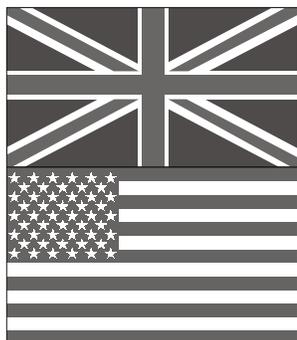


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## Manchester Hosts International Hardbat Tournament. England Defeats U.S.A.

by Scott Gordon

**H**ardbat made its first big international splash in Manchester, England, this past May in what may be the largest hardbat event held to date. The two-day affair began with a Swaythling Cup style team match between England and the U.S., and ended with an open O-40 hardbat event which drew some 70 players, mostly from around the greater Manchester area.

Organizer Tony Meredith of the Manchester Millenium Games decided to attempt the first-of-it's-kind event, after having witnessed a dramatic hardbat match played between Marty Reisman and Henry Buist at the World Veteran's Championship in Manchester two years ago. Working in cooperation with table tennis development officer Stuart Wallis and former England #2 player Jeff Ingbar, Tony persuaded a wide range of players, organizers, and media to heavily promote the event. The result was without question the best run and most widely viewed hardbat event yet.

### England vs. U.S.A.

Meredith started by inviting Marty Reisman to form a 3-person team to face the English contingent. The only stipulation was that the players be over the age of 40. Reisman decided to additionally restrict the U.S. team to players that play exclusively hardbat. He decided to ask John Tannehill and Steve Berger, both of whom accepted. Several Americans decided to join as spectators, including Berndt Mann, John

Grinnell, Marty's wife Yoshiko, and myself. Plane tickets were purchased, and the English organizers made arrangements for local transportation and lodging.

The England team was to consist of Dennis Neale, former European champion and still a ferocious attacker, Buist, and Ingbar. Of the three, Neale and Buist were still active and in good form (Buist having defeated Marty in the aforementioned encounter), while Ingbar was a somewhat unknown quantity as he was supposedly a bit out of practice. Buist and Ingbar are both fulltime hardbat players. Two matches contained considerable anticipation: the Reisman-Buist rematch, and Neale-Tannehill which likewise represented a rematch from when they had last played some 20 years earlier.

Two days before the event, the U.S. team learned that Tannehill's passport had not arrived. It wasn't until the other travelers arrived in England that they learned that Tannehill's passport situation had not adequately been repaired, and that he would not be able to attend. This left the crippled American team with only two players present. A hasty decision was made to substitute myself as the third player, being the highest rated among the American spectators, weakening the team considerably, but allowing the match to proceed according to the agreed-upon format.

*continued on page 2*

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Words cannot adequately describe our disappointment with the loss of Tannehill on the team. Clearly our chances for victory had become remote, but mostly we were sorry for the loss of an opportunity to showcase the hardbat game at its highest level. Neale was personally disappointed, as he was especially looking forward to facing John.

Still, media hype for the event was unfazed, and began almost the moment we arrived. Radio BBC broadcast an interview with the organizers and with Marty Reisman. BBC Television did an even more extensive spot the next day on Reisman, intrigued by his return to England 50 years after having won their British Open championship. He was an instant star and delighted the film crew with his behind-the-back (and other) trick shots, and most notably his famous cigarette trick which he nailed 2-for-2 (they wanted to film it from two angles, so asked him to repeat the trick!).

The match couldn't have started more dramatically. To a grandstands full of polite but partisan fans, Berger faced Buist in a classic hitter/chopper struggle. Buist is a powerful yet steady attacker who would likely sport a 2200 rating if he were in the U.S. He is obviously a favorite and popular player of whom Manchester is rightly proud. Their match went to deuce in the third to long rallies and loud cheers, and Steve's win was a surprise to the confident locals.

The second match was also a bit of a surprise. In a mismatch of classic proportions, it was me against Neale. Feeling fed to the lions, I managed to lash out a nothing-to-lose attack that caught Neale by surprise. Leading 14-7, then 19-16 in the first, Neale fought back hard and indeed finally took game one. In game two he was a bit more steady, beating me at 14. Still, he looked beatable to my teammates.

