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Rivalries Add Spice to TMS College Table Tennis Championships

Rivalries like Michigan-Ohio State add drama to the 2014 TMS College Table Tennis Championships.

The Michigan Wolverines open the 2014-15 season with a friendly tournament against Ohio State for the third time next fall. But it got pretty serious once the two teams arrived at the national tourney in Monroeville, Pennsylvania.

No matter where they finish at the April 4-6 NCTTA games, the Michigan team has come far.

"Four to five years ago, the Michigan club was in debt, and the university cancelled it," said senior Boxin Zhou, 21. But strong support from a Michigan alum and key sponsors revived the Wolverines. This year's squad from Ann Arbor advanced to Monroeville by edging Ohio State in the regionals.

After being away two years, it's nice for Michigan to return to the championships with so many standouts from schools across the USA and Canada, said Zhou, the club vice president .

Matches between the two Midwestern schools add spice to the rivalry in football, basketball and baseball in the Big Ten. Millions of fans watch Ohio State's football team fight it out with Michigan on national TV every fall.

Michigan men making the trip to the Keystone State include Brian Tsang, Bo Bi, and Sam Lu from China, plus Thomas Fuentes-Afflick of San Francisco and Lester Lee of Vancouver, Canada. On the UM women's team: Yayun Gao and Liren Guo, both of China, and Angel Chen and Sherry Chu, graduate students from Taiwan.

Ohio State punched its ticket to Pennsylvania with a wild card invite. Like Michigan, the Buckeyes team is diverse. Ohio State players include graduate students Raymond Johnston of Brunswick Ohio, Po-Hsu Chen of Taiwan, Orlando McEwan of Guyana, Bobo Shi of China, Paul Park of Orange, California and Karen Pon of Australia. An accounting major, Raymond is their youngest player at age 22. Karen, an atmospheric sciences major, is their oldest at 36.

Grabbing lunch with the team Saturday, Michigan doctoral student Duc Le of Hanoi, Vietnam will be part of the Wolverines squad next fall. This weekend, he's part of Michigan's cheering section. Other Big Ten

schools competing at the tournament included Penn State and Minnesota.

Michigan players say they're pleased with the venue, the Club Sport and Health, that's normally home to seven indoor tennis courts. "We were pleasantly surprised – the lighting was good," said Boxin Zhou.

Other college rivals brought their paddles, tricky spins and energy to the tourney. The list includes Ivy League schools like Harvard, Princeton, Cornell and Columbia, West Coast schools California, Southern California and in-state rivals Duke and North Carolina State. NC State-Duke games typically go down to the wire. That's also the case when perennial champ Texas Wesleyan faces No. 2-ranked Mississippi College. Cheng Li, the ace for the MC Choctaws, battled TWU Rams standout Yahao Zhang in the singles championship semi-finals Saturday afternoon.

The California Bears were just thinking about playing their best game in Monroeville, and not letting rivalry talk get in the way.

"We are all very close and have a good time with each other," said Ellen Hwang, a member of the Cal-Berkeley women's team. The 19-year-old freshman from Thousand Oaks, California is a business administration major. Like the 250 college players at the tourney in Pennsylvania, Ellen is all business when it comes to table tennis.

The California women's team is solid and earned a second place in women's doubles on Friday. The talented Toronto duo of Vivien Zhou and Xixi Guo, both seniors from China, won the title.

The 2014 TMS College Table Tennis Championships is hosted by the [National Collegiate Table Tennis Association](#) and the Visit Monroeville and is one of the most competitive table tennis tournaments in North America featuring 6 events: Men's and Women's Singles and Doubles, and Men's/Coed Teams, Women's Teams. The event is sponsored by TMS International, Newgy Industries, Butterfly.

Players and spectators alike will enjoy a jam-packed weekend of table tennis at the [2014 College Table Tennis Championships](#). The event starts Friday April 4th and continues to Sunday April 6th at the Club Sport and Health in Monroeville, Pennsylvania.

About NCTTA

The National Collegiate Table Tennis Association (NCTTA) is a non-profit organization established exclusively for promoting the sport of table tennis at the college level. As the national governing body for college table tennis in the United States and Canada, NCTTA organizes intercollegiate competition throughout North America. www.nctta.org

About USA Table Tennis

Headquartered in Colorado Springs, USATT is the national organizing body for table tennis in the United States, serving 9,000+ members and nearly 300 clubs. USATT sanctions 200+ events a year including the US Open and US Nationals. USATT is affiliated with the International Table Tennis Federation (ITTF), as well as the United States Olympic Committee (USOC). www.usatt.org & tabletennis.teamusa.org

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