international competitions in the 1960s with its players’ fast, offensive style. Zhuang Zedong (1940–2013) was one of the best table tennis player in the history who won three world singles titles (1961, 1963, and 1965). Chairman Mao also congratulated Zhuang and praised him for playing in a Chinese way– the penhold grip with a dual-sided style that emphasizes offensive backhand drives.¹⁶ In 1966, the Cultural Revolution began such that China had to stop all professional sport competitions, including the 1967 World Championships. Rong Guotuan, along with two other national team players, Fu Qifang and Jiang Yongning, were arrested by the Red Guards as spy suspects. Sadly, these three players committed suicide soon after they were humiliated and jailed in 1968.¹⁷

On the other hand, Zhuang Zedong was not only famous for his three-time world singles title but also for his important role in ping-pong diplomacy. In the 1971 World Champions held in Japan, the US and Chinese teams met each other during a tour on April 2. Although a US player jokingly asked whether they could visit China for table tennis, the Foreign Affairs Ministry and the National Committee on Physical Education replied with a negative response. On April 4, a US player, Genn Cowan, missed the team bus to his hotel and got on the bus that carried Chinese players instead. Because of the conflicts in the Cold War, Chinese athletes were discouraged from interacting with American athletes during that period. Despite the regulation, Zhuang handed Cowan a silk portrait of Huangshan (“yellow mountain”) as a gift. This act was noticed by the journalists who took a picture of the two players with the banner. Cowan returned the favor the next day by giving Zhuang a T-shirt with the image of a red, white, and blue flag and the words “Let It Be” as a gift, which attracted interviews from journalists. These brief contacts turned out to be historical breakthroughs when Zhou Enlai submitted the request of ping-pong diplomacy to Mao for approval.¹⁸

In the night of April 6, Mao changed his mind from denial to approval when he saw the news about Zhuang and Cowan in a government official newspaper and said, “This Zhuang Zedong not only plays table tennis well, but is good at foreign affairs.” In the morning of April 7, the last day of the World Championships, the Chinese table tennis delegation received the message

of approval and invited the US team. The US President Richard Nixon then received a telegraph about the invitation and immediately accepted it in that afternoon. This series of prompt actions led to one of the biggest events in the history of foreign affairs— ping-pong diplomacy. Finally, on April 10, the US table tennis delegation started a seven-day trip with table tennis plays in China. Under the principle of “Friendship First, Competition Second,” instead of the likely straight-match wins, the Chinese men’s and women’s teams won 5–3 and 5–4, respectively, over the US teams. During the trip, Zhuang toured the US delegation to famous tourist spots such as the Great Wall and the Summer Palace while he was appointed the Minister of Physical Culture and Sports. Despite his contribution, Zhuang was investigated and sentenced to prison for four years from 1976 to 1980 after Mao’s death and the arrest of related political affiliates. After he was released from the prison, Zhuang worked as a coach returned to Beijing. In 2013, Zhuang died at the age of 72 due to cancer.¹⁹

As most of us know, the ping-pong diplomacy long-lasting “butterfly effect” on the US–China relations after the visit. The 15 US table tennis delegation members, including the only African American player George Braithwaite, offered overwhelmingly positive feedback about the trip to the US media. The US government invited the Chinese table tennis team to visit the US, and President Nixon indicated his plan for visiting China the next year (1972). One year after the ping-pong diplomacy held in China, Chinese table tennis delegation had an 18-day trip visiting the US, Canada, Mexico, and Peru on April 12–30, 1972. In 2011, the White House in the US hosted a rematch of ping-pong diplomacy with participation of both current national players and the original 1971 and 1972 players to celebrate its 40th anniversary.²⁰

Ping-pong diplomacy, in fact, was one of the several events that showed table tennis and politics were inseparable for China based on the principle of “Friendship First, Competition Second” from the 1950s to the 1980s. For instance, China paid for the expenses for players from more than 50 countries to participate in the Asian–African Table Tennis Friendship Invitational Tournament in Beijing in October 1971. During the tournament, the United Nations accepted China as a member in place of Taiwan. Afterwards, China further utilized table tennis as a means to develop relations with other countries, such as inviting Thailand, Malaysia, and the Philippines teams for visits in 1972 and hosting the Asia–Africa–Latin America Table Tennis Friendship Tournament in 1973. To further demonstrate the concept of “Friendship First” in sport, in the 1975 World Championship, China dominated all of the events but let North Korea win the women’s singles. Therefore, ping-pong diplomacy should not be viewed as a way to develop relations only with the US but around the world. China also used other sports in addition to table tennis as means to build friendships with 79 countries in 1972 alone. In the 1980s, however, the sport ideals of “Friendship First” stemmed from the Cold War was transformed to “patriotism first” by winning gold medals and showing national pride. In addition to the World Championships and Olympic Games, the World Cup is the most important competition in table tennis held annually since 1980. China continued to dominate in table tennis in the 1970s and 1980s, especially for the women’s team who won 20 World Championships titles and only lost two from 1975 to 2016.²¹

