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ALL INTERNATIONAL  
TABLE TENNIS NEWS

5

**MIMO ITO**

**MADE HISTORY  
IN GERMANY**

**P.12**



**ITTF LEGENDS TOUR**

**JEAN-MI WAS THE "BEST OF THE BEST"  
THIS TIME.**

**P.07**



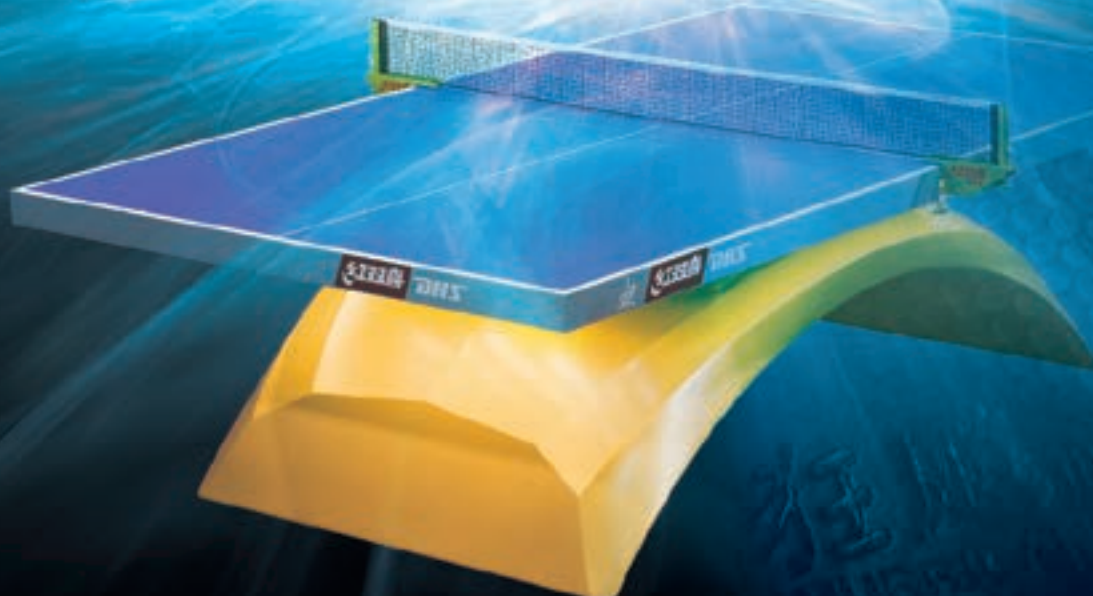


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## WELCOME TO OUR OFFICIAL PING MAGAZINE, ONE WHICH VISITS THE FOUR CORNERS OF THE WORLD.

Read about what happened in the table tennis world since our last issue.

In a few days the QOROS 2015 World Championships will commence; alongside the Olympic Games, it is the greatest event in our sport. It is the tournament that is steeped in tradition. Comparatively, the Olympic Games, which first saw table tennis staged in Seoul in 1988, is a relative infant.

Always at a World Championships there are moments of sheer drama, memorable matches that are impinged in the mind for eternity.

Who will ever forget the golden era of now some two decades ago when Europe and Asia fought for the Men's Singles top prize? Battles such as the 1987 final when China's **Jiang Jialiang** beat Sweden's **Jan-Ove Waldner** are overdue.

Ten years later **Jan-Ove Waldner** was to win in Manchester but since then, apart from the remarkable achievement of Austria's Werner Schlager in 2003, the top step of the podium has always belonged to China.

In Suzhou can **Timo Boll**, **Dimitrij Ovtcharov** or **Marcos Freitas** emulate the efforts of Werner Schlager, can they cause upsets? Further don't forget **Vladimir Samsonov**, beaten by **Jan-Ove Waldner** in the 1997 final; now 38 years old but earlier this year the Men's Singles winner on the GAC Group ITTF World Tour in Qatar.

Only one year to go and he will be able to join the ITTF Legends Tour! An event growing rapidly in status, recently saw **Jean-Michel Saive** beat both **Jan-Ove Waldner** and **Jörgen Persson** on their home soil in Halmstad.

Present in Halmstad, like a good wine maturing with age, **Jean-Michel Saive** will be making his 24th consecutive appearance in a World Championships. Conversely another will be making her first, Japan's 14 year old **Mima Ito**, who became the youngest ever Women's Singles winner on the ITTF World Tour when recently she won in Germany.

A young player with a glittering career ahead; perhaps she can look to **Jean-Michel Saive**. He was 13 years old when he made his debut in Tokyo in 1983; ten years later he reached the final.

Enjoy Suzhou, the city where history will be written.  
**Philippe Saive**

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# SUMMARY

## ITTF LEGENDS TOUR P.07

The atmosphere cordial but the competitive edge undiminished, Belgium's **Jean-Michel Saive** beat the hometown hero, **Jörgen Persson**, to win the ITTF-Legends Tour tournament in the Swedish city of Halmstad on the evening of Wednesday 4<sup>th</sup> March.



## GAC GROUP WORLD TOUR, GERMAN OPEN, BREMEN (GER) - SUPER SERIES

### P.10

Elevated to the top spot on the Men's World Ranking earlier this month as a direct result of his success in Kuwait; China's **Ma Long** won his second GAC Group 2015 ITTF World Men's Singles title of the year, when...





## GAC GROUP WORLD TOUR, QATAR OPEN, DOHA (QAT) - SUPER SERIES

**P.16**

The winner in 2003, once again **Vladimir Samsonov** of Belarus stood proudly on the top step of the podium in Doha. On the evening of Sunday 22nd February in the splendours of the Aspire Complex, he won the Men's Singles title at the GAC Group 2015...



## GAC GROUP WORLD TOUR, KUWAIT OPEN, KUWAIT CITY (KUW) - SUPER SERIES

**P.22**

Successful in Kuwait in 2007, when he beat compatriot **Ma Lin** in the final to win his first ever ITTF World Tour Men's Singles title; once again, eight years later, **Ma Long** enjoyed success in the Gulf State.



## ITTF-EUROPEAN TOP 16 CUP, BAKU (AZE)

**P.26**

A surprise penultimate round defeat at the hands of Denmark's Michael Maze one year ago, when the tournament was staged in Lausanne, Germany's **Dimitrij Ovtcharov** made no mistake one year later at the NN Table Tennis Club 2015 Europe Top 16 in Baku, Azerbaijan.

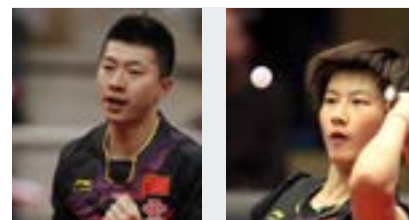
GAC GROUP WORLD TOUR,  
HUNGARIAN OPEN, BUDAPEST  
(HUN) - CHALLENGE SERIES **P.32**

GAC GROUP WORLD TOUR,  
NIGERIA OPEN, LAGOS (NGR) -  
CHALLENGE SERIES **P.34**

GAC GROUP WORLD TOUR,  
SPANISH OPEN, ALMERIA  
(ESP) - MAJOR SERIES **P.36**

ITTF-AFRICA CHAMPIONSHIPS,  
CAIRO (EGY) **P.38**

GAC GROUP WORLD TOUR,  
ASIA CUP 2015 **P.40**



## CLASSEMENT MONDIAL/BELGE MASCULIN & FÉMININ

**P.42>45**



**PLEIN CADRE**



**FROM BUENOS  
AIRES TO HAITI,  
THE WORLD IS  
CELEBRATING  
WORLD TABLE  
TENNIS DAY IN ITS  
OWN UNIQUE WAY.**

The 6 April 2015, marks the first ever World Table Tennis day which rejoices the sport of table tennis, a true sport for all. Over 100 events in more than 50 countries across the world are being held today, with one common theme - Table Tennis for Everyone, Everywhere!



ITTF LEGENDS TOUR

# HOMETOWN HERO BEATEN AT FINAL HURDLE BUT HALMSTAD CELEBRATES BELGIAN SUCCESS

The atmosphere cordial but the competitive edge undiminished, Belgium's **Jean-Michel Saive** beat the hometown hero, **Jörgen Persson**, to win the ITTF-Legends Tour tournament in the Swedish city of Halmstad on the evening of Wednesday 4<sup>th</sup> March.

At the final hurdle, **Jean-Michel Saive** emerged victorious in four games (11-8, 4-11, 11-9, 11-7). Both present at the recent GAC Group 2015 ITTF World Tour Qatar Open in Doha, arguably gave the two finalists the edge over their illustrious rivals.

## ROAD TO FINAL

Nevertheless, for both their path to the gold medal contest was by no means without moments when the eventual decision was in some doubt.

At the quarter-final stage **Jörgen Persson** accounted for Germany's **Jörg Roskopf** in four games (12-10, 11-9, 9-11, 11-3) and thus repeated the success he enjoyed when they last met on the international scene. They confronted each other at the Liebherr 2004 World Team Championships in Doha when **Jörgen Persson** had also emerged victorious.

