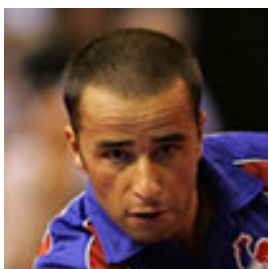


How to close the gap between the young and old TT generation

By Radivoj HUDETZ

ETTU Mag requested to some European old players, to express their opinion about the strong gap between the young and old TT generation and how the old players can still stay on the top.

Damien ELOI, 38 years old, twice European champion with French team



First of all today we can play longer because we have much better medical support than it was the case before. We older players are taking better care of our bodies, of practice adapted to our individual needs. Another reason is that we can earn good money by playing. I personally still enjoy very much playing, I enjoy going to practice, I enjoy to play matches. For this what I do enjoy I get good money so why should I quit? I have no problems with my body, I still enjoy playing, I still play on a good level and as long as it will stay in that way I will proceed playing! Concerning the youngsters I must say that table tennis is a sport in which only with fitness you can win - you have to have tactical skills, experience, mental firmness, you have to have good service and return and know how to use them in the best way. It takes time before you have all this. We in France have good juniors, they are on top in junior table tennis in Europe but when they come to play with best seniors they have no chance! I think you have to have 3 or 4 years among seniors to reach the level and become able to beat the best, but in that period many of good juniors are lost.

Petr KORBEL, 38 years old, European Championships bronze medallist in men singles



First of all I think there were many European players in the generation born between 1968 and 1972 who reached top positions in the World, it was a very strong generation. Afterwards there was not such a generation, only one or two top players came out of each following generation - why it is so I really do not know! We older players try to stay fit, try to avoid any injuries. In the meantime medicine made big progress, so it is for example possible to sanify injuries like meniscus or such in much shorter time than it was the case before. One reason is maybe that many top players want to become coaches, but the job of a coach is not well paid and his/her status is not very good. So if they can proceed playing and earning good money they play as long as possible.

In eastern European countries after the fall of socialism there is quite a new situation - the state is not paying as much money for sport as before, the young generation has now many new possibilities, there are even many new, attractive sports so there are not so many young talented players willing to work very hard. The young generation has today many other interests like computer, they simply live in other circumstances than we did. I saw it in my Czech Republic - before you came into a school, gave the children a table and balls and everybody wanted to start playing table tennis - today it is not so easy to find children who want to play table tennis, they have so many other choices. Besides we have a problem in table tennis - at the beginning it is relatively easy to make fast progress, but afterwards it becomes extremely difficult to climb to a higher level. Many young players give up at that point, they loose the confidence that they can make it at all and look for some other challenge. I think many of them simply do not have enough patience. Frankly, we older generation enjoy to stay on the top, we will not give up without fight.

Jorgen PERSSON, former European and World champion men singles, 41 years old



These older European players who are still on the top in Europe have big knowledge of the game and they also have been able to develop further their game, becoming older they have not stopped developing themselves. The table tennis game changed a lot but these older players are following the development of the game and their experience is their advantage. Coming out of junior category is quite a big step for young players in their effort to climb to the top among seniors. We, older players developed a complete game, we can play passive when it is needed, we have several different possibilities we can use in a match. The young players, it is specially the case in Europe, play only total attack, they have no defence, they can play only when they have initiative in the game. We are able to change our game, the young players in Europe mostly have no alternative for full attack. After our generation only few players like SAMSONOV and BOLL were able to climb to the top in the World, there were also able to develop a complete game, they have alternatives in their game. The fact that young players in Europe have mostly only one, attacking game make it easier for us older players to stay with our compete game and experience on the top. There were many very good young talented players at the time our generation came out of juniors who were able to push out the older generation immediately. As juniors our generation was closer to top seniors than the young generation nowadays. Now the young players are not so good and we are still on the top and playing longer than the generation before us did! I think when we came out of juniors we started immediately to beat the older generation and I think it was one of reasons why they stopped to play earlier. In Europe today you have on the top from younger generations only SAMSONOV, BOLL and MAZE - there are lot of other good players, but not top players, so we can still stay on the top.