

Referee Report

2011 National Championships and 2012 Cadet and Junior Team Trials

December 13-17, 2011

Virginia Beach, VA, USA

Location

I believe this was the first time in 20 years that the U.S. National Championships was not held in Las Vegas. A change in venue can be refreshing, and shows a long-standing host not to take our association's business for granted. However, working with a new location also has associated costs, with the need to re-establish things that were already built at the prior location. Low season in Virginia Beach is quieter than low season in Las Vegas.

Facility and Equipment

The competition was held in the Virginia Beach Convention Center, a facility that was built less than five years ago. It was apparent that the building was new in the lack of wear in the facility, but also with some annoyances such as nail tips peeking out of the floor. Three table tennis courts were not used because the floor was not flat. The concession stand was adequate; better than a typical hot dog/pizza stand, but not as good as a full restaurant or cafeteria. Lighting was acceptable, but not excellent.

Butterfly tables and nets were used, along with orange Nittaku 3-star premium balls.

Transportation and Accommodations

Norfolk International Airport was about 20 miles away from the hotels and facility. While this was a source of complaint by some, similar distances can be expected in many cities. For example the distance between downtown Chicago and O'Hare Airport is over 20 miles.

There were four official tournament hotels, which made shuttles to the convention center a bit more cumbersome as we needed to wait for the shuttle outdoors and stop at multiple hotels. However the shuttle ran at a reasonable frequency.

Schedule

The competition schedule was significantly different from previous National Championships and U.S. Opens. My primary goal was to provide the ideal schedule for spectators: If a table tennis fan comes to the Nationals as a spectator, I want them to be able to sit in the arena and watch great matches all day. If we don't put good matches in the arena, we may as well not have an arena.

Arena matches were heavily focused on Men's and Women's singles first; Cadet, Junior, Under-21 singles and Men's, Women's, and Mixed doubles second. Late round matches of other events such as hardbat were also played in the arena. The downtime in the arena was minimized.

To achieve this, a staggered schedule was used in Men's and Women's Singles starting with the second round. From the 8ths, all matches in Men's and Women's Singles were played in the arena, along with half of the Men's Singles 16ths. This requires additional work but I believe it is worth the effort and hope this kind of scheduling will be carried out in future Nationals and U.S. Opens.

Another goal was to maximize the number of matches umpired within the championship title events. The chief umpire and her deputy (Yelena Karshtedt and Mike Wetzel) provided umpires for:

- Men’s and Women’s Singles and Doubles, and Mixed Doubles – All elimination matches.
- Cadet and Junior Team Trials – The final round of qualifying matches, all group matches, and all final placement matches.

The other goals were to minimize schedule conflicts, and to ensure that no event would have two rounds back to back.