A place in the final reserved **Jörgen Persson** overcame Frenchman **Jean-Philippe Gatien**, again in a four games duel (11-9, 10-12, 11-6, 11-6), to reserve his place in the final.



## REVERSAL AND REPEAT

Meanwhile, in the opposite half of the draw, at the semi-final stage **Jean-Michel Saive** overcame Sweden's **Jan-Ove Waldner** (11-6, 13-15, 11-8, 12-10), to reverse one memorable decision and repeat another.

In the inaugural ITTF Legends Tour tournament staged in Jemeppe-sur-Meuse, last May, **Jan-Ove Waldner** had beaten **Jean-Michel Saive** in the final; however 20 years earlier **Jean-Michel Saive** had enjoyed what may be considered his greatest hour.

He beat **Jan-Ove Waldner** in Birmingham's Indoor Arena in central England, to be anointed European champion.

**"Some 1,200 spectators were present."**



## SEEKING REVENGE

*"I've prepared for this tournament because even if we enjoy being together, we all want to win", said **Jean-Michel Saive**. "I know that the other players consider that I was supposed to be the favourite because I'm still fighting on the ITTF World Tour but as you saw I lost in front of my own crowd in May."*

Wounded; in Halmstad, **Jean-Michel Saive** had an extra motivation and most certainly he had taken the tournament very seriously.

## WELL PREPARED

*"I wanted to get my revenge; to be fit and prepared for this event, I decided not to play the Belgium Championship for the first time in 32 years", added **Jean-Michel Saive**. "After 25 Belgian titles, I preferred to focus on winning my first ITTF Legends Tour tournament."*

Simply the character of **Jean-Michel Saive** is underlined, he enjoys the battle, he enjoys the heat of competition. Will he ever change? I hope not.

## TURNED BACK CLOCK

The win recorded by **Jean-Michel Saive** turned back the clock; it was same one round earlier when **Jan-Ove Waldner** played China's **Jiang Jialiang**.

He reversed the decision of the final of the Men's Singles event at the 1987 World Championships when he had lost to the man who at the time was the defending champion.

*"It is amazing to see so many kids coming and watch; this is also the target of the Tour and I'm glad for it", said **Jan-Ove Waldner**. "On the sport point of view, I was so happy to play against **Jiang Jialiang** because like many fans, the 1987 World final was a wonderful final; I wanted to play one more time against him."*

**"...thank you for all the positive moments..."**





■ “Next time I’ll win!”

## PROMISE MADE

Defeat for **Jiang Jialiang** but clearly the man who celebrated his 51<sup>st</sup> birthday during his stay in Sweden had enjoyed the experience and was delighted to re-kindle an old rivalry

*“Guys, I want to thank you for all the positive moments we spend and share together”,* was the toast of **Jiang Jialiang** at the ensuing dinner. I must also admit that I’m your best fan!

Furthermore, he made a promise. “Next time I’ll win!” he concluded.

## SENSE OF SATISFACTION

Meanwhile, for **Philippe Saive**, all the time and effort had proved most worthwhile; the headmaster was proud of the occasion.

*“When you look at the people, they are so happy to share these moments of emotion, nostalgia and respect for the history of our sport”,* he reflected. “We’ll work even harder to make more events possible.”

A success, some 1,200 spectators were present.



## RESULTS

### Semi-finals

✓ Jörgen Persson					3-1		
✗ Jean-Philippe Gatien							
11-9	10-12	11-6	11-6	/	/	/	
✓ Jean-Michel Saive					3-1		
✗ Jan-Ove Waldner							
11-6	13-15	11-8	12-10	/	/	/	

### Finale

✓ Jean-Michel Saive					3-1	
✗ Jörgen Persson						
11-8	4-11	11-9	11-6	/	/	/





GAC GROUP WORLD TOUR, GERMAN OPEN, BREMEN (GER) - SUPER SERIES

## DÜSSELDORF DECISION REVERSED, MA LONG LEVELS DUELS ON GERMAN SOIL

Elevated to the top spot on the Men's World Ranking earlier this month as a direct result of his success in Kuwait; China's **Ma Long** won his second GAC Group 2015 ITTF World Men's Singles title of the year, when he emerged successful the German city of Bremen on Sunday 22<sup>nd</sup> March.

At the final hurdle he beat Chinese National Team compatriot, **Zhang Jike**, the no.2 seed, to secure the top prize. In a thrilling seven games duel, **Ma Long** recovered from a three games to one deficit secure victory (11-9, 7-11, 8-11, 14-16, 11-6, 14-12, 11-8).

### BIG FIGHT

*"It was an extremely close match, with every single point being a big fight", said **Ma Long**. "The last time I played him in Germany I lost which was very disappointing, so I am happy that we are now one-one; this time I can go home happy."*

At the Liebherr 2014 Men's World Cup staged in Düsseldorf; **Zhang Jike** had beaten **Ma Long** by the minimal two point margin in the deciding seventh game (8-11, 11-4, 13-11, 7-11, 2-11, 11-5, 12-10).

*"...I had to calm down and do the simple things well...."*

### CONFIDENCE BOOST

*"This victory gives me massive confidence for the upcoming World Championships", added **Ma Long**. "**Zhang Jike** will be one of my biggest rivals there, so knowing I can beat him gives me great belief that I can win my first ever Men's Singles World Championships title."*

### PREVIOUS MEETINGS

It was the 12<sup>th</sup> time that **Ma Long** and **Zhang Jike** had met in a World ranking event; it was the eighth time that **Ma Long** had won.

**Zhang Jike** won the first meeting when they appeared in the Junior Boys' Singles event at the New Zealand Junior and Ca-





det Open in 2003. **Ma Long** then won the next five encounters before in more recent times honours have been shared.

In addition to the recent success in Düsseldorf, **Zhang Jike** won when the met in the Men's Singles final at the GAC Group 2012 ITTF World Tour Slovenian Open and one year later at the GAC Group 2013 ITTF World Tour Kuwait Open.

Conversely, **Ma Long** won at that Asian Championships staged in Busan in 2012 and at the GAC Group 2013 ITTF World Tour Grand Finals.

## APPEARANCES

It was for **Ma Long** his 29<sup>th</sup> appearance in an ITTF World Tour Men's Singles event and his 19<sup>th</sup> win; for **Zhang Jike** it was his ninth final, his fourth runners up spot.

**"... although in reality the balance was in favour of Zhang Jike."**

## STATUS PREVAILS, MA LONG AND ZHANG JIKE BOOK FINAL PLACES, GERMAN HOPES END

China's **Ma Long** and **Zhang Jike**, the respective top two seeds in the Men's Singles event at the GAC Group 2015 ITTF World Tour German Open in Bremen, emerged successful at the semi-final stage on the morning of Sunday 22<sup>nd</sup> March.

**Ma Long** ended the hopes of the host nation by recovering from a two games to nil deficit to beat **Dimitrij Ovtcharov**, the no.4 seed and defending champion (8-11, 9-11, 11-6, 11-8, 11-4, 11-4), before **Zhang Jike** booked his place in the final. He overcame colleague, **Yan An**, the no.6 seed.

## FULL DISTANCE DUEL

However, it was by no means a comfortable passage for **Zhang Jike**.

The Olympic and World champion needed the full seven games to secure victory (8-11, 11-8, 11-3, 11-5, 9-11, 6-11, 11-7).



## MADE MISTAKES

*"In the first game, I was leading 7-3 but I played in a hurry and ended up making a lot of mistakes", said **Ma Long**. "In the second game, it was 9-9 and I lost, which can be normal in a tight game; when I was nil-two down, I had to calm down and do the simple things well."*

Seemingly, he did the simple things very well.

## PREVIOUS MEETINGS

It was the eleventh time that **Ma Long** and **Dimitrij Ovtcharov** had met on the international scene; it was the eleventh time that **Ma Long** had emerged successful.

However, previous contest between **Yan An** and **Zhang Jike** had resulted in two wins apiece, although in reality the balance was in favour of **Zhang Jike**.

**Zhang Jike** beat **Yan An** on the first two occasions that they met. He won on the ITTF World Tour in the Men's Singles event at the Harmony China Open in 2011 and the





## “Mima Ito is 14 years and 152 days”

following year in Slovenia. However, the most recent meeting had gone in favour of **Yan An**. He overcame **Zhang Jike** at the GAC Group 2013 ITTF World Tour Korean Air Korea Open.

The duel in Korea was their fourth meeting in World ranking events; the one other was earlier in 2013 when **Zhang Jike** had been forced to withdraw at the end of the third game of their quarter-final Men's Singles encounter.

## APPEARANCES

Meanwhile for **Ma Long** it was the 40<sup>th</sup> time he had appeared in an ITTF World Tour Men's Singles semi-final, the 29<sup>th</sup> time he had won and progressed to the final; for **Zhang Jike** it was his 19<sup>th</sup> appearance in the penultimate round but for an Olympic and World champion, only the ninth time had emerged successful.



