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International veterans table tennis competitions

Abstract

Sport activities are acknowledged to be very important for health of all population, and for elder population table tennis is an ideal sport! Therefore table tennis has become more and more popular, better and better organized.

Nowadays there are in almost all national table tennis associations veteran committees, or even autonomous veteran associations.

For players over 40, which are considered as veterans, veterans tournaments are very popular - in Europe there are many open veterans tournaments. Official World and European Veterans Championships became huge tournaments with big number of participants. It can be expected that veterans table tennis will become even more popular and better organized on all levels.

Key words: *table tennis, veterans, competition*

Introduction

Sport activities are acknowledged to be very important for health of all population, and for elder population table tennis is an ideal sport! Therefore veterans table tennis has become more and more popular, better and better organized. Nowadays there are in almost all national table tennis associations veteran committees, or even autonomous veteran associations. In numerous countries official national veterans championships are held for veterans, men and women over 40, playing in different age categories. In some countries such championships are held not only in single events but more and more often even in team events! Very popular are open veterans tournaments - there is a huge number of such open veterans tournaments in Europe. Although most of veterans tournaments are regional, most of them open tournaments, there are nowadays more and more big international open veterans tournaments which are listed in international veterans calendar. There are 18 such big international open veterans tournaments in Europe listed in veterans calendar 2009.

As veterans table tennis was more and more popular, better and better organized, in 1982 the idea was born to organize World Veterans Championships. As World Veterans Championships happened to be a great success, Europe started to organize European Veterans Championships in 1995.

World Veterans Championships

Back in 1980, some local Gothenburg clubs discussed the idea of inviting senior players to an international tournament, and asked ITTF for approval to call the event "World Veterans Championships". The ITTF Secretary General at that time, Mr. Tony Brooks, gave green light under the condition the championships were regarded "unofficial".

Mr. Westling as representative of Gothenburg veterans went to World Table Tennis Championships in Novi Sad, Serbia, former Yugoslavia, in 1981 to discuss with representatives of participating countries the idea of veterans championships. The reactions were very positive and it was decided to invite table tennis veterans all over the world to participate in the first world championships for veteran players - World Veterans Championships - to be staged in Gothenburg, Sweden, in May 1982.

The regulations (age categories, playing system etc) were put together based upon Swedish experience from domestic veteran events but also according to input received from representatives of many countries during the World Championships in Novi Sad. For the majority of players such a tournament is basically combination of table tennis and holiday. In order to attract players of less high quality a certain minimum number of matches has to be guaranteed to each participant.

The basic concept of World Veterans Championships agreed upon from the very beginning was - to schedule it in time of the year when the weather is fine, to guarantee to each player several matches, sightseeing, social arrangements and a Farewell Party.

The first World Veterans Championships in Gothenburg gathered 21 countries represented by 451 participants and these figures were for sure higher than anybody could have expected. Among players of various capacity, many ex-champions participated. Three of them were former World Champions: Mrs Kazuko Ito (Japan), Mr. Ferenc Sido (Hungary) and Mr. Laszlo Bellak (Hungary - later USA). The event became a great success with its friendly atmosphere and therefore Swaythling Club International with its president at that time Mr. Joe Veselsky decided immediately to back up the initiative to hold World Veterans Championships on regular basis each even year.

Swaythling Club International formed a World Veterans Committee with responsibility to find future organizers, to assist them during the planning sessions, to give them full support during the championships. Mr. Hans Westling from Sweden was elected as chairman of the Committee and he still holds this position.

The World Veterans Championships have become more and more popular through the years - from 451 participants on first championships a number of 3.650 participants was reached in Bremen, Germany in 2006. All Continents with exception of Africa have already hosted World Veterans Championships.

