REFEREE REPORT

2008 Sunshine Coast Open

The inaugural Sunshine Coast Open Table Tennis Championships, held at the University of the Sunshine Coast Sports Stadium on Saturday 15 & Sunday 16 March, 2008, was very successful. More than eighty players from ten associations competed over the two days in almost thirty events, with several events attracting more than thirty entries.

The venue, the USC Sports Stadium, has a very large open floor space, about one-third of which was curtained off for the tournament, in front of a permanent grandstand. It would certainly be suitable for the staging of state or national championships, including the Australian Veterans.

Club members spent many hours prior to the weekend covering up the high level windows. The floor on the playing courts was excellent for table tennis. The ten courts were perhaps a little small in area and at most times could not be fully utilized for competition. However the spare courts, plus two more tables set up behind the dividing curtain, were used extensively for practice. The lighting was slightly below the minimum standard for table tennis but was generally quite satisfactory. Later afternoon sun prevented play on one table (#10) for a short period of time each day due to reflected glare. The stadium was advertised as being air-conditioned but this was not working throughout the weekend though air still circulated from the vents causing a small amount of movement of the ball on some courts.

The organizing committee did considerable work in preparation for the tournament, particularly with gaining sponsorship. The local council contributed a sizeable grant to pay for the hire of the venue while other sponsors ensured that prizemoney for the graded events was at least the equal of other Queensland tournaments. Unfortunately, due to other unexpected commitments, several key personnel were unavailable for all or parts of the tournament. This left much of the tournament conduct up to a small number of people who nevertheless worked very hard. Club members need to be encouraged to be more involved with assisting at future championships.

Catering is another area that needs to be addressed. The venue does not have its own canteen so that an outside vendor selling fast food from a van located in the car park was used. If the association can make alternative arrangements for the supply of suitable food and drinks, especially if possible inside the venue and for their own profit, this situation would greatly improve.

Most of the events and timetabling followed fairly conventional lines. Junior events were played as round robins, as were several of the events which had low entries. An innovation was to have three-player round robins as the first round of the Mens Open Singles. This was popular with the players but did cause problems as they could not start until after the Open Doubles events had finished. Numerous players who had either not entered the doubles or were knocked out early had to wait for long periods before able to start their singles round robin. If this system is retained, it is suggested that the Singles round robins be held prior to the start of the doubles events. The knockout section

of the Singles could then be held in conjunction with or after the doubles as players became available. Alternatively, the round robin matches could be played randomly when players are available but this is less advisable.

As is often the case when the Open events are the last to be decided on the Saturday night, very few spectators were present to see the finals of the Mens and Womens Singles. Given that the Sunday program was very big, it is suggested that consideration be given to holding one of the grades (eg A Reserve) on Saturday night. This would ensure more people were present during the final stages of the Open events, creating more atmosphere as well as enabling them to see the best players in action.

The Sunday program included the A Reserve, B and C Grade events together with the veterans events. This created many problems as numerous players were involved, and performed well, in many of these. Besides the large numbers of entries in the graded events, entries for the veterans events were also excellent. In future, if there is to be only one Veterans Doubles event, this should be played at the start of the programme, with singles matches started as players become available.

With sponsorship, the winners of the graded singles won as much prizemoney as some Open Singles winners do at other tournaments. However, several players were spoken to by this referee who is of the opinion they had entered a grade at least one below their actual standard. It is not believed they did this deliberately, rather due to their own perception of their ability or a lack of guidance by their home association in grading them accurately. All players spoken to accepted this opinion with grace, if not full agreement. Entries from numerous associations had not been countersigned by an association official and in many cases did not show the player's tournament grade - other associations were more diligent in these aspects.

Many players, both local and visiting, were very obliging when asked to umpire matches in addition to the "loser umpire" system. Mick McShane attended on Saturday afternoon, having travelled from Brisbane of his own accord while Stanley Chan, Greg Dinsey and Kenneth Wong (all State Umpires) and Mathew Carter all umpired various finals.

Overall, the Sunshine Coast Table Tennis Club are to be congratulated on their first Open tournament. When word gets to other players and if the club can continue to build on this excellent foundation, this tournament can become a major event for years to come.

Dave Delpratt (Referee)
20/3/08