Conversely for **Dimitrij Ovtcharov** it was his eighth Men's Singles semi-final defeat in 19 appearances; for **Yan An** his fourth loss in seven penultimate round visits.

## RECORDS SET WHATEVER THE OUTCOME, MIMA ITO BECOMES YOUNGEST EVER WINNER

In September 2011, when only ten years old, **Mima Ito** became the youngest ever player to win a Junior Girls' Singles title on the ITTF World Tour, when she emerged successful in Chinese Taipei.

Now less than four years later, **Mima Ito** is once again breaking records; on Sunday 22<sup>nd</sup> March she won the Women's Singles title at the GAC Group 2015 ITTF World Tour German Open in Bremen and thus becomes the youngest ever winner in the history of the ITTF World Tour.

*“I am shocked and ecstatic to win such a big title at my age.”*

At the final hurdle she beat the host nation's **Petrissa Solja** (9-11, 13-11, 7-11, 11-7, 12-12, 12-10) in a contest that whatever the outcome made history.

## FIRST DEFEAT

It was the first time that two qualifiers had contested an ITTF World Tour Women's Singles final; furthermore, had **Petrissa Solja** won, she would have become the first player in the history of the ITTF World Tour to win a hat-trick of available titles.

Earlier in the tournament, she had won the Under 21 Women's Singles title and with **Shan Xiaona** had donned the Women's Doubles crown; defeat was only experienced in her 15<sup>th</sup> and concluding match of the tournament.

## SURPASSED GUO YUE

Thus **Mima Ito** surpassed the achievement of China's **Guo Yue**.

She who won the Women's Singles title at the Japan Open in Kobe when 15 years and 66 days old. **Mima Ito** is 14 years 152 days old.

## YOUNGEST MAN

The youngest winner of an ITTF World Tour Men's Singles title is China's **Yu Ziyang** and again there is a Japanese connection.

He was 16 years and 30 days old when he won in Yokohama at the GAC Group 2014 ITTF World Japan Open.



## CLEAR AMBITIONS

*"I am shocked and ecstatic to win such a big title at my age", said **Mima Ito**. "It's just the beginning for me, I now need to continue playing at this high level and win many more titles."*

An outstanding performance but **Mima Ito** is clearly not prepared to rest on her laurels, she has clear goals.

*"I now want to qualify for the Japanese team for the Rio 2016 Olympic Games and do well", added **Mima Ito**. It will then give me the experience I need of realize my dream of gold in the singles and team event at my home Olympics, Tokyo 2020."*

**"...when Guo Yue won in Japan in 2003, she was 15 years."**

## HOME SUPPORT

Defeat for **Petrissa Solja** but most certainly she won the hearts and admiration of the crowd for her efforts. Virtually **Mima Ito** had to play two opponents!

*"The big crowd cheering for Solja did not affect me", added **Mima Ito**. "I just went out and played my game, and stuck to my tactics; it was very cool to play in front of all these people, and I can't wait to do it again."*



It was for both **Mima Ito** and **Petrissa Solja**, their first every meeting in a World ranking event and their first appearance in an ITTF World Tour Women's Singles final.

Shocks Continue **Petrissa Solja** and **Mima Ito** Reach Women's Singles Final

Against all expectations or perhaps judging by the results of the previous two days to be anticipated; the host nation's **Petrissa Solja** and Japan's **Mima Ito** emerged successful at the semi-final stage of the Women's Singles event at the GAC Group 2015 ITTF World Tour German Open in Bremen on Sunday 22<sup>nd</sup> March.

Neither seeded; both players having been required to compete in the qualification rounds, **Petrissa Solja** beat China's **Gu Ruochen** (11-6, 11-5, 11-9, 6-11, 7-11, 11-8) before **Mima Ito** overcame Singapore's **Feng Tianwei**, the no.2 seed (13-11, 11-7, 11-6, 11-7).

Quite astounding results; even more astounding when taken into consideration that fact that **Petrissa Solja** is only 21 years old, having celebrated her birthday earlier this month, whilst **Mima Ito** is a mere 14 years of age.

## GUO YUE STILL YOUNGEST

However, **Mima Ito** is not the youngest player ever to reach a singles final on the ITTF World Tour; that record still belongs to **Guo Yue** of China. **Guo Yue** was 14 years and 130 days old when she was beaten in the Women's Singles in Denmark on Sunday 24<sup>th</sup> November 2002 by her compatriot **Zhang Yining**; **Mima Ito** is 14 years and 152 days.

However, if **Mima Ito** can win the title in Bremen, she will be the youngest ever; when **Guo Yue** won in Japan in 2003, she was 15 years and 66 days old.

## QUALIFIERS

Two players who negotiated the qualification stage will contest the final; a scenario, to the best of my knowledge, that has never happened in either a Men's Singles or Women's Singles event on the ITTF World.

Furthermore, for **Petrissa Solja** it means she has reached all three possible finals. Two days earlier she won the Under 21 Women's Singles event and also she is in the final of the Women's Doubles event with **Shan Xiaona**.





***"This is a dream that I am in a Super Series final in my home country..."***

## BERLIN

Such a situation has never arisen previously on the ITTF World Tour where one player has reached all three possible finals.

In 2010 in Berlin China's **Feng Yalan** won both the Women's Singles and Under 21 Women's Singles events but with **Mu Zi** lost to Italy's **Wenling Tan Monfardini** and **Nikoleta Stefanova** in the concluding Women's Doubles preliminary round.



## STARTED WELL

*"I started the match very well; I was well on top during the first three games", said **Petrissa Solja**. "I then lost the next two games, as she changed her tactics."*

A change of plan but **Petrissa Solja** found answers.

*"In the sixth game, I managed to work out how to counter these tactics; also I became too passive and I decided that I needed to be more aggressive, which worked", added **Petrissa Solja**. "At three-two and 8-all I felt I had no pressure, as I was a game ahead and she was the one that was on her final chance."*

It was a situation where being so close the finishing line, pressure can mount and the number 11 appears the hardest number of all to achieve; not in the case of **Petrissa Solja**, she afforded **Gu Ruochen** no more points.

## STILL DREAMING

*"This is a dream that I am in a Super Series final in my home country; it is nice that all my family and friends are here to watch the best tournament of my life", added **Petrissa Solja**. "I have now played 13 matches; adrenaline is the only thing keeping going."*

Furthermore, she has won all 13 matches!





GAC GROUP WORLD TOUR, GERMAN OPEN, BREMEN (GER) - SUPER SERIES



GAC GROUP WORLD TOUR, QATAR OPEN, DOHA (QAT) - SUPER SERIES

## TITLE REGAINED, ONCE AGAIN VLADIMIR SAMSONOV SUCCEEDS IN QATAR, EXTENDS RECORD

The winner in 2003, once again **Vladimir Samsonov** of Belarus stood proudly on the top step of the podium in Doha. On the evening of Sunday 22<sup>nd</sup> February in the splendours of the Aspire Complex, he won the Men's Singles title at the GAC Group 2015 ITTF World Tour Qatar Open beating Germany's **Dimitrij Ovtcharov**, the top seed at the final hurdle.

Occupying the fourth seeded position in the draw; a five games success was posted to close the curtain on the six day tournament (11-9, 11-8, 15-13, 6-11, 11-9).

### CLOSE GAMES

Close games started proceedings, with **Vladimir Samsonov** emerging successful in the opening two tense opening exchanges.

In the third game he established a four point lead but the gap was reduced to one point at 9-8; he called "Time Out". He won the next point on his own service but then lost the next two; he held games points at 11-10 and 12-10, then again at 13-12.

### SERVICE

**Dimitrij Ovtcharov** once again saved the game point. Throughout **Vladimir Samsonov** had served with his forehand very much from the forehand side of the table towards the forehand of **Dimitrij Ovtcharov**.

At 14-13 he reverted to a trademark backhand service, he served across the diagonal; the change brought success, a strong first attack from the forehand and a three games to nil lead was established.





## RESPONSE

Immediately **Dimitrij Ovtcharov** responded to win the fourth game but **Vladimir Samsonov** was not to be denied.

In the fifth game, he established a 7-3 lead; **Dimitrij Ovtcharov**, to his great credit fought, he levelled at 9-all but at 10-9 it was match point to **Vladimir Samsonov**.

The chance was taken; the **Vladimir Samsonov** of the late 1990s was on show in Doha, the era when he stood at no.1 on the World rankings; the title was secured with a high quality performance against a very high quality opponent.

## IMPORTANT STAGES

*"I was down in the first game and won but I think more importantly I was 4-8 behind in the third game and won; that was the crucial game in the match", said **Vladimir Samsonov**. "Serving I made changes but the serve I used at the end of the third game was not very good, I served long to try to surprise him but the serve was too slow.*

Nevertheless it produced the desired result; however there were some anxious moments before victory was clinched.