In the third, we retained our lead with Marty's win over Ingbar. However, Ingbar looked much stronger than we expected (the scores were 19 and deuce). His all-around game, lovely strokes, and athletic style was a joy to watch. Despite our 2-1 lead, our confidence was dropping. And, in fact, it was to be team U.S.A.'s last win.

Amidst the growing cheers of a crowd which clearly appreciated the long, varied rallies of the classic style, England won the next three in ever more dominant form. Buist led by defeating Reisman in a very close 3-game match featuring both players fighting to keep the offense. It was in this match that we learned that Buist also had a virtually ironclad defense. Ingbar's steady game and experience

led him to a relatively easy 2-game win over me. Neale then beat both Marty and Steve in succession, with Marty giving him the closest fight (deuce in the first).

## **International Veteran's Hardbat Event**

Still smarting from our disappointing loss (oh, how we missed Tannehill!), the entire U.S. squad (Reisman, Berger, myself, Mann, and Grinnell) joined the more than 60 Mancunians (that's what they call themselves in Manchester) for a whole day of hardbat competition. While it's not clear to us how they manage seedings without a rating system, their seedings could not have been more accurate. Further, to maximize the chance for a U.S.-England final, they placed all of us on the same half of the draw.

The tournament started with round robin play, and all of us but Grinnell survived the groups. Buist and Ingbar also advanced. Reisman defeated me, and then again defeated Ingbar in an attractive and close match. Berger beat Mann. In the semi's, Reisman defeated

“  
*BBC Television did an even more extensive spot the next day on Reisman, intrigued by his return to England 50 years after having won their British Open Championship.*  
”

*continued on page 3*

Berger in a heartbreaking (to Steve) match after being down 10-1 in the third! Buist survived in the other half of the draw to reach the final.

Thus commenced yet a third Reisman-Buist match, this one for the finals of the first International Hardbat tournament. Again, it was a Buist victory, again in three games, and again the rallies were outstanding and the outcome ever in doubt. With most of the attendees staying to watch the final, the publicity for hardbat couldn't have been better.

Afterwards, we were treated to a lovely awards ceremony and banquet, at which time I was able to sit and chat with the winner, Henry Buist. He showed me his paddle, which was a very old Rowe Twins model, which had been restored at least once to reattach its handle. Buist claimed that it played better after the repair! We were all impressed by the gracious and polite nature of all of the players, and Mr. Buist was no exception.

Throughout our stay, the Manchester hosts treated us like royalty. We were greeted at the airport and accompanied everywhere we wanted to go. Mr. Ingbar drove us to Leyland for a visit to the Leyland rubber factory (a story for a future article!), and took us all to a wonderful Indian dinner. Mr. Wallis ensured that we always had first class practice facilities, and hosted a meal at his house. We were escorted around town by Vicki (a local table tennis coach), and when we wanted to do anything in particular, such as the time we wanted to chase down a particular book at a local bookstore, she made sure it happened. I could boringly go on and on regarding how well we were treated, at every minute of the day.

Will hardbat continue to grow in Europe? Manchester is ready to make this an annual event. And already there is talk of another veteran's challenge: U.S. plus England, versus the rest of Europe. Time will tell, but the future just got a whole lot brighter. ●

“  
And already  
there is talk  
of another  
veteran's challenge:  
U.S. plus England,  
versus  
the rest of Europe.  
”

## Recent Results

August 2000

### San Francisco Summer Open

1<sup>st</sup>: James Therriault, 2<sup>nd</sup>: Scott Gordon

July 2000

### Daly City Mayoral Cup (CA)

1<sup>st</sup>: Scott Gordon, 2<sup>nd</sup>: Bruce Liu

July 2000

### Bobby Gusikoff Benefit (Ft.Lauderdale,FL)

1<sup>st</sup>: Lim Ming Chui, 2<sup>nd</sup>: Wally Green

June 2000

### Meiklejohn National Seniors (CA)

1<sup>st</sup>: Xin Peng, 2<sup>nd</sup>: Larry Hodges

June 2000

### Golden Gate Open (San Francisco, CA)

1<sup>st</sup>: Philip Lim, 2<sup>nd</sup>: Avishy Schmidt

June 2000

### New Jersey State Championship

1<sup>st</sup>: Boris Rabinovich, 2<sup>nd</sup>: Ashu Jain

June 2000

### St. Joseph Valley Open

1<sup>st</sup>: Don Brazzell, 2<sup>nd</sup>: Larry Hodges

May 2000

### Eastern Open

1<sup>st</sup>: James McQueen, 2<sup>nd</sup>: Tim Boggan

Apr 2000

### Ohio Closed

1<sup>st</sup>: John Tannehill, 2<sup>nd</sup>: Roy Schlabach Jr.

