

ITTF WORLD HOPES TEAM June 7-11, 2009, Chengdu, China

Report

Page 2	My overall impression
Page 3-6	General comments Program, Training targets, Coaches and training partners Education, Competition Trends, Relations with our hosts
Page 7-10	Comments about each player



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This June twelve boys and girls from all over the world made a small milestone in ITTF programs. First World Hopes Team activity was held in Chengdu, China between 7-21 of June.

They had tasks to respond to many challenges they faced during camp and competitions. High intensity, tests, many balls, demands to correct current strokes and learn new one, physical training, long working days that caused planned and unplanned fatigue were some of them in the first week. That was probably the easier part. Out of their clubs and regular gyms they came to practice with unknown peers, many of them first time in similar situation. Following competition was about to bring more psychological tension, pressure to do well and justify presence, battles to cope with losing or winning. Knowing that they would be tested by more than 40 players from China, Korea, Hong Kong and Taiwan conclusion was that not an easy contest was in front of them.

Here is the response. All training was done with maximum effort, results of the tests were improved with every repetition, new skills were learned, already known strokes corrected, motivation and new friends helped to have fatigue shrugged off. Wins were taken in big strides, loses were fought sometimes with a few tear drops but always with determination to do it better in next match. Tension was beaten with fist in the air and sometimes loud “tso” from throat after winning rally.

New friends were made. Many of them don’t speak same language but communication was never a problem. Cheering for a team-mate was genuine and high-five after the game was just reflection of spirit during the days spent together.

For sure it was not best 12 world players, but each of them made sure that after two weeks is much better player. And maybe some of them are among best dozen. It would not be surprise that one fine day probably a decade from now, photos from this camp will be evidence that we were once practicing together with true table tennis star. For now, WHT made statement with four medals in prestigious China Junior Open.

They were not alone in their effort. We had two guests from Puerto Rico (one 13 years old boy and 8 years old girl). Coaches shared new experiences with them and gave support. In Zita Pidl, ITTF Manager they found good organizer who took care of them. We were on the spot but there were also a huge audience consisting of ITTF officials, table tennis public in their countries, parents, and friends. It brought additional weight and they carried it adequately.

Excellent conditions – accommodation, food and gym. Officials, coaches, training partners and volunteers made it even better.

It looks that I was lucky to be there.

Program

First World Hopes Team camp consists of nine days training and five days competitions.

Main idea was to expose WHT participants to both – training and tournament environment. Planning for the event I have decided to divide training into three microcycles:

- a) Day 1-3 5 training sessions 15 hours
- b) Day 4-6 6 training sessions 18 hours
- c) Day 7-9 3 training sessions 9 hours

Additional to above mentioned hours were 25 minutes daily morning running and stretching.

In order to fulfil our objectives I have decided to expose kids to heavy demanding training in first two and lighter, more pre-competition style third microcycle. Here comes several surprises:

- a) They were able to successfully meet all given training targets
- b) They were able to recover fast and be ready for competition.

Most probable explanations are: i) very strong motivation to perform well and ii) their age (ability to recuperate fast).

Although all of participants (except Korean Jeong Woo Park) claimed that it was unusual high volume and intensity, all of them responded very well and they should be even told to slow down in last days before the tournament.

Typical day was:

- 07.25 – 07.50 Footing, morning gymnastics and stretching
- 08.45 – 11.30 Training
- 15.00 – 18.30 Training

Training sessions were conducted with Chinese partners till 17.30 (when they usually finish their program) and extra hour was done only by members of WHT.

Suggestions for future camps: To have additional week of training. Considering very high motivation, probably costs could be pass to participants. It would be also cost effective because the most expensive item is usually airplane ticket.



Training targets

Levels and skills inside our group varied a lot. It brought challenge to choose the right content and in order to get optimal benefits for each player sessions were run with a lot of individual approach. Training sessions targeted:

- Consistency
- Precision
- Footwork
- Serve and receiving (second and third microcycle especially)
- Training matches.