*"In the fifth game when **Dima** caught up after I led 7-3 and 9-5, I did become nervous", smiled **Vladimir Samsonov** who at 38 years of age possessed the necessary experience to deal with the tense situation.*



*"I am really grateful to him; he fixed me up perfectly."*

## COLLEAGUES

*"Dima and myself, we know each other so well, we both play for the same club in the Russian League", added **Vladimir Samsonov**. "I wanted to win, I won in 2003 but I didn't expect to win this year; Qatar is always a strong tournament and this year I played well from the very start."*

## PHYSIOTHERAPIST SUPERB

Furthermore, he had some local help for which he was extremely grateful.

*"I had some problems with my hip, I went to see the physiotherapist here and he was outstanding", continued **Vladimir Samsonov**. "I am really grateful to him; he fixed me up perfectly."*

The physiotherapist in question is **Rosen Georgiev Aleksandrov**, he is based at the Aspire Complex where the tournament was staged and works only for the Qatar Table Tennis Association.

## GREAT TO WIN

Delighted with the treatment he received and understandably delighted with the outcome. *"I'm really happy, it's great to have won", concluded **Vladimir Samsonov**.*

A fine effort from **Vladimir Samsonov** and it was a fine effort from both finalists in the manner they conducted themselves.

## SHAKE HANDS

Two sportsman in the true sense competed; at the end of the contest it was a correct handshake arms around each other in respect of each other's talents.

Great credit to **Vladimir Samsonov** and





**Dimitrij Ovtcharov**, they upheld the best values of table tennis, the best values of sport; long may they grace the table tennis arenas of the world.

## RECORD

It was the 38<sup>th</sup> time that **Vladimir Samsonov** had appeared in an ITTF World Tour Men's Singles final and the 27<sup>th</sup> time he had won; it is a record no player can equal.

The nearest is China's now retired **Wang Liqin** who appeared in 31 Men's Singles finals and won 21 times.

However, if he is to match the record of **Zhang Yining**, **Vladimir Samsonov** must continue practising and competing.



She appeared in 31 ITTF World Tour Women's Singles Finals and won an incredible 29 times!

## DIMITRIJ OVTCHAROV AND VLADIMIR SAMSONOV REACH MEN'S SINGLES FINAL

Germany's **Dimitrij Ovtcharov** and **Vladimir Samsonov** of Belarus were the players to succeed at the semi-final stage of the Men's Singles event at the GAC Group 2015 ITTF World Tour Qatar Open in Doha on the afternoon on Sunday 22<sup>nd</sup> February.

Impressive, **Dimitrij Ovtcharov**, the top seed, accounted for Portugal's **Marcos Freitas**, the no.3 seed (11-2, 10-12, 11-9, 11-6, 9-11, 11-8), before **Vladimir Samsonov** followed suit.

Occupying the no.4 seeded position in the draw, he overcame Chinese Taipei's **Chuang Chih-Yuan**, the no.2 seed (13-11, 14-12, 11-5, 11-7).

## CONFIDENT START

Confident, **Dimitrij Ovtcharov** made the best possible start; he commanded the first game before **Marcos Freitas** responded to clinch a close second game.

In the third game **Dimitrij Ovtcharov** held a lead but that was reduced to one point in his favour at 9-8. Sitting courtside, **Jörg Rosskopf**, the German National Coach, called "Time Out".

The break proved a wise move; **Dimitrij Ovtcharov** secured the next point and after one game point had been saved by **Marcos Freitas**, it was success and a two games to one lead.

## PORTUGUESE SUPPORT

A boost for **Dimitrij Ovtcharov**, he captured the fourth game with a degree of comfort and continued in a positive manner to lead 9-6 in the fifth. Urged for a group of ardent Portuguese fans in the crowd, **Marcos Freitas** recovered to win five points in a row to reduce the match deficit to one game.

However despite the best efforts of those flying the Portuguese flag in the tiered seating there was to be no dramatic recovery; to his credit, **Dimitrij Ovtcharov** re-grouped, mind, body and soul came together, the sixth game and a place in the final was secured.

## CLOSE GAMES

A contest full of entertaining top spin rallies; it was the same in the contest between **Vladimir Samsonov** and **Chuang Chih-Yuan**.

**Vladimir Samsonov** captured a close first game, in the second he saved game point before holding 13-12 lead; he elected for "Time Out"; it proved a wise move, he secured the next point and held a two games to nil lead.

## ABSORBED TOP SPIN ATTACKING PLAY

Two close games, playing in his trademark elegant manner, **Vladimir Samsonov** secure the third game with a degree of comfort being able to absorb the fast attacking play from **Chuang Chih-Yuan** and turn to his advantage.

Now very much in the ascendancy and in control, **Vladimir Samsonov** established a 6-3 lead in the fourth game.

**Chuang Chih** trying to move around his backhand to execute a forehand top spin stroke was caught off balance on more





than one occasion; at 1-7 he held three match points. He needed just one opportunity; a place in the final was seized.

## HISTORY FAVOURED DIMITRIJ OVTCHAROV

Prior to the contest in Doha, the odds were heavily stacked in favour of **Dimitrij Ovtcharov**; he had played **Marcos Freitas** on four previous occasions in World ranking events and he had won on all four meetings.

Notably he had beaten **Marcos Freitas** just over two weeks earlier when the pair met in the final of the Men's event at the NN Table Tennis Club 2015 Europe Top 16; he won in a seven games duel.

Prior to that meeting; in 2005 **Dimitrij Ovtcharov** had emerged successful in their Boys' Singles duel at the World Junior Championship, before once again being victorious when they met in the final of the Men's Singles event in 2011 at the Brail Open. The one further engagement had been at the Liebherr 2012 World Team Championships in Dortmund when in **Dimitrij Ovtcharov** had prevailed in five games.

## FAMILIAR FOES

**Dimitrij Ovtcharov** and **Marcos Freitas** were no strangers to either other; neither were **Vladimir Samsonov** and **Chuang Chih-Yuan**. They had first met on the in-

ternational scene in 2004 when **Chuang Chih-Yuan** had emerged successful but since that date the balance has been with **Vladimir Samsonov**. He had won six of the next nine meetings.

However, on the most recent occasion that the two had met, the ZEN-NOH 2014 ITTF World Team Championships, **Chuang Chih-Yuan** had prevailed in six games.

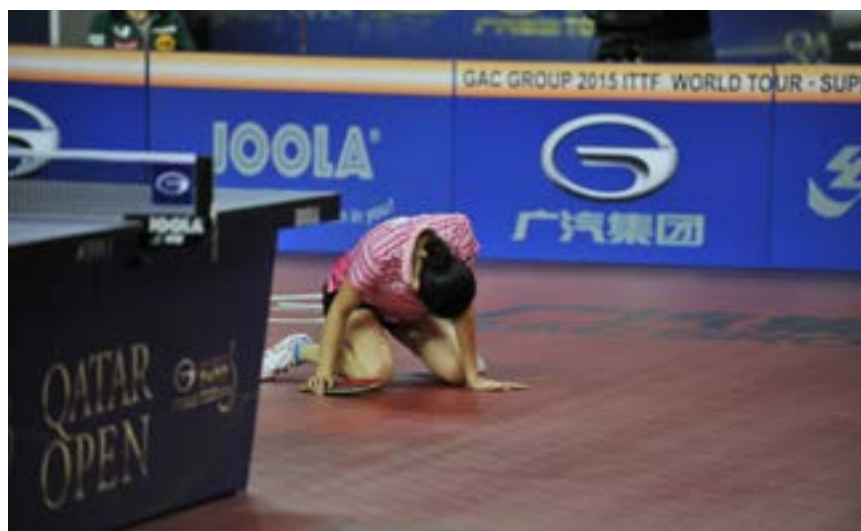
## APPEARANCES

Overall it was for **Vladimir Samsonov** no less than his 47<sup>th</sup> appearance in a Men's Singles ITTF World Tour semi-final; previously he had emerged successful on 37 occasions, a quite remarkable record.

Meanwhile, for **Chuang Chih-Yuan** he was competing in his 28<sup>th</sup> such contest; prior to Doha, he had been victorious in the penultimate round 14 times.

## ELIZABETA SAMARA UPSETS SEEDING, CLINCHES QATAR WOMEN'S SINGLES CROWN IN STYLE

Maintaining the very best traditions of Romanian excellence, **Elizabeta Samara** won the Women's Singles title at the GAC Group 2015 ITTF World Tour Qatar Open in Doha on the evening of Sunday 22<sup>nd</sup> February.



Furthermore, she caused somewhat of a surprise to arrest the coveted title.

Occupying the no.7 seeded position in the competition; she upset the order of merit by beating Germany's **Han Ying**, the no.3 seed at the final hurdle. Impressively, **Elizabeta Samara** succeeded in four straight games 11-6, 12-10, 11-6, 11-9).

## CONFIDENT

Displaying a confident approach against the defensive skills of **Han Ying**, **Elizabeta Samara** secured the first two games, the second after trailing 6-9. Patience was a hallmark of the Romanian's efforts as she waited for the opportunity, not trying to blast her opponent into the desert sands.