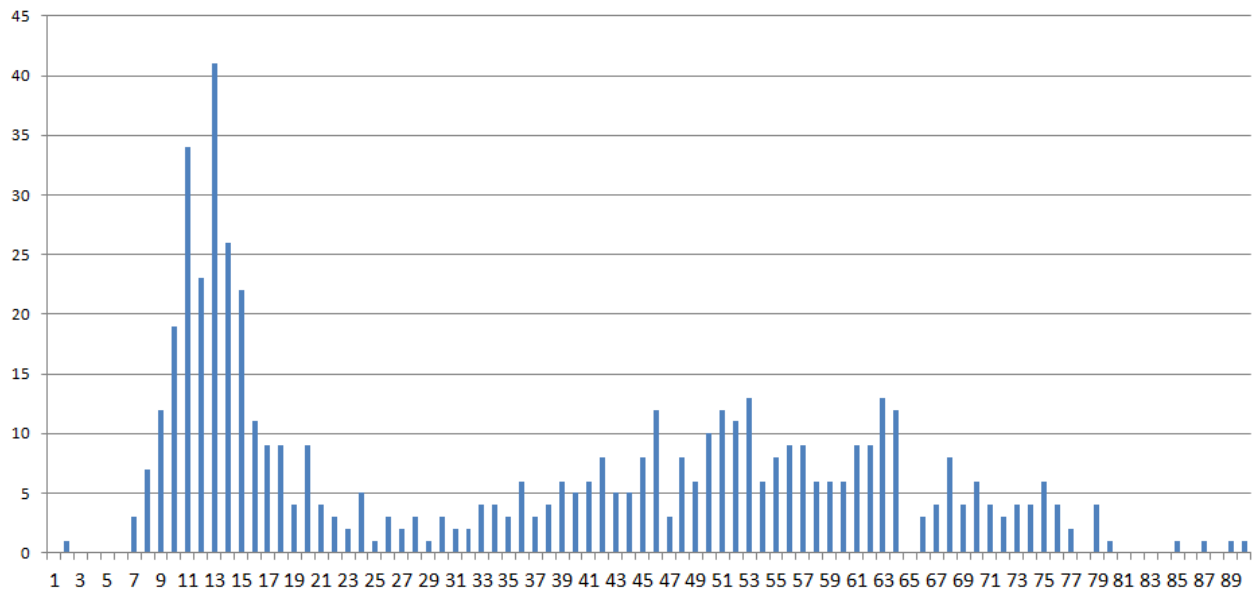
Draws

Draws for Men’s and Women’s Singles and Doubles, and Mixed Doubles, were made live on-site. About 15 players attended the live draws, and players stated that they were pleased to see the public draw.

Players

There were over 550 tournament entrants. This was lower than the previous year and it is difficult to gauge whether the reduction is due to the location or the current economic state. The number of entrants from New York was lower than I expected.

This chart shows the number of participants by age:



About 1/3 of the players were juniors. This is certainly a positive trend and I hope it continues. However there is a trough in the graph from ages 21 to 35 – coincidentally, an age range that is considered critical in marketing. By reading the entry form it is obvious that this tournament has little to offer players in that age range. There are few events that a 25-year-old rated in the 2300s is eligible to enter, compared to junior players, or senior players who may not even be interested in entering many events. The association will not attract these players (and their entry fees) without changes to the tournament format. These players are not contenders for national titles, but want to spend their week playing table tennis, not half a day playing table tennis and the rest of the week walking around. One

possibility may be to add a tiered, giant round robin event. To avoid schedule conflicts, entrants in this event would not be permitted to enter age-restricted events. Another option may be to add some higher rating events.

Peter Li won the Men's Singles title, and Ariel Hsing repeated as the Women's Singles champion. Also of note, Hollywood actor Adoni Maropis won the open hardbat competition. I noticed that our younger players have not been trained in ball selection.

I am pleased to report that no players were disqualified for misbehavior.

Broadcast

Streaming video covered courts 1 and 2 for three days of the competition.

Racket Testing

Due to a lack of qualified volunteers, Racket Control was not available for the first half of the tournament. For the latter part of the tournament, umpires performed racket control duties. Voluntary testing began Friday morning at 9:00am and compulsory testing began at 3:45pm, starting with the 8ths of Men's Singles, the quarterfinals of Women's Singles, and Cadet Boys' and Girls' Team Trials crossover matches. Blanket testing was performed through the conclusion of those events.

This was the first time that the RAE device was used to measure VOC emissions from rackets at a U.S. Nationals (it was used at the 2011 U.S. Open). Unfortunately several high level players, who presumably had never had a racket tested with the RAE device, failed the VOC test in voluntary or compulsory tests. 71 compulsory racket tests were performed with 2 failures, and 39 voluntary tests were performed with 8 failures.

Officials

In addition to the 24 full time U.S. umpires, there were 5 umpires from Japan, 3 from Canada, and 1 from Jamaica. A deputy referee was also from Canada. 2 umpires and one additional volunteer did extra duty as racket testers. As always, we are thankful for the help provided by all officials, and the support from other national associations.

Respectfully submitted,

Kagin Lee, Tournament Referee