

Columbia Table Tennis Team Wins 2005 NYC Division Team Championship

On Sunday, February 27, 2005, the Columbia University table tennis team played in the second of two qualifying tournaments to win the prestigious New York City Division Tournament of the National Collegiate Table Tennis Association (NCTTA) at the Fashion Institute of Technology (FIT) in New York. NCTTA is a U.S. incorporated 501(c)3 not-for-profit sports organization that is the national organizer for intercollegiate table tennis tournaments held annually in North America.

Although Columbia had won the much coveted division trophy for the last three years in a row, the outcome for 2005 was in doubt because of the especially difficult win at the first qualifying tournament held at FIT on November 21, 2004. Overall, the NCTTA division that we played in was definitely more competitive than the divisions we played in for the 2002, 2003, and 2004 qualifying tournaments. The first November tournament was practically a repeat of last season's thrilling win over Brooklyn Polytechnic in which the Columbia doubles champions of Man Yiu and Li-Fu Huang squeaked through with a 3-2 win to decide the match against Brooklyn Polytechnic. Again, in November 2004, Columbia narrowly won the doubles at 3-2 with the able assistance of doubles champions William Liu and Li-Fu Huang. In addition to Brooklyn Polytechnic, a former formidable foe from the 1980s (when the championships were regional instead of national), Rutgers University, beat Columbia 3-2, thereby posing a threat to our plans to capture a fourth division title.

In sum, we almost lost the first qualifying tournament of the 2005 season to Rutgers and Brooklyn Polytechnic last November 21, 2004. Columbia, Rutgers, and Brooklyn Polytechnic each had won 6 matches and lost 1 match. Fortunately, however, Lady Luck was on our side, and we succeeded in winning that tournament based on the number of individual games won. Columbia was the winner with a win-loss record of 21-19 games; the other two teams each had a win-loss record of 19-21 games. As our victory was so close and nerve-wracking, we changed our strategy for the second qualifying tournament in February 2005 at FIT. Due to our change in strategic decision making, we easily won this tournament with an outright win-loss record of 8-0 in matches against the other teams. Thus, after winning the second qualifying tournament of the 2005 season, to paraphrase Britney Spears, we were able to sing, "Oops, we did it again!"

The total A team win-loss records for both qualifying tournaments of the 2005 season were as follows:

Columbia 15-1
Rutgers 14-2
Brooklyn Polytechnic 13-3
FIT 8-8
Cooper 8-8
Stevens 8-8

Purchase 3-12
Yeshiva 2-14
Yale 1-15

To better understand these results, some additional data are offered by way of explanation. Although both A and B team matches were played, only A team scores are used for determining team eligibility for playing in the nationals. Overall, Columbia was the winner and Rutgers was the runner-up, so they will both attend the National Collegiate Championships organized by NCTTA from April 1-3, 2005 at Texas Wesleyan University. Brooklyn Polytechnic was a rival that came a close third. The Yale University record appears unusually low compared to its November 2004 results. This is because Yale had to cancel its participation at the last minute due to unforeseen circumstances and thus lost all of its February matches by default. And among the three teams that tied with 8-8 win-loss records, the host FIT team beat Stevens and Cooper Union.

Special thanks go to Wayne Chin, director of the 2005 NYC Division Tournament at FIT. Wayne and his club members did a wonderful job of organizing the matches and making sure that all of the teams were well-treated. Gratitude is expressed to Lily Yip for providing the Double Fish tables and to Stiga for the Optimum balls. We would also like to thank our Club Sports Director, William Ebner, for supporting our participation at the regional level and for funding our participation at the nationals again. The biggest round of applause is reserved for the Columbia University Table Tennis Club's president, Zhiyong Zhou, for motivating our team to play its best and for doing all of the behind-the-scenes running around that paved our way to winning the regional championship yet again. Way to go, Dr. Z!