Apr 2000

### Butterfly Open (Raleigh, NC)

1<sup>st</sup>: Todd Sweeris 2<sup>nd</sup>: Larry Hodges

July 2000

### U.S. Open (Ft. L., FL)

#### Open Final:

Ty Hoff def. Lily Yip  
(18,20,9)

#### Semi Finals:

Ty Hoff def. Alexis Perez  
(-15,17,24,10,20)

Yip def. Brian Masters  
(-11,20,21,7-3,ret)

#### Quarter Finals:

Hoff def. Hodges,  
Perez def. Jain,  
Masters def. Berger,  
Yip def. Mintsiveris

#### Doubles:

Hodges/Hoff def. Jain/  
Jarema (18,13)

#### U2000:

Wally Green def. Scott  
Gordon (13,19)

Read the article written by Scott Gordon on the US Open HB events in the September/October issue of the USATT magazine.

# Meiklejohn Senior National Championship

Laguna Hills CA  
June 3, 2000

by Ralph Stadelman

## Results:

- 1<sup>st</sup> Xin Peng
- 2<sup>nd</sup> Larry Hodges
- 3<sup>rd</sup>-4<sup>th</sup> Sam Balamoun  
Nick Mintseveris
- 5<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> Barry Dattel  
Lim Ming Chui  
Roberto Byles  
Avischy Schmidt,



Xin Peng



Larry Hodges

The eleventh annual Senior Nationals included a second annual hardbat event, and with the prize money increased over the first year a top-flight field participated. Over half of the 28 entrants were rated above 2000, and last year's champion, Barry Dattel, was knocked out in the quarter-finals.

One of the interesting aspects of a Senior National event is to see who turned 40 in the past year and is the new "young favorite". This year the newcomers included Xin Peng (who, in fact, had just turned 50) and just-turned-40

Larry Hodges. These two met in a very offensively oriented final, but not before some great matches and surprising twists made this a tournament typical of what hardbat play has come to mean in its resurgence. Early round highlights included Corazon Valenzuela pushing (literally) Norm Bass to the limit in an 18, -20, 19 win, and Tom Miller putting aside his umpire's role just long enough to defeat Jim McQueen in a close 18, 16 match. Pete May took 3 games to oust Mark Wedret,

and Ralph Muramoto defeated newly crowned world senior doubles bronze medalist Leon Ruderman in three games.

The round of 16 matches ended play for last year's semi-finalist Ralph Stadelman when he could not contain Larry Hodges' attack of service. Sam Balamoun demonstrated his excellent retrieving game in eliminating Corazon Valenzuela, and Xin Peng served notice to the field with a 5 and 7 victory over Ralph Muramoto.

Eventually the field was determined for the quarter-finals. Number one seed Xin Peng faced the formidable challenge of hardbat legend Lim Ming Chui, and this was the first instance in the tournament of injury-affected play. Lim lost 15 and 15, pointing out afterward that Xin's two-winged attack was too much for his one-winged response. This was in reference to the extremely sore elbow that

has afflicted Lim for some time and prevents him from effectively attacking with his backhand.

In the second quarter-final Sam Balamoun got stronger as the match went on against Avischy Schmidt, winning 14, -19, 13. Avi was very effective hitting hard in the second game, but Sam began placing his chop/retrievals deeper in the final game, forcing Avi to roll instead of hit. Sam's one-per-game backhand pick hits came more often in the third game also, as Sam gained confidence.

Larry Hodges raised his lifetime mark against Barry Dattel to 5-1 with a 19, 19 win here. Barry missed several of Larry's serves at key points, and Larry exhibited a surprisingly effective chopping defense to earn other important points.