Numbers of methods were introduced to stress importance of consistency and precision (“ordinary” exercises, 2 minutes tests, 20 attempts tests, multi-ball).



Coaches and training partners

Program for the day were made with cooperation of Mr. Chen Pei Guo, the Head Coach at the Chengdu International Training. Beside him two-three coaches were available for multi-ball training. Their presence and effort made training possible having in mind a huge difference in skill levels among our players.

We always got several training partners. At the beginning a few (4) and at the end of our training program more (up to 8) players from Chengdu. That would be a typical day. We also had one training session with Congo team. At one was present Omar Assar (EGY) and Momo, best Congo player. Once we got members of cadets and juniors provincial girls’ team playing matches with us.

We had eleven accompanying coaches on site (remaining two were parents). Their involvement grew up with a time and initial sit-and-watch attitude was replaced with more pro-active approach. Once the competition had started my involvement was to help players without coaches (two) and to work with coaches (advisory role).

Suggestions for future camps: WHT players will probably always show up with significantly different levels. Selection of training partners should be more responsive to that fact. Most talented players deserve more attention and better partners. This time partners were good for average member of our team, but not enough challenging for best ones (Jeong Won, Tamolwan, even Patrick).

Education

We have been using this two weeks to introduce certain values, methods, exercises and stroke technique:

- **Team spirit** – Although it can sound strange to someone that team spirit (World Team!?) can or should be one of main attribute here, it was successfully shown that team effort contributed a lot to success of each individual. Doing things together (from warm-ups to cheering together for playing team-mate) produced many side-effects – faster recovery, willingness to push oneself when faced with fatigue, new friendships and of course gave extra edge when facing tough opponent.
- **Routines** –morning gymnastics, stretching several times a day, shadow training, proper eating and sleeping schedule...
- **Proper stroke technique** – hardly to imagine better place than China to work on this issue; presence of Chinese trainers made it possible
- **Consistency** – pre-request for successful development – stressed through verbal explanation, number of tests and exercises
- **Anticipation** –a few exercises were introduced where both – hiding and reading part of anticipation were required
- **Serve and receiving** demonstration by best players in the center
- Exposure to **different playing styles** – a couple of defensive players (girls), several pen-holder players and several players with pips – both during training and training-matches
- DVD with team and single final from World Junior Championship 2007 were **analyzed**
- Last but not least, players and coaches were introduced to **different ITTF programs** (one of them being Olympic solidarity scholarship); Omar Assar and Nosahd Alamiyan winning in Chengdu – both team and single made all explanation much easier.

Suggestions for future camps: To organize some lecturing about basic strokes from Chinese coaches. WHT coaches to come prepared for these discussions. (DVDs, own players tapes, short essays...).

Competition

Although it was not to be expected – China, Korea, Hong Kong, Taiwan players were present results WHT achieved were remarkable. Fact is that China has participated only with local players (city and province), but on the other hand best members of WHT were able to challenge and win some of players in older category (U15).

One gold, one silver and two bronze medals was achieved in terms of medals, but what should really counts here is experience and shown fighting spirit. For many players it was first competition trip outside of country and all of them performed with very positive attitude.



Gold – Hopes Boys Single (U12)	Jeong Woo PARK
Silver – Hopes Girls Single (U12)	Tamolwan KHETKUEN
Bronze-Hopes Boys Single (U12)	Patryk ZATOWKA
Bronze-Cadets Boys Double (U15)	Jeong Woo PARK, Patryk ZATOWKA

Suggestions for future camps: Keep official competitions as a closing part of our camps. If not possible organize one between WHT members.

Trends

Training and game knowledge is spreading very fast. Now players of 11 and 12 years old from all over the world have comparable knowledge to 14-15 years olds from countries of good table tennis tradition a decade ago. Training volume, intensity, methods are generally well known.

Serve and receive is core of the game and that is why representatives of Asian countries (CHN, KOR) have tremendous advantage. In that sense, rest of the world still haven't caught up.