The following cities have been hosts of World Veterans Championships so far:

<i>Year</i>	<i>Place</i>	<i>Country</i>	<i>Nr. of players</i>	<i>Nr. of countries</i>
1982	Göteborg	Sweden	450	21
1986	Rimini	Italy	1100	38
1988	Zagreb	Croatia	1650	45
1990	Baltimore	USA	1100	46
1992	Dublin	Ireland	1300	48
1994	Melbourne	Australia	1800	49
1996	Lillehammer	Norway	1950	49
1998	Manchester	England	1400	53
2000	Vancouver	Canada	1850	57
2002	Lucerne	Switzerland	2750	63
2004	Yokohama	Japan	2384	47
2006	Bremen	Germany	3650	59
2008	Rio de Janeiro	Brazil	1316	53

European Veterans Championships

The European Veterans Championships was first mentioned within the ETTU Executive Committee under its President Hans Wilhelm Gäb at the beginning of 1993. An offer by the Russian Table Tennis Federation to organize the first event in the summer of the same year was rejected. Instead, it was decided to discuss the whole matter with the World Veterans Committee of the Swaythling Club International as the body responsible for World Veterans Championships.

Both ETTU and SCI finally supported the idea of a Continental Veterans Championships to be held alternatively with the Worlds event – in odd years. A respective proposition was put to the Congress during the European Championships in Birmingham 1994 and passed. A protest of the Norwegian Association, which feared the new event might endanger the participation in their World Veterans Championships 1996 in Lillehammer was rejected, but it was also decided not to organize the first European event in a country situated near Norway.

Under the condition that the applicants agreed to pay the fixed levy, the ETTU entrusted Austria (1995), Czech Republic (1997) and Sweden (1999) with the organization of the new event.

Members of the first ETTU Veterans Committee were as follows:

Chairman	Ferenc Sido (HUN)
Deputy Chairman	Reinhard Engel (AUT)
Members	Ramunis Budriunas (LTU)
	Dino Ciommei (ITA)
	Vladimir Ivanov (RUS)
	Klaus Lehmann (GER)

Viliam Moravec) (SVK)
 Diomides Savvides (CYP)
 Ladislav Stipek (ESP)
 Mike Watts (ENG)
 Co-opted member Diane Schöler (for the SCI)

Two years later, in Bratislava 1996, the options for the EVC in 1997 (Prague, CZE) and in 1999 (Goteborg, SWE) were confirmed. It was also decided that presentations of the venues would be required in the future.

The Theis Tournament Computer Programme which had been developed at the cost of the SCI and was tested in Vienna 1995, was said to be at the disposal of future organizers, free of charge. The New Chairman of the Committee was Rudi Sporrer, with Ferenc Sido as his deputy.

In 2003, after the respective new addition to the World Veterans Championships, a new age group of "Over 85" was included into the Championships, bringing the total up to 8 categories each, for men and women.

European Veterans Championships:

Previous organizers were:

<i>Year</i>	<i>Place</i>	<i>Country</i>	<i>Nr. of players</i>	<i>Nr. of countries</i>
1995	Vienna	(AUT)	1.400	39
1997	Prague	(CZE)	1.880	36
1999	Göteborg	(SWE)	1.320	31
2001	Århus	(DEN)	1.420	32
2003	Courmayeur	(ITA)	1.370	34
2005	Bratislava	(SVK)	1.990	37
2007	Rotterdam	(NED)	2.080	38

Veterans Table Tennis

Veterans table tennis is booming, there are more and more individual and team events, more and more veterans are regularly playing and practising table tennis. There are various reasons for such a development - first of all aging population understands today how important physical activity is for health and well being - and table tennis proved to be a sport which can be played without any risks even in high age, official championships for players over 85 are the best proof! Social aspect of table tennis is very important for aging population as well - regular practice and participation on tournaments, playing in a veterans team is most welcome and needed social activity too! Advantage of table tennis is as well the fact that it is not an expensive sport, it is not a sport reserved only for wealthy people. Table tennis does not require necessarily big sport halls or sport fields, some smaller rooms for few tables are often enough for regular activity. Basic equipment as tables and nets are not expensive, the same applies to balls and rackets.

Official World and European veterans championships became huge tournaments. All the participants pay their travel and accommodation expenses themselves, they even have to pay entry fee which is usually around 100 Euro. So such big tournaments are not financial burden for organizers, it is not a problem to cover expenses of the organization with the income from entries and other sources. It can be expected that veterans table tennis will become even more popular and better organized on all levels.

***Published in Proceedings of International Science Congress –
Table Tennis and the Aging Population (Poreč, June 13th–14th
2009).***

ISBN 978-953-6378-99-9 (KF)