The big disappointment of the hardbat event occurred at 7:30 PM on Saturday evening, when Houston's Roberto Byles, still in the semi-finals or finals of four events, agreed to help out the tournament schedule by defaulting his quarter-final hardbat match to Nick Mintsiveris. This would have

been one of the top matches of the event, pairing Roberto's grace, touch and athleticism against Nick's power, experience and witticisms, and could have gone either way.

Semifinal pairings matched Sam Balamoun and Xin Peng, and Larry Hodges against Nick Mintseveris. Both of these carried the "youth vs. age" theme, but other contrasts were provided as well.

The match between Sam and Peng was a throwback to the collision of forces of nature. Offense vs. defense in the traditional sense of attacker and retriever. In the end, Peng's power prevailed, but not before Sam had brought the crowd to its collective feet on more than one occasion. Steve Berger was not at this event, but Sam Balamoun very ably represented defenders everywhere with his inspired play.

Continued on page 5

“  
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Senior National  
event is to see  
who turned 40  
in the past year  
and is the new  
“young favorite”.

”

The second semi-final was also the second instance of injury-affected play. Nick's bad back was aggravated in the early going of game one, and although he continued, he could be heard to lament as the match neared its 16, 13 finish, "it's not fair, he can bend". In the end, Larry hit a few more winners than Nick did, though both demonstrated outstanding shotmaking skills.

The final was supposed to be a formality in the minds of many spectators. How could anyone withstand the ferocious forehand and backhand attack of Xin Peng? To the surprise of these oracles, the answer was provided by Larry Hodges' strategy of

"if you can't withstand the attack, then it's best to attack first". A very strong three game match resulted, and the variety of shots and counters made this a much closer match than the 14, -23, 9 score might indicate. Peng's offense again proved overpowering, but not on every point, and not even at some key points in the second game. Both players gave the crowd their best, and both represented hardbat table tennis as true champions.

The quality of the field, the efforts of Stan Kahan and the Meiklejohn tournament officials in providing this event, and the enthusiasm of the spectators truly make this a tournament to attend and appreciate. It makes it worthwhile to be 40. ●

“  
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overpowering,  
but...  
”

For many years during the infancy of our sport the premier pimpled rubber coverings were manufactured in England by the Leyland company. But with the advent of sponge, hard rubber became almost impossible to find. With the recent renaissance of hardbat table tennis there is once again a demand for quality pimpled rubber, and those who have squirreled it away can sell it for top dollar. So what does this situation have to do with a play by John Guare titled "Six Degrees of Separation" whose hypothesis is that we are more closely connected with everybody on earth than we might think?

Well, let's return for a moment to Leyland rubber. During the last half of the 19th century an English industrialist named Frederick Leyland of Liverpool got rich in shipping and then diversified into other industries including eventually automobiles... and rubber. This Frederick Leyland was also a patron of the arts who in 1876 commissioned James McNeill Whistler to decorate a room in his London house. This room became known as *The Peacock Room* because of its widespread use of the Peacock motif on all four walls.

Whistler also used Frances Leyland, Frederick's wife, as his model (and mistress).

When Frederick discovered the dalliance he fired Whistler and closed the room to the public. Seventy-five years later, in 1952, the Freer Gallery in Washington D.C. managed to acquire the room from the Leyland heirs and have it dismantled, shipped to Washington and reassembled in the Freer where you can see it the next time you are in the Capital.

So does this mean that all of us hardbat players are only six degrees separated from Whistler's Mother and Frederick's Frances? It would be nice to think so, wouldn't it? ●

### Leyland Rubber...

### Six Degrees of Separation

By Dick Evans  
Hillsboro, WV

*"If other people  
are going to talk,  
conversation  
becomes impossible."*

James McNeill Whistler



Whistler's mother

.....

## SATOH'S Good... But his bat may be what makes him better

### From the Hock Archives

*and the*

### Racket Sports Heritage Collection

**W**hile many of us are making the switch to the 40mm diameter ball (with some happier about the switch than others) let us take time to reflect on the past, when a far more momentous equipment change rocked our sport: the switch to SPONGE!

In this installment of FROM THE HOCK ARCHIVES, we reprint a portion of a letter to the editor from the March 1953 issue of the USTTA's Table Tennis Topics (shortly after Satoh took the world by storm with his sponge racket). We thank Berndt Mann and Don Varian for digging this up.

To the editors...