The Columbia team was especially proud of winning the New York City Division Team Championship for the *fourth* year in a row. Team members who have been selected to participate at the nationals in Texas include Li-Fu Huang, East Asian Regional Studies; Charles Liu, Biochemistry, William Liu, Education; Karun Singh, Social Work; Leslie Tam, Mathematics and Finance; and Man Yiu, Statistics. We're all extremely psyched up to play our best and intend to achieve our goal of being among the top three winners! We understand that there are some very strong new teams with individual players rated much higher than our best players. Nevertheless, as a whole, we have our strongest team ever. Our strategy is sound, and it will be executed at the nationals in real time and at a very deep level. We will stay physically and mentally fit by eating properly and engaging in regular exercise and practice. Like a blushing bride before her wedding, we will all lose weight and become even more fit as the big event approaches.

In closing, the Columbia team hopes by its performance at the 2005 NCTTA Championships that it will inspire Columbia and other universities to take up the cause of the table tennis movement and integrate it within dormitories as well as in public places throughout the campus. We attach a copy of an opinion article sent to the Columbia Spectator in December 2004 to show how dear this issue is to our hearts. Included at the

end of the article is a list, by no means exhaustive, of why we think table tennis is so cool:

Ping-Pong, Plato, and Passion: What's the Buzz?

On December 1st, after dropping off my daughters at the new Columbia School at 110th and Broadway, I casually picked up my copy of the *Spec* that's left inside the entrance, and began to read it while crossing the street to catch a bus to Butler Library. I quickly perused the cover page that covered several interesting topics such as Google thesis searches, civil liberties, and an AIDS photo exhibit at the School of Social Work. However, what really caught my attention and caused me to nearly hit an unmovable lamppost, several harried pedestrians, and a moving M60 bus was the staff editorial titled *We Want Ping-Pong*.

After over a decade of literally hounding *Spec* sports editors to write about ping-pong in a favorable light, here, right before my very eyes was an editorial extolling some of the virtues of my sport of passion, known to serious players by its other name, table-tennis. I couldn't believe it! I knew that despite our best attempts, no one from Columbia's ping-pong club had managed to successfully infiltrate the *Spec*'s editorial staff to persuade it to change its stance. So why were they discussing ping-pong now? I felt compelled to read on, muttering to myself some lines from Cowper, "God works in mysterious ways/His wonders to perform."

The main thrust of the editorial was that ping-pong is needed to foster a spirit of camaraderie and thereby promote a feeling of community among Columbia students. Although the student council has taken up the matter of making ping-pong available in dorms and other campus spaces like the Wien food court, ping-pong has not yet made its debut as disagreement continues to exist regarding how to maintain an ongoing supply of paddles and balls. Quite frankly, it's a wonder that this appears to be the obstacle that is standing in the way of a progressive vision of having ping-pong available to every student in all of Columbia's dorms. 144 high quality balls can be purchased for as little as \$40 and sturdy paddles cost as little as \$15 when purchased in bulk. Such costs are easily within an individual dorm's budget. The Columbia University Table Tennis Club knows of several reputable suppliers who would be willing to offer good discounts on tables and related equipment. Also, having won the NYC Division of the NCTTA Championships the last three years in a row, our team members are well-qualified to provide some initial volunteer instruction in the dorms to get the ball rolling on the implementation of this issue.

Recall Plato's famous *Cave Allegory* in which the prisoners strove to discard their chains of ignorance by gaining knowledge leading to enlightenment and freedom? Well, in my opinion and that of many others, table tennis should become the sport of choice in every Columbia dorm. In closing, to inform and educate those who are oblivious to the sport's strengths, here are the top ten major reasons why ping-pong must prevail: 1. It's one of the most popular indoor sports in America, 2. It's inexpensive, 3. It's easy to learn, 4. It's

extremely aerobic, 5. It's an Olympic sport, 6. It's usually played by smart and friendly people, 7. Modern paddle technology and systematic coaching help to neutralize the gender advantage typically found in most other sports, 8. It helps one to concentrate on their studies and work, 9. The risk of injury is very limited, and 10. It has a high success rate of bringing players together romantically because of the emphasis on good strokes and sensitive touch.

Respectfully submitted,

Karun K. Singh
PhD Candidate, School of Social Work
Vice-President, Columbia University Table Tennis Club