Understanding stokes' technical details including footwork is another edge for Far East countries. Members of WHT, their coaches and association has to understand these issues, work on them in order to make hopes what are they suppose to become – world class players.

Suggestions for future camps: prepare DVDs and statistical data where these statements will be very obvious to other coaches. Propose more methods to be implemented when they return to their homes to overcome problems.

Relations with our hosts

Excellent.

Suggestions for future camps:

More exposure to different styles would be desirable. We got that exposure only during training matches (1-2 training sessions).

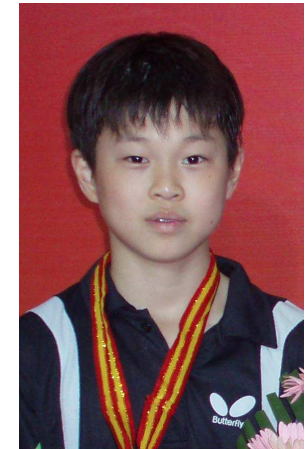
Three Chinese coaches did excellent job helping the weakest members of our team with multi ball training. However, my opinion is that there presence during training behind Chinese players would bring additional quality to training and that mixing both coaching styles would bring more benefits overall.

Comments about each player



Tamolwan KHETKUEN (THA) Here she already proves that is able to win in tough matches. She also has a huge potential. Potential is not only in her age, but in fact that with a few new things (serve, more risky receiving, better footwork, more options with initial ball, better agility) she would be able to raise her game to another level. Knowing how fast she learn and adopt, how coachable she is and how her coach is dedicated to game, mentioned level should not be far away. If next couple of years they get enough exposure to new challenges and good training environment it should be reasonable to expect her to become very high level senior player one day. Beat couple of Korean cadets and Chinese players. In semi-final and final of U12 and in group U15 she was facing much older, more knowledgeable and more experienced opponents. She had the determination to challenge them and came successful out of these tests.

Jeong Woo PARK (KOR) Already very educated player. Core of the game (serve and receive) is on a level of very good 15 years old cadet player. Also nice sense for a game pace rarely seen at such a young player. With little bit better receiving and more tools when attacking he would be competitive with the best world cadets. This will probably come soon together with better physical attributes (height and muscles). It would be surprise if in 7-8 years doesn't become part of Korean NT. Very nice personality. Although both – player and his coach don't speak English they were able to communicate well and to be integral part of our group. Deals nice with a pressure and finds ways to enforce his playing style to his opponent. Superior in U12 and very competitive in all three U15 categories (team, single, double).



Patryk ZATOWKA (POL) Very nice ball placement and game understandings. Obviously recently grew up a lot and in this moment his strokes and movements are slower than they should be. Coordination is not affected but explosiveness is. Once when this softness disappears he will need to find proper distance from a table. Able to take responsibility in team and double matches. Hard worker, easy going and his presence means a lot to a group.



Fermin TENTI (ARG) Able to cover huge area and play effectively from any distance. Maybe it is consequence of his parallel tennis training sessions. Excellent in changing rhythm and confusing opponent with unorthodox solutions. However, executions are not strong side of his game and if he can improve a couple of things his game would be competitive on a level of Patryk and Jeong Woo. Now he is able to compete with them at training but long tournaments demands more consistency and different pace. Distance and semi-distance stroke should be used as a surprise and occasional excursion from close to table game. Now it is opposite.

Charles DENG (USA) Player that have specific style and inhered unique training philosophy. Forehand topspin is everything and most of the training is dedicated to footwork. It brings a lot of consistency at training and some in game. On the other hand, it is coming together with limited options when faced with opponent able to well return his serve. I was very surprise to see how he was able to respond to my demands to try new things during a game. He has shown an excellent response to instructions during crucial moments and it could probably lead to different approach to training, too. Very coachable. His “hard” hand is result of huge number of repetitions, not consequence of lack of talents. He was learning and improving a lot during competitions. Environment (club, father taking care of him in very intense way) will of crucial importance for his further development. Made some unexpected wins in single.