**S**ince H. Satoh's victory in the World Championships last year, a disturbance has been created over the legal use of his sponge rubber racket.

Law No. 4 of Table Tennis indicated that a racket may be made of *any* material, be of any size, shape or weight, so that should be enough to put Satoh's racket beyond the reach of debate.

I have reason to disagree with those who take sides in saying that Satoh's victories were not accomplished with his bat but strictly with his skill and cleverness in exploiting its potentialities.

Perhaps he is clever enough to repeat his past performances with an old shoe.

Although I am 100% against outlawing this soundless weapon I honestly feel that his racket played an important role in his victories. I am not questioning Satoh's ability but I feel that he is not superior to some of the players he has defeated.

In a recent tournament, I among many experienced the sponge rubber racket. Needless to say, I was easy prey as were others who attempted to cope with it.

A severe chop or any other spin has never faltered my game to the point where I couldn't adjust it after a short while, but at the hands of the sponge racket every phase of my ability was far below par. But again back to Law No. 4 and this entire squawk should be eliminated.

Mr. Montegu [sic] also said that Satoh's matches were bright and inviting and not the least bit dull from the spectator angle.

It must have been interesting to himself and those who used this racket, but very drab to the individual who expected to witness top-flight table tennis instead of a soundless affair. What would be the opinion of table tennis fans who would time and time again have to witness these luster lacking soundless games? It is my

opinion that if the bat has any effect on the spectators it will decrease instead of increase its viewers.

I fully agree with the statement that Satoh is not unbeatable. Perhaps if he would discontinue the use of the soundless bat and resort to the old racket he would be as helpless as those struggling against his own bat.

Mr. Montegu states that Satoh's victories were fascinating and exciting to the spectators. There would only be one solution to this question and that would be a poll of those who witnessed one of his exciting, fascinating victories.

I can only provide a list of people who will agree with me that the sponge rubber racket has decreased the excitement and outstanding features of a table tennis match. I will stand beside Mr. Montegu when he says, "Let Satoh be champion until someone is good enough to beat him."... but, it will most likely be one who masters the sponge rubber bat or invents a new device that will be able to resort to Satoh's method of play.

As I bring my response to a climax, I cannot permit anyone to lead me to believe that Satoh's racket plays no part in his victories.

*Joe Dragosh, KCTTA, Sports Dept., Kansas City Star, Kansas City, Kan.*

**T**he collective angst of many people with sentiments similar to those expressed above created a groundswell large enough to result in an all-out ban on sponge a few years later in various countries (like our own). The bans were short-lived, and they too created quite a furor. On the opposing page, we present an article from the May, 1957 issue of Table Tennis, official magazine of the English Table Tennis Association. We thank Charles Hoey, curator of the Racket Sports Heritage Collection, for this enlightening tidbit. ●

# Table Tennis

Official Magazine of the

English Table Tennis Association

Edited by W. HARRISON EDWARDS

Published by Walthamstow Press, Ltd., Guardian House, 644 Forest Road, London, E.17

Vol. 15

May, 1957

No. 8

## IT'S BACK TO RUBBER AGAIN!

**SPONGE and other freak bats are banned in this country for next season. It is back to orthodox pimples rubber only.**

Such was the decision of the annual meeting of the E.T.T.A. at Westminster on April 27.

While there was an overwhelming majority for some form of standardisation, the voting shows that the decision on pimples rubber has clearly split the country into two camps.

I don't think the defeated side are going to take this lying down. There may well be repercussions.

The first vote was for standardisation and the figures were: 972 for, 358 against, 120 abstentions.

Once this had been decided came a further vote as to what form the standardisation should take: 828 votes were cast in favour of pimples rubber, 625 for standardisation by thickness (which would have allowed "sandwich" or thin sponge), and 26 abstained.

### BLOCK VOTING

Voting was on the "block system," with each delegate having a specified number of votes according to the number of clubs represented.

*While it is agreed that some form of standardisation is necessary, to legislate that players can use pimples rubber only appears too dogmatic. There should surely be some give and take if we want to get the rest of the world to follow suit.*

The ban on sponge will operate for next season in all home tournaments with the exception of the English "open" where it will be lifted to allow for entry of overseas players. Neither will it apply to international matches unless by agreement.

