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USA TABLE TENNIS

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World Table Tennis Championships

Zagreb, Croatia, May, 2007

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ERICA WU

by Tawny Banh

Erica Wu, born in 1996, is the only child of Peter Wu and Johan Pao. She is ranked third in girls under 12 and 14 in America, sporting a remarkable rating of 1821. Her most current achievements include winning the Girls' Under 18, 16, and 13 at the NATT Western Open, and first in Under 12 (boys and girls) and second in Under 18 Girls' at the John Schneider Memorial Open. Erica started playing at age eight, spending only one hour a week in her first year. From ages 9-10, she developed greater interest in the sport. Her style of play is a close-to-the-table, aggressive forehand loop and backhand hit and block.

Erica's parents, both actuaries, have given a lot to her formal training. So much so that her mom took an early retirement in order to drive Erica to and from practices (she primarily plays at the Los Angeles Table Tennis Club, but she is sometimes at Northridge). Erica plays three days during the week, for just one hour per day. On weekend days, however, she spends two hours. Though neither of Erica's parents are table tennis players, her mom is there to pick up balls at every practice, and has also taken her to Taiwan for training. Her dad, despite frequent travels, is supportive and readily gives advice concerning play. Erica has had many player-coaches: Crystal Huang, Tawny Banh, Rihong Huang, Yuyan Li, Dinh Nguyen, and Grace Lin.

Over the last couple of years, Erica has evolved from rubber on both sides of her bat, to medium pips on the backhand, then to short pips. Though changing was a challenge for her, it was necessary due to evolving sponsorships. With a current sponsorship from Butterfly, Erica is playing with Bryce on her forehand and Challenger Attack short pips on her backhand. She uses a Schlager Light blade. With this set-up, the ball goes deep on her loop and is very easy to control.

Erica says it's pretty cool being the only young girl at many tournaments. It makes her feel rather special because people notice kids more easily than adults. (She especially likes it when there is a crowd watching and cheering for her.) Future plans include being a U.S. Cadet Team member by age 12, and she hopes to earn a spot on the U.S. Junior Team by 15. Ultimately, she hopes to be an Olympian, playing doubles with Gao Jun.

Table Tennis isn't the only item on this young girl's horizon. She is an excellent student whose primary scholastic interest is writing, but she also enjoys nature and animals. Erica is a wonderful athlete; she enjoys soccer, basketball and volleyball. She also plays the piano and flute. One caveat: Erica doesn't like piano, but her mom says if she quits piano, she has to quit table tennis too.

Play, Erica, Play.



Age: 11
Hometown: Arcadia, CA
Highest Rating: 1907



2007 Mayors Cup Youth Table Tennis Championship

New York City, April 28

By Peeru Muhammad Pirzada and Ben Nisbet

American Youth Table Tennis Organization, a not-for-profit group dedicated to growing the sport of table tennis in New York City, teamed up with the New York City Sports Commission to create the First Annual 2007 Mayor's Cup Youth Table Tennis Championship in April of this year. This tournament was open to all New York City school children who play table tennis. Student athletes competed for the distinguished title of New York City Champion in the following singles events: elementary school, girls middle school, boys middle school, girls high school, boys high school.

The finals of the Mayor's Cup elementary event featured a tight match between Mustafa Abrams of Merrick Academy and Judah Dougal of PS 139. Abrams persevered in four games, with a balanced attack and superbly placed loops. In the high school boys singles, Chang Ming Huang of Newton High School successfully defended his number one seed position with a steady barrage of loops and counter attacks to outlast the fast-improving Emile Goldstein of Beacon High. The girls high school event finals featured a strong performance from the duo from Bard High School in which Riana Shaw defeated Shelly Loc in straight but closely played games.

As evening approached, Denis Polinskiy, the number one seed in the boys middle school event, squared off against Jamaal Abrams. This was a ferociously fought match that featured long rallies and counter loops. Polinskiy, who is coached by the former National Junior Coach of the Ukraine, Oleg Zalesskiy, persevered in four games. Not to be outdone, Anna Ho of Queens, currently ranked tenth in the USA in the Under 15



category, defeated Annie Gou to win the Mayor's Cup middle school girls event in a close and well-played match. Anna is coached by Hui Yah Lui, the current USA Table Tennis Coach of the Year.

In addition to the Mayor's Cup events, the Organization also invited after-school coaches to form teams to play in a school team event. By the end of the day, over 138 students from all over the city participated, making this into one of the larger youth table tennis tournaments held this year in the United States.

A special thanks to tournament referee, Richard Palmer; AYTTO coaches, Kelvin Puello and Genny Grabovskaya; Jeffrey Mohl and Ken Podziba of the New York City Sports Commission; John De Matteo, IS 126's Athletic Director; and Ruiz, IS 126's Facility Director. Also, the parents and the coaches deserve our recognition. Finally, thanks go to the twelve dedicated volunteers who truly made the tournament possible. To all the participants, keep playing table tennis, we look forward to making this event bigger and stronger in 2008.

Mr. Peeru Muhammad Pirzada is AYTTO's Director of Programs, while Mr. Ben Nisbet is the Founder and a board member. For more information on the Organization, please visit www.aytto.org