Table tennis became an Olympic sport in 1988 in Seoul, Korea. Initially, there were singles and doubles events for both men and women; doubles events were replaced by team events since 2008. Becoming an Olympic sport, table tennis gained attention and financial investment from various countries, which led to more advanced equipment with continual improvement in technology.²² During this time, the Chinese men’s team experienced challenges when Sweden won three consecutive world team champion titles in 1989, 1991, and 1993. The Swedish team was led

by table tennis legend Jan-Ove Waldner. Waldner has the nickname “Evergreen Tree” due to his extraordinary longevity and competitiveness in table tennis— playing international-level table tennis for 30 years since he was 16, including five Olympic Games. Moreover, he is first male player (1992) and the only non-Chinese who accomplishes a table tennis grand slam— World Champion, World Cup Winner, and Olympic Gold Medal— in the history. There are only four other male players who reach this pinnacle as of 2017: Liu Guoliang (1999), Kong Linghui (2000), Zhang Jike (2012), and Ma Long (2016).²³

In addition to being the second male player who achieved a grand slam, Liu Guoliang is considered one of the greatest coaches. He was appointed as the Chinese Men’s National Team Head Coach when he retired at the age of 27 in 2001. Liu is particularly famous for using tactical and mental strategies in and outside of the sport. For instance, he built a communication system with his players by clapping hands and shouting specific cues when actual coaching was not allowed during the game. Moreover, Liu taught his players the degree of aggressiveness they should play and when to take risks in competitions based on the game scores. Outside of the sport, he understands his players very well and uses effective strategies to motivate individual players by considering their personality. For example, Liu helped World Champions Ma Lin and Wang Hao gain motivation and confidence through goal setting and external motivators.²⁴

Liu Guoliang’s advanced tactical and psychological strategies, however, could seem unfair to his players. At the 2012 London Olympics, Wang Hao and Zhang Jike competed for the men’s singles gold medal. Both players had relatively equal chance to win a gold medal and also earn a career grand slam as both of them had already won the World Championships and the World Cup. The night before the match, surprisingly, Liu privately told Wang to lose the finals match to Zhang. The reason was that the Chinese team had to play against South Korea the next day for the team’s finals; Liu thought that Wang was more mature and would recover psychologically after a loss much better than Zhang in order to win the team match the next day. Wang proudly told Telegraph before the finals match, “I don’t feel any pressure now because we are both playing for China.” Liu’s strategy was successful, because Zhang won his singles match and Zhang and Wang won their doubles match the team match against South Korea, winning another gold medal for China. Nevertheless, the strategy could seem a disservice to Wang, especially since he received his third silver medal in singles instead of a gold, and he could never achieve a career grand slam as a result.²⁵ Regardless, Wang was a player who made a big impact in the world of table tennis due to his unique playing style. He was the first penhold player who brought to the world unprecedented offensive penhold backhand using the reverse penhold backhand (RPB) technique rather than the traditional defensive backhand technique. Since then, the majority of the Penhold player adopt his dual-sided offensive style using RPB. Another “first” about Wang was related to his personal life, in which he was the first Chinese table tennis player who was ever allowed to date a fellow player.²⁶

As previously mentioned, Chinese female players have dominated the table tennis world to an even greater extent than the male players. While Yao Ming may be the tallest (2.26m), famous male basketball player from China, Deng Yaping may be the shortest (1.50m), famous female table tennis player from China. Deng was indeed rejected by the national team at a young age due to her height. After Deng managed to be selected to the team at the age of 15, she set several records in women’s table tennis, such as winning 18 World Championship and World Cup titles and four Olympic gold medals including singles, doubles, and team events. Moreover, Deng maintained the number one ranking for eight years and was voted Chinese female athlete of the century. Deng is as successful off the table as she is on the table. After she retired at a relatively young age of 24, Deng went back to school and eventually earned her doctorate at Cambridge

University with her thesis titled “The impact of the Olympic Games on Chinese development: A multi-disciplinary analysis.” Deng also received a seat at the People’s Political Consultative Conference of the Chinese Communist Party. Beyond Deng, Wang Nan and Zhang Yining are the other two female table tennis legends who won four Olympic gold medals.²⁷