It has been stressed that this is an experiment for one year only and that the whole position will be reviewed at the next A.G.M. in the light of the international situation.

What effect will this have on the players who

use the sponge or sandwich bat? This includes Ann Haydon, Brian Kennedy, and Johnny Leach.

Miss Haydon's first reactions were: "I might as well give up the game. I have trained to use sponge and play against it for two years, now that time has been wasted."

A few days later, after she had time to sleep on the matter, she said: "To give up the game would be like cutting off my nose to spite my face. It is likely, however, that most of my play will now be overseas. In any case I will not be playing until September and can think of the matter then.

### CANNOT EXPERIMENT

"Nevertheless I think it is a backward step, for this stipulation as to pimples rubber means we cannot experiment with new surfaces and I cannot see the Japanese following our lead."

Johnny Leach described the move as a retrograde step. Some form of standardisation is necessary, but to describe going back to pimples rubber as an experiment is ridiculous. Pimples rubber has been used for 30 years, so we all know what to expect."

Kennedy has made no comment since, but when he heard that thick sponge was likely to be banned he described it as "ridiculous."

Meanwhile, the arguments are now on up and down the country, and we shall have to wait and see what happens next year. It may well be a season of tournaments without the stars.

Richard Bergmann is off on his travels again. A tour of Europe, then South America. Once again the old arguments come up about whether or not he should be ranked over here. Richard provides the answer himself.

*"I don't want to be ranked. I shall be away for two years so it is pointless."*

HARRISON EDWARDS.

## THE FIGHTING KENTUCKIAN:

### An interview with Don Brazzell

by Lorin Benedict



John Oros

“  
...as far as we know,  
Tannehill is the  
ONLY player to take  
Brazzell down  
in official  
hardbat versus hardbat  
play.”

LB:  
So do you play sponge as well?

DB:  
Not lately I haven't. In the past couple years all I've used is hard rubber.

**W**e decided to interview Don Brazzell a couple of months ago after he won the St. Joseph Valley Open over Larry Hodges. This was only a couple of months after he got second to John Tannehill in the Buckeye Open. Along the way to various firsts and seconds he has defeated Danny Seemiller, fulltime 2200-level hardbatter Roy Schlabach Jr., and Ashu Jain. In fact, as far as we know, Tannehill is the ONLY player to take Brazzell down in official hardbat versus hardbat play. The result is that Don Brazzell is currently the nation's 7th ranked hardbat player (UHRL 2382), nestled in between Attila Malek and Derek May. This is all the more amazing, considering that his USATT rating has hovered around 2100 for years. Many of us have never even seen him play since his recent hardbat competition has been confined to the midwest. So read on, as we uncover the mystery of this seldom-seen Kentucky resident who for years has crossed state lines to play in the very cradle of hardbat-dom: Bernard Hock's club in New Albany, Indiana.

LB: How long have you been playing hardbat?

DB: Well, roughly two years. Before that I would only take it out every week or every couple of weeks. Matches that I thought would

be boring at the club, I'd play hardbat. But the last couple of years I've been using it in more and more tournaments.

LB: Does that mean that you never used hardbat back in the days when there were more hardbat players?

DB: I'm 47 years old, so when I started playing in the mid 60's in club tournaments or USTTA tournaments I had already switched over to inverted.

LB: So do you play sponge as well?

DB: Not lately I haven't. In the past couple years all I've used is hard rubber.

LB: So you're USATT rating (2068) has been a result of hardbat versus sponge play?

DB: Yes. That's why my rating has dropped!

LB: OK... We in the Classic Table Tennis Association didn't know this. Since you are one of the strongest players hardbat against hardbat, the natural question to ask you is: Do you practice with full-time hardbat players?

DB: Well, there's one full-time hardbat player at the club. He hasn't played a tournament in about 15 years, but his rating would be about 1800. He's a fairly good hardbat player and I get a lot of practice with him. Also, there are a few sponge players who play with a hardbat just for the hell of it. Our club probably gets more hardbat players than most.

LB: Do you also find yourself practicing against sponge players?

DB: Probably a lot more than I do with hardbat players.

LB: Just because there are more of them around?

DB: Yes.

LB: Recently you've defeated former hardbat champs Seemiller and Hodges and you also beat serious contender Ashu Jain...