However, when the chance arose, she was unrelenting and was not going to let the prey off the hook.

## TIME FOR ADVICE

In the third game, she established a 7-5 lead, on occasions forcing **Han Ying** to attack as authority on the situation was gradually exerted. A crucial stage of the match had been reached, **Jie Schöpp**, the Head Coach of the German Women's Team, sitting courtside in the role of advisor, called "Time Out".

Advice was administered but equally there was advice from the vastly experienced Viorel Filimon for the in-form **Elizabeta Sa-**

**mara**, who was very much in the ascendancy. Positive when the occasion demanded, **Elizabeta Samara** surrendered just one more point to secure the third game; she was honing in on victory.

## SECOND ROUND NOT REPEATED

It was to some extent in the first three games, the second round match against Monaco's **Yang Xiaoxin** repeated. On that occasion, **Han Ying** had lost the first three games and trailed 4-8 in the fourth; incredibly she recovered to secure a seven games success.

Against **Elizabeta Samara** it was to be a different story; after a series of energy sapping long rallies, at 10-7 in the fourth game, **Elizabeta Samara** held three match points.

**Han Ying**, refusing to concede fought, more long rallies; she won the next two points, **Elizabeta Samara** called "Time Out". It proved a wise move; she won the next point and celebrated, the title was in Romanian hands.

## IMPORTANT GAMES

"Winning the second game after being 6-9 down was very important as was winning the fourth", said **Elizabeta Samara**. "I must admit that in the fourth game I was afraid because of the match against **Yang Xiaoxin** when **Han Ying** had come back from three games to nil behind; it was in my mind."



Experienced words proved invaluable as the match neared its zenith.

"I was ahead 10-7 then I lost the next two points", added **Elizabeta Samara**. "My coach told me to be calm, to relax and not to panic."

The advice from Viorel Filimon was heeded, as was his tactical advice.

## DIRECTION IMPORTANT

"I focused my attentions on playing towards her forehand and to the middle", explained **Elizabeta Samara**. "If I played towards her backhand I could not read the spin on the ball and I made mistakes."





Notably, **Han Ying** uses short pimped rubber on the backhand as opposed to long pimped rubber. It enables her to vary the amount of backspin when returning the ball.

## MILESTONE

The tactics designed reaped dividends and for **Elizabeta Samara** the win was a milestone. It was the first time she had beaten **Han Ying**.

*"I'd played **Han Ying** twice before; in the Team event at European Championships in Shwechat and then in the European Champions League", continued **Elizabeta Samara**. "At the European Championships I had match point when leading two-one; in the same year in the European Champions League, I had no chance."*

## THIRD TITLE

It was the second time that **Elizabeta Samara** had appeared in an ITTF World Tour Women's Singles final, pertinently it was the third time she had won, the previous victories were in 2013 in Santos and last year in the Czech Republic.

However Doha was special, just as beating **Han Ying** was a milestone, so was winning in Qatar; it was her first Super Series title.

## WOMEN RESULTS

### Demi-finales

✓ <b>Han Ying</b>	4-3						
✗ <b>Feng Tianwei</b>							
6-11	8-11	11-7	12-10	11-7	5-11	12-10	
✓ <b>Elizabeta Samara</b>	4-1						
✗ <b>Yang Haeun</b>							
11-5	10-12	11-7	11-6	11-5	/	/	/

### Finale

✓ <b>Elizabeta Samara</b>	4-0						
✗ <b>Han Ying</b>							
11-6	12-10	11-6	11-9	/	/	/	/

## MEN RESULTS

### Quarts de finale

✓ <b>Dimitrij Ovtcharov</b>	4-3						
✗ <b>Jung Youngsik</b>							
11-8	5-11	11-4	9-11	11-13	12-10	11-2	
✓ <b>Marcos Freitas</b>	4-2						
✗ <b>Daniel Habesohn</b>							
11-9	11-5	11-8	9-11	7-11	11-9	/	/
✓ <b>Vladimir Samsonov</b>	4-1						
✗ <b>Joao Monteiro</b>							
8-11	11-9	11-6	11-9	11-8	/	/	/
✓ <b>Chuang Chih-Yuan</b>	4-3						
✗ <b>Robert Gardos</b>							
7-11	10-12	11-7	16-14	6-11	11-6	11-5	

### Demi-finales

✓ <b>Dimitrij Ovtcharov</b>	4-2						
✗ <b>Marcos Freitas</b>							
11-2	10-12	11-9	11-6	9-11	11-8	/	/
✓ <b>Vladimir Samsonov</b>	4-0						
✗ <b>Chuang Chih-Yuan</b>							
13-11	14-12	11-5	11-7	/	/	/	/

### Finale

✓ <b>Vladimir Samsonov</b>	4-1						
✗ <b>Dimitrij Ovtcharov</b>							
11-9	11-8	15-13	6-11	11-9	/	/	/





GAC GROUP WORLD TOUR, KUWAIT OPEN, KUWAIT CITY (KUW) - SUPER SERIES

# HOME OF FIRST NOW HOME OF MOST RECENT, MA LONG WINS AGAIN IN KUWAIT

Successful in Kuwait in 2007, when he beat compatriot **Ma Lin** in the final to win his first ever ITTF World Tour Men's Singles title; once again, eight years later, **Ma Long** enjoyed success in the Gulf State.

Occupying the second seeded position in the draw, on the early evening of Sunday 15<sup>th</sup> February at the GAC Group 2015 ITTF World Tour Kuwait Open, he beat **Xu Xin**, the top seed (13-11, 3-11, 11-1, 11-7, 11-9) to collect his 18<sup>th</sup> such title in 28 finals.

Furthermore, you can add to the list three ITTF World Tour Grand Final Men's Singles titles, never losing in the gold medal contest and the record is quite prodigious.

## GOOD SHAPE

*"Today I was feeling in good shape; I know **Xu Xin** has changed the rubber on his racket so he was not at his best today", said **Ma Long**. "The win today is for me another step towards Suzhou but now I will take a few days off for Chinese New Year."*

The city of Suzhou will host the QOROS 2015 World Championships from Sunday 26<sup>th</sup> April to Sunday 3<sup>rd</sup> May.

## TENTATIVE START

A comprehensive win for **Ma Long** but it was a quite tentative start. The first two games were shared with **Ma Long** winning a close opener after **Xu Xin** had held one game point. Win a close game and confidence blossoms; the phrase has been uttered time and time again.

However in the splendid surroundings of the Salwa Club, it was quite the reverse scena-

rio, **Xu Xin** dominated the second game; no doubt stung by the fact of having missed the opportunity in the first.

## STUNG INTO ACTION

If losing the first game had stung **Xu Xin**, losing the second game stung **Ma Long**. He afforded **Xu Xin** just one point!

## SUPPORTING THEORY

The scores in the second and third games very much supporting another theory that when a Chinese player gains a two or three point lead they are unstoppable; the technique is so well honed that with the advantage they are relaxed and thus the level rises a few degrees.







In the fourth game, neither player was able to establish an early advantage until the score reached 4-all; **Ma Long** won the next two points and then extended the lead to 8-4.

Endorsing the unstoppable theory, at 10-6 he held four game points, he needed just one; a three games to one lead was established.

## ASSUMED ASCENDANCY

A two games advantage, **Ma Long** was very much in the ascendancy; he was the more dominant player. He was the first to seize the advantage and nullify the long explosive forehand top spin stroke of his adversary.

He established a 9-7 lead, he was nearing the finishing line; he elected for "Time Out".

## TITLE SECURED

The next two points were shared. At 10-8, **Ma Long** held two match points; a lethal **Xu Xin** forehand saved the first but not the second, it was gold for **Ma Long**.

Once again **Ma Long** was the champion in Kuwait.

## FAN ZHENDONG FOLLOWS SUIT, MA LONG AND XU XIN BOOK FINAL PLACES

Defeat for the defending champion in the opening contest on the concluding day of play, Sunday 15<sup>th</sup> February, at the GAC Group 2015 ITTF World Tour Kuwait Open when **Zhu Yuling** was beaten by her compatriot **Ding Ning**, at the semi-final stage of the Women's Singles event.

In the concluding contest in the morning session of play it was defeat for the reigning Men's Singles champion.

Once again in all-Chinese semi-finals; **Fan Zhendong**, the no.3 seed was beaten by **Ma Long**, the no.2 seed (11-7, 11-8, 11-8, 9-11, 11-8); the result coming immediately after **Xu Xin**, the top seed, had overcome **Zhang Jike**, the no.4 seed (6-11, 11-4, 11-5, 11-5, 11-4).

**Ma Long** and **Fan Zhendong** brought the Men's Singles semi-finals to a conclusion but it was **Xu Xin** and **Zhang Jike** who started the itinerary.

## IMMEDIATE RESPONSE

The first two games in the semi-final were shared, **Zhang Jike** secured the first in an impressive manner, **Xu Xin** responded immediately to win the second, before adding the third; the long raking forehand exerted by the tall left hander proving ever more potent.

