

Ping pong in America relegated to basement fun

Table Tennis is like zen, says Young Jo Kim, a member of the University Club Sports table tennis club.

"In a way table tennis doesn't look exciting," he says. "It's so individual; you have to concentrate on yourself. In matches it's so silent."

By JEFF PETERSEN
Of the Emerald

The silence is broken only by a ball one and one-half inches in diameter "katunking" off a nine foot by five foot table and hit with rubber-coated paddles. Dividing the table into two equal sections is a net six inches tall and six feet wide.

Kim says many good players believe the paddle is an extension of the hand or fingers. "You're chasing a very little thing — the ball. It's a lot like life. You're chasing little balls, and if you catch them you win."

"You feel the ball with the racket," says Elsie Spinning, who eight years ago was the ninth-rated American woman at age 16.

"Touch is very important."

Spinning practiced in Sweden with the U.S. women's junior team, but her parents had to pay. Lack of funding is a problem facing the top young American players.

"We don't have the training facilities or the coaching to keep them here," says Ron Vincent, who is the volunteer instructor of the University's table tennis class. While the game is popular as a competitive sport in China, Japan, Sweden and other countries, it lacks appeal in the U.S.

Vincent says table tennis in America is as low key as the American Bass Fisherman's Association. "All we have is cliques competing against themselves while confined to a geographic region."

Another reason for its lack of popularity is that it is "not socially acceptable for young women," says Spinning. "Places we had to play when I was younger weren't very nice; they weren't the kinds of places parents would want their daughters to run off to."

Spinning says table tennis is



Photo by Greg Gawlowski

Touch is important in table tennis, Young Jo Kim, a member of the Club Sports team, says. Table tennis is not as popular in the United States as it is in the Far East; due to a lack of training facilities and qualified coaches, American table tennis is primarily a basement sport.

more of a basement recreation in America than a sport. When training in Sweden she saw "groupies" chasing the male table tennis star. "He was to Swedish table tennis what Bjorn Borg is now to tennis."

"The Wilt Chamberlains and Kareem Abdul-Jabbars of China are table tennis players," Vincent says. He says Far East children are started at the game as soon as they are a head taller than the 30-inch high table.

When Kim played competitive table tennis for his high school team in Japan, he practiced eight hours a day. "Before class we'd practice a couple hours, and after class five or six hours. I'd go home tired. A lot of my friends weren't very interested in school. Table tennis gave me a reason to go to school."

Kim says it was hard to concentrate on the game for eight hours each day. But it is this kind of intense interest that packed 15,000 people in a specially-built arena in Peking for the 1961 world table tennis championships, while thousands more waited outside hoping to get in.

A player's mind must be focused 100 percent on the game. An opponent's stroke must be anticipated in order to counter with the correct shot. "It's a lot like chess," says John Kretchmer, Club Sports representative from the team. "You try to deceive your opponent."

When playing in a tournament, Kretchmer's eyes narrow in concentration. "I have to be tense," he says. "I have to want to crush the other guy."

Between matches Kretchmer relaxes and catches his breath. At a recent tournament he played 20 games. He uses the first game to feel out an opponent to see what will work and what won't. If he gets a big lead he will try to overpower his opponent, but if the match is close he says creative tactics are more important than powerful shots.

Among the shots a table tennis player might use are the back-

table. "If your footwork is not good you can't chase and hit the ball," he says. He says good footwork is the foundation of his table tennis game.

How does a player prepare for a competitive match? Kretchmer got ready for his match against Jeff Frahier of Portland State by writing a paper on the attacking style for an English class. "I'm a counter-attack player, but the last time I played Frahier that didn't

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hand push shot, forehand push shot, backhand chop, forehand chop, backhand flick, dropshot, forehand topspin drive and the smash.

There are two kinds of players — the attacker and the counter-attacker. Points are decided quickly. A point between two attacking players is usually over by the fifth volley.

The two most popular racket grips are the penholder and the shakehand. Kim says the penholder, highly popular in the Far East, is good for straight kill shots. More popular in the United States and Europe is the shakehand. Looping shots with arm extended and following through are more compatible with this grip, says Kim.

Kim is a convert of the penholder, which he says requires fast footwork and quick reflexes because the player is close to the

work. So I tried attacking. I crushed him."

Because table tennis is an individual sport and has little potential as a money maker, its acceptance in the United States on a competitive level is still in question. Vincent has his own idea why backing of table tennis lags behind other countries.

"There's not enough masochism in the game," he says. "There's not enough blood and guts for most spectators. Or for most players."

Table tennis has come a long way since two bored students using cigar box lids for paddles, a champagne cork for a ball and a row of books for a net played the first game in 1881. In the United States it has a long way to go.

As Kim says, "Table tennis is easy to start with, but it's hard to get good."

Club Sports round-up



Fencing

Saturday the fencing club will travel to Portland's Mt. Scott Community Center for a foil tournament.



Water polo

The water polo club and teams from seven other schools — Washington, Washington State, Central Washington State College, Oregon State, Lewis & Clark College, Southern Oregon State College and Portland State — have qualified for the Northwest Intercollegiate Water Polo Championships.

PSU and Lewis & Clark will host the tournament Friday and Saturday in Portland.



Soccer

The University of Puget Sound will challenge the Duck's men's squad in a 6 p.m. Saturday match at Autzen Stadium.



Rugby

Saturday the rugby club will play an exhibition match starting at 10:30 a.m. on the rugby field next to Hayward Field. A tailgate party will follow.

All interested are welcome at rugby practice held Tuesdays and Thursdays at 3:30 p.m. behind Mac Court. For more information call Andy Thompson at 484-1587 or Terry Snyder at 343-4353.



Skiing

The ski club is sponsoring Dick Barrymore's latest movie, "Wild Skis," tonight at 7 and 9 p.m. in 150 Geology.

Tickets are \$2.50 in advance and \$3 at the door. Advance tickets may be picked up from any ski club member, or at the Club Sports office in the EMU basement.



Volleyball

The men's volleyball club travels to Tacoma, Wash. this weekend for a tournament at Highline Community College.

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