DB: In my opinion, he [Ashu] is a better hardbat player than those others. He's just about the best hardbat player that I've played. The thing about it is this... I wasn't thinking that we were using hardbat rules, and he used a lot of hidden-ball serves. I've played him when he was using inverted and I was using hardbat and his serves with hardbat were just as difficult.

Continued on page 9

*The Fighting Kentuckian, continued from page 8*

LB: We've played him before too, and know that to be the case. But what I was going to mention is that you seem to have defeated everyone that you have played hardbat-to-hardbat except for John Tannehill. Do you consider Tannehill to be another level up from these people?

DB: Oh yeah. I'd say he is. He plays like he always used to. His game has never changed. His hardbat game is the same that his inverted game was years ago. He's real consistent with it. He doesn't overpower you, he just doesn't let up. He moves well enough where he can cover most of the table with his forehand, and if you happen to open up he does have a good defense; good enough to get him back in the point. He's tough. He's one I'm still working on.

LB: Now a more general question: Do you enjoy hardbat versus hardbat competition more than sponge versus sponge?

DB: Yes I do actually. Especially... I only get to play once or twice a week, and I get a lot more physical workout in the two or three hours that I get to play playing with hardbat than if I was playing with sponge. This is another big reason why I've switched.

LB: The main reason being that the points are longer?

DB: Yeah. Our club has a lot of 1800-2100 rated players. We've got 8 or 10 of them that are very regular there, and when I play them with inverted, a lot of times I don't work up a sweat. Now with hardbat, an 1800 rated player that can topspin hardbat chop... I've always thought that those are the types of inverted players that would beat a hardbat player easily. So you've got to play some 1800 rated players just as tough as you do anybody else.

LB: Is that also the case if you were to play, say, an 1800 hardbat player? That it wouldn't be as easy for you to overpower them?

DB: An 1800 player that uses hardbat I'm not going to worry about.

LB: Since you were a sponge player for so many years, do you feel that you have "two games", or is your hardbat game very similar to your sponge game?

DB: It's similar in the way I hit the ball, but my strategies would be very different. Actually, my hardbat strokes and my inverted strokes are not all that different. My backhand hit is fairly similar. It's just a slight paddle angle change for me. I used to switch back and forth. I used hardbat a lot even when I was using inverted and it never really bothered me.

DB: Like Dean Doyle. So how would you describe your game?

DB: Blocker. Pick-hitter. If I'm forced to, I chop. If I'm playing inverted players I do a lot more chopping. But most inverted players get messed up with nothing balls. That drives a lot of them crazy. But mostly block and pick-hit.

LB: What are some key issues in hardbat versus hardbat play, or in other words, what should we "Brazzell-wanabees" be working on?

DB: I think if you work on your strokes more you can go topspin-to-topspin. You know, years ago when hardbat was played it was it was usually offense against defense. Just working on your stroke, you can go offense-to-offense, medium range back from the table and play a lot of points that way.

LB: How do you feel that the hardbat competitions can be made better than they already are?

DB: I'd try not to make the hardbat finals one of the last matches of the tournament. I'd like to see it played before or after some of the bigger matches. And the thing is... the people that are there, the players and everybody else, they watch. Especially the finals. Because it's not highlighted, it doesn't get as many people watching as it could. The scheduling of the matches is the only thing that I can see that would change that.

DB: How do you see the hardbat game as evolving? I'm referring to two schools of thought: There are those that think that hardbat versus hardbat is an intrinsically better game and that everybody should be playing it, and there are others who think this is just a fun offshoot of the current game. Where are you in this continuum?

LB:

*Now a more general question: Do you enjoy hardbat versus hardbat competition more than sponge versus sponge?*

DB:

*Yes I do actually.*

LB:

*...So how would you describe your game?*

DB:

*Blocker. Pick-hitter. If I'm forced to, I chop.*

DB:

*I think if you work on your strokes more you can go topspin-to-topspin.*

*Continued on page 10*

LB: *Do you have a favorite table tennis player, hardbat or sponge?*



*John Tannehill*

DB: *Right now, Tannehill.*

LB: *Really!?*

DB: *I admire him.*

DB: I don't know that it's a better game. If I go in that direction, then I would also say that if you change some of the qualities of inverted rubber, you could go in the same direction.