**Xu Xin** was the dominant player, in the fourth game he established a 4-2 lead; **Zhang Jike** called "Time Out"; the Olympic and World champion was below his best, he was not moving well.

## BACK PROBLEM

One day earlier after beating Portugal's **Marcos Freitas** in their quarter-final encounter, **Zhang Jike** complained of pain in the lower part of his back; it appeared to be troubling him.

He was making mistakes returning service and was not playing in the fluent manner to which we have become accustomed.



## IN CONTROL

Comfortably, **Xu Xin** secured the fourth game.

**Zhang Jike** followed a policy of staying close to the table in the fifth game in an effort to give **Xu Xin** minimal time to expound his long stroke. It was to no avail, he could not stop **Xu Xin**; simply one player was in a rhythm, one was not.

Totally dominant **Xu Xin** secured the fifth game; a place in the final was reserved.

## EARLY LEAD

A comprehensive win for **Xu Xin**; for **Ma Long** it was very much the same.

Safe and secure from the backhand, dynamic from the forehand; **Ma Long** captured the first two games of the semi-final contest. Quite simply once **Ma Long** had the opportunity to exercise his devastating forehand top spin stroke, the point was assured in his favour.

**Fan Zhendong**, who in recent times has dominated adversaries with his sheer power, was receiving a taste of his own medicine.

## TIME OUT CALL

In the third game, **Ma Long** established a clear lead; at 10-5 he held five game points, **Fan Zhendong** won the next three points. **Ma Long** called "Time Out" to gather his



thoughts and break the momentum which **Fan Zhendong** was starting to establish.

It proved a wise move. **Ma Long** won the next point; he held a three games to nil lead.

## FOUND ANSWERS

Once again, as in the previous game, **Ma Long** seized the early advantage; **Fan Zhendong** looked puzzled, quizzical as he searched for answers.

He found answers, aggressive from the backhand he recovered from a 6-9 deficit to secure the fourth game.

## RECOVERY THWARTED

Alas for **Fan Zhendong** it was not to signal a memorable recovery; **Ma Long** was not to be denied. At 10-8 in the fifth game **Ma Long** held match point; he was not to be denied.

It was for **Ma Long** no less than his 39th appearance in an ITTF World Tour Men's Singles semi-final. It was his 28<sup>th</sup> success; for **Fan Zhendong** it was the third time in

eight appearances that he had suffered a penultimate round defeat.

## LI XIAOXIA SECURE TENTH TOUR WOMEN'S SINGLES TITLE BUT FIRST IN KUWAIT

Olympic and World champion, **Li Xiaoxia** added another title to her collection in the Salwa Club on the afternoon of Sunday 15<sup>th</sup> February.

Approaching her best form and at times displaying her very best form, she won the Women's Singles title at the GAC Group 2015 ITTF World Tour Kuwait Open.

Occupying the third seeded position in the competition, she beat Chinese National Team colleague, **Ding Ning**, the top seed, at the final hurdle (11-5, 11-8, 11-4, 8-11, 11-5).





## DIFFERENT PLAYER

Most certainly it was a much different **Li Xiaoxia** on duty than had been witnessed at the Women's World Cup some four months earlier in the Austrian city of Linz, when she had been beaten in four straight games in the final by **Ding Ning**.

In Kuwait there was a much more positive nature in her approach; creating angles from the backhand, whilst gaining success after success by executing her powerful forehand top spin faded wide to the **Ding Ning** forehand.

## DOMINANT

She dominated the first two games, time and again **Ding Ning** being forced into the passive mode.

Leading by three games to nil, in the fourth game **Li Xiaoxia** made the better start; totally dominant, forcing comparatively weak returns of service from **Ding Ning** and then attacking quickly over the table, **Li Xiaoxia** won the first four points.

Surely **Ding Ning** would call "Time Out" somewhat unexpectedly she refrained from the idea of a break. She won the next three points and then proceeded to level matters at 6-all, before securing a one point lead at 7-5. Eventually she lost just three more points before securing the game to reduce the arrears.

## HOPE EXTINGUISHED

There was a ray of hope for **Ding Ning** but it was soon extinguished. **Li Xiaoxia** took an early lead in the fifth game; as in the previous three games, **Ding Ning** experienced problems controlling the **Li Xiaoxia** service; whilst also, as before, the fast faded forehand wide to the **Ding Ning** forehand reaped dividends.

A lead was established, it was never relinquished, at 10-5 it was match point, Championship point; it was duly converted.

## BACK INJURY

"I've not been able to practise for the past two months, I have had a back injury", explained **Li Xiaoxia** who was a member of the Chinese outfit earlier in the year in January at the World Team Cup in Dubai but never played in any contest.



*"It's only a few days ago that I was really able to practise properly; as the tournament progressed I felt I was playing better and better", added Li Xiaoxia. "Of course I am focused on Suzhou and hope to achieve a good result there."*

The city of Suzhou will host the QOROS 2015 World Championships from Sunday 26<sup>th</sup> April to Sunday 3<sup>rd</sup> May.

## NEW CROWN

Success for **Li Xiaoxia**, it was her 10<sup>th</sup> ITTF World Tour Women's Singles title in 16 appearances in a final but her first in Kuwait.

## WOMEN RESULTS

### Demi-finales

✓ <b>Ding Ning</b>	4-3						
X <b>Zhu Yuling</b>							
6-11	11-8	11-4	1-11	5-11	11-6	11-4	
✓ <b>Li Xiaoxia</b>	4-1						
X <b>Liu Shiwen</b>							
9-11	11-7	11-2	11-8	11-9	/	/	/

### Finale

✓ <b>Li Xiaoxia</b>	4-1						
X <b>Ding Ning</b>							
11-5	11-8	11-4	8-11	11-5	/	/	/

## MEN RESULTS

### Quarts de finale

✓ <b>Xu Xin</b>	4-0						
X <b>Jung Youngsik</b>							
11-6	12-10	11-8	11-7	/	/	/	
✓ <b>Zhang Jike</b>	4-3						
X <b>Marcos Freitas</b>							
9-11	11-8	9-11	11-8	9-11	11-6	11-4	
✓ <b>Fan Zhendong</b>	4-2						
X <b>Chuang Chih-Yuan</b>							
9-11	11-7	9-11	11-6	11-8	11-8	/	
✓ <b>Ma Long</b>	4-0						
X <b>Lee Sangsu</b>							
11-5	11-6	11-4	11-5	/	/	/	

### Demi-finales

✓ <b>Xu Xin</b>	4-1						
X <b>Zhang Jike</b>							
6-11	11-4	11-5	11-5	11-4	/	/	
✓ <b>Ma Long</b>	4-1						
X <b>Fan Zhendong</b>							
11-7	11-8	11-8	9-11	11-8	/	/	/

### Finale

✓ <b>Ma Long</b>	4-1						
X <b>Xu Xin</b>							
13-11	3-11	11-1	11-7	11-9	/	/	/



ITTF-EUROPEAN TOP 16 CUP, BAKU (AZE)

## DIMITRIJ OVTCHAROV STRIKES GOLD IN BAKU, SILVER MEDAL FOR DEFENDING CHAMPION

A surprise penultimate round defeat at the hands of Denmark's **Michael Maze** one year ago, when the tournament was staged in Lausanne, Germany's **Dimitrij Ovtcharov** made no mistake one year later at the NN Table Tennis Club 2015 Europe Top 16 in Baku, Azerbaijan.

On the evening of Sunday 8th February, occupying the top seeded position in the competition, he beat Portugal's **Marcos Freitas**, the second seed and defending champion, to secure the title. In a tense final, **Dimitrij Ovtcharov** recovered from three games to one deficit to record a seven games victory (10-12, 11-7, 9-11, 8-11, 12-10, 11-7, 11-4).

### TENSE MATCHES

*"Actually I was not playing badly, I was in the lead in first game but when I lost it, it gave advantage to **Marcos**; I had a game point", said **Dimitrij Ovtcharov**. "**Marcos** played very well today and I had to give my best."*



**"However, both were stretched to the limit, both had to survive exacting moments."**

Furthermore, the semi-final duel against **Panagiotis Gionis** of Greece, the fifth seed, had been a tense seven games duel (10-12, 11-6, 14-16, 11-4, 10-12, 11-4, 11-8).

*"It was especially difficult in the final after the tough semi-final against Panagiotis", continued **Dimitrij Ovtcharov**. "The main task for me was to calm down and to prepare myself for final."*



## MEN'S WORLD CUP PLACE BOOKED

Defeat at the semi-final stage for **Panagiotis Gionis** but in his concluding contest of the tournament he beat Frenchman, **Simon Gauzy**, the no. 11 seed (5-11, 11-7, 4-11, 10-12, 12-10, 11-8, 11-1).

The win means he secures his place in the Liebherr Men's World Cup to be staged later in the year in the Swedish city of Halmstad.