Bryan AFANADOR (PUR) Player with already defined style – close to table, a lot of down the line shots. Good coordination is plus, but longer than necessary strokes for that type of game are minus. Although he is trying to innovate with his serves it is still weaker side of his game, at least at world level. If he manages to technically improve his strokes including serve his exposure to international level will be more promising. Psychologically strong and able to find solutions and courage in tough situations. His coach-father is leading him well. Very competitive.

Christos CHRISTONOV (CYP) Very soft hand, excellent touch. The rest of body doesn't follow. He worked very hard to improve his weight shifting from one leg to another and to include trunk into his forehand topspin stroke. However, still will take some time to implement it in game situations. Managed to learn new stroke – backhand spin very fast and some of it we have already seen during competition. His performance varies a lot even during one game. Occasionally his soft touch brings nice, mature solutions. On the other hand, opponents were able to exploit his weak footwork and once out of balance he becomes easy target. Most probably it is caused with inadequate training group back home where simple and easy solutions are enough to keep him very competitive.





Egle ORLOVAITE (LTU) Very interesting player. Using long pips at her backhand is just one particular thing about his game. The other is unusual stiffness. In environment of her friends she is very cheerful, but fun disappears during games especially at the end of them (at the end of the sets). Nine training days and a lot of work with Chinese coaches managed to add some softness and improve forehand topspin. Also manage to win some nice matches in team and single.



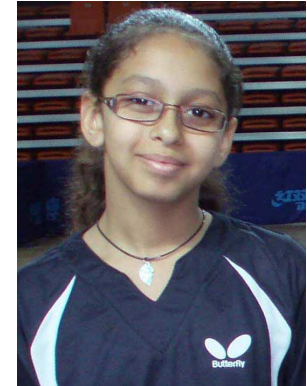
Salma KHALED (EGY) Knowledge of her basic strokes is broad but only successfully implemented in familiar and known training situation. Soft attitude prevents to give so needed true roughness to her game. Relying on her strokes and good opportunities for training at home, maturing can bring better attitude and tougher game approach. Manage to make one nice game at single. Cheerful personality, but shared mostly with other members of Egypt team in China not with WHT members.

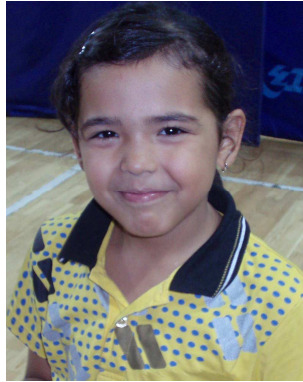
An Qi TAN (MAS) Her knowledge of basic strokes is very poor. Just beyond beginner's level. Enough smart, she (and her accompanying father) realizes how much behind is comparing to other participants. On the other hand, her attitude didn't allow her to accept underdog status. So, she used her cleverness and toughness to learn a lot, get some consistency in her game at training and change odds at last games in her single consolation. She managed to beat to two Chinese players. In future she should base her game on her tough backhand, intelligence and ability to deal with pressure. Her development will depend a lot on conditions at home.



Jenina NIETO (PER) Although she can occasionally deliver surprisingly nice stroke especially forehand topspin, lack of proper fundamentals prevents her to achieve more. Basic stance is too high, ball is usually taken too late with forehand strokes. She tried hard during training. Very pleasant personality ready to cooperate during sessions with coaches and team-mates.

Abderahmane ALIOUA (ALG) Lack of basic table tennis skills and tools. Once when faced with reality he took it really hard. Then he decided to fight and I can say that he was one of the most if not the most hard working player. He tried everything and if left alone, he would serve, do some physical exercise or shadow training. Very shy and without almost any words he managed to communicate with us through his hard work and persistence. His coach provided him a lot of support during camp.





Adriana DIAZ and Manuel GOMEZ (PUR) were not part of the WHT but being in the center and similar age they have participated at all our activities. Eight year old Adriana caught a lot of attentions with her talent, character and hard training. Manuel was also practicing very hard and little bit more self-confidence this time would bring him more joy. His level is level of other boys from our group.