Rather than making so many unbelievably fast and spinny rubbers, back it off a little bit. I thought the game was better in the early seventies than it is today... before services were so dominating. But I'm not going to say that hardbat is a better game. But I'd like to see it evolve more, obviously.

LB: Do you have a favorite table tennis player, hardbat or sponge?

DB: Right now, Tannehill.

LB: Really!?

DB: I admire him. The way he plays hardbat, it's the same way he played inverted. He's about a

year older than me, so I grew up watching him play inverted. And his game is the same. He manages to play that way using hard rubber. So it tells me that you can really play a good topspin fast-paced game. Hardbat is not basically long drawn-out points. You can still do quite a bit with hardbat as long as you learn the hardbat stroke.

LB: So did you know Bernie Hock pretty well?

DB: Quite well, yeah. I knew him from when I lived in Michigan when I was a kid. That's where I started playing the game. I knew him from the major tournaments... buying equip-

ment. I did have a couple of old Hock blades which really never got used back then. But the last ten years of his life I knew him quite well. I was a pallbearer at his funeral.

LB: What racket do you use?

DB: A Hock blade.

LB: What kind?

DB: I've got one of the thicker 3-plys. Actually, the blade was made by John Allen out of all Hock stuff.

LB: One of the reasons that we decided to profile you is that the top hardbat players generally fall into two categories. Category 1: those who are elite sponge players (2400+) who also like to play with a hardbat. They are going to be great hardbat players just because they're great table tennis players. People like Derek May, Jimmy Butler, Seemiller, Todd Sweeris. Category 2: Full-time hardbat players like Ty Hoff and Steve Berger, typically in the 2200-2300 range when they were sponge players. You seem to be maybe close to the second category, but maybe a little out of these categories because as a sponge player you weren't as good as, say, a Ty Hoff. Yet as a hardbat player you seem to be every bit as good, given your results. Thus, it seems pretty clear that you are a considerably better hardbat player than you were a sponge player...

DB: Definitely.

LB: So to what do you attribute your success?

DB: It just suits my game. I play hardbat, but I'm not a chopper way back from the table. Even with inverted, I won most of my points blocking and counterdriving. And I can do that with hardbat at a higher level. That's the only thing I can think of. ●

## **About the New Look of the Newsletter**

I'm sure you have noticed that the Hardbat Newsletter has a new look to it. This is a short note by the guilty party. At the Fort Lauderdale meeting, I volunteered to take some of the burden off from Lorin and to lay out the newsletter for him. I'm an amateur, in both senses of the word, at desktop publishing: I like to do it but have no professional training in it.

Nevertheless, I hope you find the newsletter attractive and easy to read. I also hope to hear from you about how to improve it. Please send your suggestions to the Livermore address on page two or email them directly to me at [hluetchinger@bigfoot.com](mailto:hluetchinger@bigfoot.com).

I'm looking forward to seeing many of you at a tournament.

*Hermann Luechinger*

In the last issue we started showing a picture of a mystery celebrity playing ping-pong (hmm... not table-tennis?). Here is our new mystery person.

# Who is it?

Do you recognize this famous sports figure?



Don't touch the table!

## Who was it?



Last issue's celebrity:  
**Judy Garland**

Although we do not include a complete ratings list in this issue, we do give you a teaser of the current standings:

## The TOP HARDBAT GALS...

For the complete UHRL standings, visit [www.hardbat.com](http://www.hardbat.com)

## UHRL Ratings for Women

- 1 2436 NJ Yip, Lily
- 2 2287 NY Wang, Li Jun
- 3 1663 IN Wilson, Sharlene Krizman
- 4 1475 AZ Kuchenbecker, Kristin
- 5 1450 TX Roufeh, Mahin
- 6 1292 WA Wunderlich, Liana
- 7 1273 NJ Samkoff, Rhoda
- 8 1230 TN Ellis, Allyson
- 9 1197 CA Brin, Harriett
- 10 1181 FL Barron, Samantha
- 11 1107 FL Nealy, Barbara
- 12 1059 FL Nealy, Marjorie
- 13 0886 CA Semenza, Judy
- 14 0830 AZ Magras, Jane



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*Houshang Bozorgzadeh*