Players finishing in the top three places at the NN Table Tennis Club 2015 Europe Top 16 automatically qualify for the NN Table Tennis Club 2015 Europe Top 16.

## GOAL

*"My first goal was to reach the quarter-final but when I saw the draw and **Tiago Apolonia** was there, I thought I can go further", explained **Panagiotis Gionis**. At the quarter-final stage, he beat **Tiago Apolonia**, the fourth seed, in six games (2-11, 11-8, 7-11, 11-6, 11-9, 11-9).*

*"I won and of course instantly started thinking of World Cup", continued **Panagiotis Gionis**. "I am so happy that I will leave Baku with that ticket."*

## CONTROVERSY AND SPORTSMANSHIP

Places secured and especially for **Dimitrij Ovtcharov** and **Panagiotis Gionis**, they were hard fought places; their semi-final duel which went the full seven games (10-12, 11-6, 14-16, 11-4, 10-12, 11-4, 11-8)



lasting no less than 77 minutes and having a moment of controversy than ended in a moment of sportsmanship.

The controversy came in the seventh game with the scores level at 7-all. *"I stopped because **Panagiotis** played a double hit", explained **Dimitrij Ovtcharov**.*

However the officials believed the return had been good and gave the point to **Panagiotis Gionis**; both players agreed it was a double hit, **Panagiotis Gionis** indicated that the point should be awarded to **Dimitrij Ovtcharov**.

## SEIZED INITIATIVE

**Panagiotis Gionis** levelled at 5-all but then **Dimitrij Ovtcharov** seized the initiative to move ahead 8-5, eventually winning the game 11-8.

*"I won my games easily and each game won by **Panagiotis** was very close", said **Dimitrij Ovtcharov**. "He played perfectly and seized each and every opportunity."*

*"I am so happy that I will leave Baku with that ticket."*

## AFFECTED CONCENTRATION

Undoubtedly it was a most sporting gesture from **Panagiotis Gionis** to award the point to his opponent but seemingly it had a major effect on the outcome.

*"For sure it completely blew my focus, I am a defender and I need time to settle into rhythm", explained **Panagiotis Gionis**. "We had a break that lasted for seven minutes and after that I lost three easy points; before that I had played one of my best matches."*

## HARD FOUGHT SEMI-FINAL

A tough semi-final contest for **Panagiotis Gionis**, it was the same for **Marcos Freitas** against **Simon Gauzy**, a full distance seven



games success being the outcome (13-11, 8-11, 7-11, 11-9, 9-11, 11-6, 11-7).

*"Simon played very aggressively, I was not up to my best, I suffered from the lack of concentration, I was not moving the way I want and generally I was not playing very well", said Marcos Freitas. "Simon was at the top of his game always a step ahead of me; at the end the most important thing is that I won, even when I am not happy with my performance."*

## SECOND WIN

A place in the final booked but the title was not to be retained; the top step of the podium belonged to **Dimitrij Ovtcharov** for the second time in his career.

He won the Europe Top 12 in Villeurbanne in 2012; three year later he was the champion again.

Favourites Survive, Final Places Booked in Tension Packed Atmosphere

Germany's **Dimitrij Ovtcharov** and Portugal's **Marcos Freitas**, the respective top two seeds in the Men's event at the NN Table Tennis Club 2016 Europe Top 16 in Baku, Azerbaijan, emerged successful in their semi-final duels on the afternoon of Sunday 8<sup>th</sup> February.

However, both were stretched to the limit, both had to survive exacting moments.

**Dimitrij Ovtcharov** recorded a seven games win over **Panagiotis Gionis** of Greece, the no.5 seed (10-12, 11-6, 14-16, 11-4, 10-12, 11-4, 11-8), before **Marcos Freitas**

eventually overcame Frenchman **Simon Gauzy** by a similar margin (13-11, 8-11, 7-11, 11-9, 11-6, 11-7).

*"... I had to give my best."*



## LIU JIA AND PETRISSA SOLJA SUCCEED

Meanwhile in the counterpart Women's event, it was success for Austria's **Liu Jia**, the top seed and Germany's **Petrissa Solja**, the no.9 seed.

**Liu Jia** beat **Li Jiao** of the Netherlands, the no.4 seed (11-7, 11-8, 11-5, 7-11, 11-13, 11-5); **Petrissa Solja** beat compatriot **Irene Ivancan**, the no.11 seed (11-9, 13-11, 11-7, 13-11).

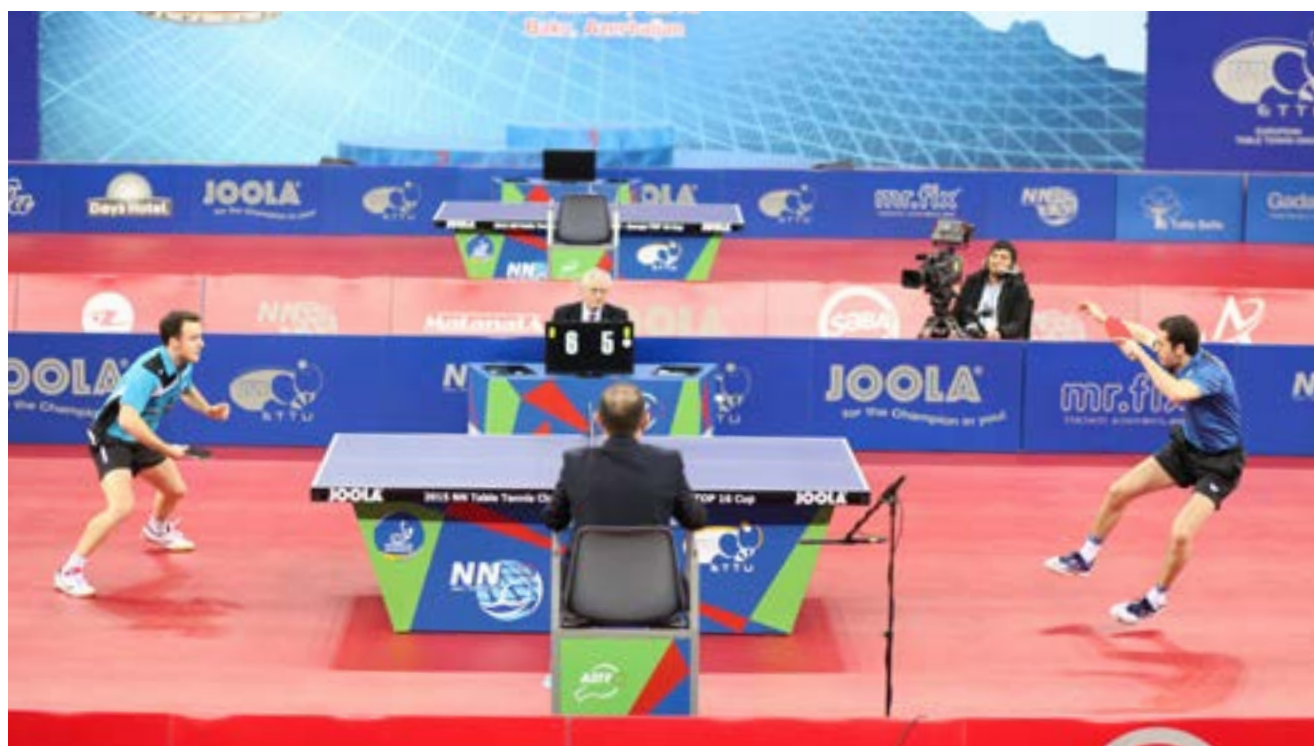
## COLLEAGUES

A contest between two players from the same national association is always difficult to predict; however the result went as status and national team selection suggested,

Notably at the TMS 2014 European Team Championships in Lisbon, **Petrissa Solja** was selected alongside **Han Ying** and **Shan Xiaona** for the final against Austria.

Perhaps somewhat surprisingly, despite the fact both are regular competitors on the GAC Group ITTF World Tour, it was the first time that **Petrissa Solja** and **Irene Ivancan** had met in a World Ranking event.

It was not the scenario in the other three duels; with in each instance the result being as history advised and in the case of **Liu Jia** very pertinent history.







## LAUSANNE REPEATED

**Liu Jia** had played **Li Jiao** on five previous occasions, on each occasion she had prevailed; the most recent being at the same stage one year ago at the DHS 2014 Europe Cup.

On that occasion **Liu Jia** won in six games (11-4, 11-7, 8-11, 11-8, 7-11, 11-4); one year later the result was repeated.

The only difference being on that occasion, the outcome was an upset; **Li Jiao** was the top seed, **Liu Jia** was the no.5 seed.

## FULL DISTANCE CONTESTS

Six games contests on both occasions, it is a reflection of the history between the two players. The first three engagements in a World ranking event all went to **Liu Jia** and all in full distance affairs.