With such a great pool of table tennis players in China during the past two decades, making the Chinese team is often harder than defeating the top players from any other countries. Many of the second-tier players who are not selected represent China in big competitions, therefore, emigrate to other countries in order to reach their dream of competing at the World Championships and the Olympic Games. At the 2016 Rio Olympics, 44 table tennis players were Chinese-born but only six of them actually represented China; others represented countries such as the Singapore, Germany, Spain, Brazil, and so on. The six players representing China still dominated and won all four events, which extended the number of table tennis gold medals to 28 out of the 32 possible total.²⁸

Because of China’s dominance in table tennis, the ITTF has changed the rules multiple times in the past two decades in an effort to enhance the chance of other countries winning in competitions. In 2001, the ITTF increased the size of the ball from 38mm to 40mm diameter so as to reduce the speed and spin of the shots, changed the game from 21 to 11 points which increased the chance for an upset, and set a service rule that players cannot hide their serve. Since Chinese table tennis players are famous for their serve and spin, these changes might attenuate their strengths. These changes seemingly did not stop China from winning more titles. We used to see three Chinese table tennis players on the Olympic podium for the singles events, but it would have been impossible since the 2012 London Olympics. The rule change was that a maximum of only two players can represent one country to play a singles event, and only three players can play a team event in the Olympics. The ITTF President at that time, Adham Sharara, admitted the change was targeting China’s dominance, “The [Olympic] tournament cannot be dominated as before by the Chinese.”²⁹ Once again, the rule change did not stop Chinese players from winning gold medals in men’s and women’s team events and both gold and silver medals for men’s and women’s singles in 2012 and 2016 Olympics. In 2014, the table tennis ball material was changed from celluloid to non-celluloid (as called plastic or poly balls), and the size of the ball was enlarged to 40+ mm diameter. The rationale behind this change was to lower the cost and reduce the risks of fire hazard. More recent change was the implementation of a new World Ranking system in 2018. The aim of creating this ranking system was to “count on a larger variety of nationalities and higher presence of players proceeding from all continents”; therefore, some top-ranked Chinese players who do not participate in many tournaments would be affected. The accuracy and effectiveness of this system would debut soon around the time of this book publication.³⁰

Today, table tennis is one of the largest sports in the world based on participation. The ITTF consists of 226 member associations, which include 58 in Europe, 51 in Africa, 45 in Asia, 40 in Latin America, 24 in Oceania, and four in Northern America. Table tennis an inclusive sport not only across gender and countries but also across social classes and levels of physical and mental ability. The ITTF has been developing a “Table Tennis for ALL” program to promote universality and inclusiveness of the sport. For instance, an annual World Table Tennis Day is held on April 6 to celebrate the universality of table tennis, with 453 events in 93 countries in 2017.³¹ Table tennis was included as a para sport early in the first Paralympic Games in 1960. Currently, para table tennis participation is estimated to be over 40 million competitive players in more than 100 countries. Players are classified into one of the 11 categories based on physical disability rang-

ing from sitting in a wheelchair (Class 1–5) to standing (Class 6–10) or intellectual impairment (Class 11). These events are more balanced in terms of competitiveness across different countries, because they are not dominated by Chinese players. Ibrahim Hamato, an armless Class 6 Champion from Egypt, is arguably the most famous Para table tennis players due to his unique play-ing style—holding the racket with his month and tossing the ball with his foot when serving. AYouTube video Nothing is Impossible of his plays with other world-class players such as Wang Hao and Ma Long has accumulated more than 3million views as of 2017.³²

You may now know much more about table tennis. But does ping pong still exist? Ping pong tournaments might have been long forgotten since ping pong has been perceived as a basement game instead of a real sport. Yet, ping pong tournaments were brought back to the world when the chairman of a British promotion company Matchroom Sport, Barry Hearn, started organiz-ing the World Championships of Ping Pong in 2011. Tournament participants have to play with a sandpaper wood instead of sponged rubbers as a rule of ping pong. In 2013, the championships became an annual event held at the Alexandra Palace in London and attracted more than 8,000 spectators every year. The attraction might have come from a more balanced competition not dominated by China, since only one Chinese player had won the title (2017).³³

Although the sport of table tennis, or ping pong if you prefer, has largely given way to competitiveness mostly in Asia and Europe, it still entertains many other regions of the world. Easy access to tables, cheap equipment, and inclusive atmosphere of the sport have reached a diverse group of players across the world— playing at a gym, a park, school, home, a bar, or anywhere you can imagine. It may be shocking to some that table tennis was once a black-tie sport, played only among the Victorians who had high social status in England. To end this chapter, let’s appreciate what Ivor Montagu and the ITTF, as well as all table tennis enthusiasts, have done in the past century to popularize this sport for its global reach and inclusiveness.

Notes

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