At the Liebherr 2006 World Team Championships, **Liu Jia** won in five games. Later

in the year at the semi-final stage of the Women's Singles event at the Polish Open, she succeeded in seven games, before once again, six years later at the Liebherr 2012 World Team Championships needing five games to ensure victory,

The only more comfortable win for **Liu Jia** came at Liebherr 2013 European Championships in the Women's Team event she won in three straight games. **Liu Jia** won in three straight games in the Women's Team contest.



## CLOSEST OF ALL

Equally **Dimitrij Ovtcharov** and **Marcos Freitas** had never suffered defeats against the penultimate round adversaries in World ranking event.

**Dimitrij Ovtcharov** had played **Panagiotis Gionis** on three previous occasions and had only conceded one individual game; the duel in Baku was the toughest of them all.

In the Men's Team event at the Liebherr 2010 European Championships and at the Liebherr 2012 European Championships, **Dimitrij Ovtcharov** had won in three straight games; in the Men's Singles event at the 2010 Polish Open he won in five games.

## HARD FOUGHT DUELS

Comfortable wins prior to the NN Table Tennis Club 2016 Europe Top 16 for **Dimitrij Ovtcharov** against **Panagiotis Gions**; not for **Marcos Freitas** in his three prior contests in opposition to **Simon Gauzy**.

In the Men's Singles event at the GAC Group 2013 ITTF World Tour Qatar Open, **Marcos Freitas** had succeeded in a full distance seven games duel. One year later at the GAC Group 2014 ITTF World Tour Kuwait Open, he had prevailed in six games, whilst in their most recent meeting at the ZEN-NOH 2014 World Team Championships it had been a three games to one success.

## LEAVE HEAD HELD HIGH

Again at the NN Table Tennis Club 2016 Europe Top 16 it was a hard fought duel, defeat for **Simon Gauzy** but he could leave Baku with head held high; a semi-final finish on debut was a superb performance.



*"... I did not want to think about victory, I just played point for point."*

## LIU JIA FINDS BEST FORM TO RETAIN TITLE, SILVER AND BRONZE FOR GERMANY

The defending champion, Austria's **Liu Jia**, repeated her success of one year ago in Lausanne, by winning the Women's title at the NN Table Tennis Club 2015 Europe Top 16 on the evening of Sunday 8<sup>th</sup> February. Occupying the top seeded position in the competition, **Liu Jia** accounted for surprise finalist, Germany's **Petrissa Solja**, the no.9 seed to secure the title (11-3, 12-14, 11-8, 11-3, 11-9).

Defeat for Germany but there was success; **Irene Ivancan**, the no.11 seed, caused somewhat of an upset by beating **Li Jiao** of the Netherlands, the no.4 seed (11-8, 6-11, 11-9, 10-12, 11-8, 7-11, 11-2).

### ERROR FREE

It was an error free performance from **Liu Jia** who joked that she had played like a machine. "I think **Petrissa** was a little bit nervous and on the other hand I played one of my best matches here", said **Liu Jia**. "It was the same as last year; I had very close matches here as well, the one against **Kristin Silbereisen** was the most difficult."

At the quarter-final stage, she had beaten **Kristin Silbereisen**, the no.10 seed, by the very narrowest of margins (11-13, 11-4, 9-11, 11-9, 7-11, 11-9, 11-9).

### INVITATION ASSURED

An invitation to the 2015 Women's World Cup later in the year is guaranteed for **Liu Jia** and **Petrissa Solja**; it is also assured for **Irene Ivancan**.

Players finishing in the first three places at the NN Table Tennis Club 2015 Europe Top 16 gain invitations; the names of any other players eligible will be advised once all the continental tournaments have been concluded.

"It is great relief that I have secured the place at the World Cup; now I do not have to think if a place becomes available if someone does not accept the invitation", said **Irene Ivancan**. "Also, after a very hard semi-final it is good that I could say goodbye to the tournament with the victory."

At the semi-final stage, **Irene Ivancan** had suffered defeat at the hands of **Petrissa Solja** (11-9, 13-11, 11-7, 13-11); whilst **Liu Jia** had beaten **Li Jiao** (11-7, 11-8, 11-5, 7-11, 11-13, 11-5).

### CLEVER PLAYER

"**Li Jiao** is very clever player; it is always hard to play against her, it is never easy; she started to play risky and it paid off", explained **Liu Jia** who lost the fourth and fifth games.

"I do not know what happened, I cannot explain", added **Liu Jia**. "It is good that I managed to slow down the game and to regain the control in sixth game; that is the important thing against **Li Jiao**, you have to slow her down otherwise she is very quick and dangerous."

### FAMILIAR OPPONENT

**Li Jiao** was well known to **Liu Jia** as was **Irene Ivancan** to **Petrissa Solja**.

"We have played so many times before and it is always close game, two points difference almost always even I win or lose", explained **Petrissa Solja**. "I could not eat this morning, I slept very badly, I was thinking about the match; from the moment I gained a three-nil advantage I was trying to calm down, I did not want to think about victory, I just played point for point."

### THIRD TIME

The thinking worked but in the final it was defeat for **Petrissa Solja** at the hands of **Liu Jia**, who claimed the title for a third time. In addition to her success last year, she won in Rennes in 2005.



## MEN RESULTS

### Quarts de finale

✓ Panagiotis Gionis	4-2						
✗ Tiago Apolonia							
2-11	11-8	7-11	11-6	11-9	11-9	/	

✓ Simon Gauzy	4-3						
✗ Robert Gardos							
5-11	11-13	9-11	11-9	11-0	11-6	11-7	

✓ Dimitrij Ovtcharov	4-0						
✗ Adrien Mattenet							
11-9	14-12	11-6	11-7	/	/	/	

✓ Marcos Freitas	4-3						
✗ Joao Monteiro							
9-11	6-11	12-10	11-3	11-7	10-12	11-8	

### Demi finales

✓ Dimitrij Ovtcharov	4-3						
✗ Panagiotis Gionis							
10-12	11-6	14-16	11-4	10-12	11-4	11-8	

✓ Marcos Freitas	4-3						
✗ Simon Gauzy							
13-11	8-11	7-11	11-9	9-11	11-6	11-7	

### Match pour la 3<sup>ème</sup> place

✓ Panagiotis Gionis	4-3						
✗ Simon Gauzy							
5-11	11-7	4-11	10-12	12-10	11-8	11-1	

### Finale

✓ Dimitrij Ovtcharov	4-3						
✗ Marcos Freitas							
10-12	11-7	9-11	8-11	12-10	11-7	11-4	

## WOMEN RESULTS

### Demi finales

✓ Liu Jia	4-2						
✗ Li Jiao							
11-7	11-8	11-5	7-11	11-13	11-5	/	

✓ Solja Petrissa	4-0						
✗ Ivancan Irene							
11-9	13-11	11-7	13-11	/	/	/	

### Match pour la 3<sup>ème</sup> place

✓ Ivancan Irene	4-3						
✗ Li Jiao							
11-8	6-11	11-9	10-12	11-8	7-11	11-7	

### Finale

✓ Liu Jia	4-1						
✗ Solja Petrissa							
11-3	12-14	11-8	11-3	11-9	/	/	





GAC GROUP WORLD TOUR, HUNGARIAN OPEN, BUDAPEST (HUN) - CHALLENGE SERIES

## SEVEN YEAR WAIT OVER, JIANG TIANYI SECURES MEN'S SINGLES TITLE IN HUNGARY

Quarter-finalist at the London 2012 Olympic Games when beaten by the champion elect, China's **Zhang Jike**; Hong Kong's **Jiang Tianyi** won the Men's Singles title at the GAC Group 2015 ITTF World Tour Hungary Open in Budapest on Sunday 1<sup>st</sup> February.

Occupying the second seeded position in the draw, at the final hurdle he withstood a spirited recovery from Korea's **Jeong Sangeun**, the third seed, to clinch the title.

**Jiang Tianyi** won in seven games (11-4, 11-9, 11-3, 10-12, 5-11, 10-12, 11-3).

### IMPRESSIVE DEBUT

It is only the second time, since making his debut a decade ago at the Liebherr German Open in Magdeburg in November 2005 that he has won an ITTF World Tour Men's Singles title

In Magdeburg, he made an impressive start, he won the Under 21 Men's Singles title beating Hungary's **Janos Jakab** in the final; three years later at the Brazilian Open in Belo Horizonte he secured the Men's Singles crown, accounting for Korea's **Kim Junghoon** to secure gold.



### SUCCESS ELUSIVE

Success in Men's Doubles events in partnership with compatriot **Tang Peng**, have come his way but securing a place in the final of an ITTF World Tour Men's Singles event has proved elusive.

Since winning in Brazil, **Jiang Tianyi** has reached the quarter-final round on eleven occasions, progressed to the semi-final four times but until the GAC Group 2015 ITTF World Tour Hungary Open, has never advanced beyond that point.

Notably in recent times, reaching the latter stages has proved significantly difficult; he has not reached the round of the last eight since being a semi-finalist in Poland in early November 2012.





## RUNNER UP AGAIN

Meanwhile, for **Jeong Sangeun** it was his second career ITTF World Tour Men's Singles final and his second defeat; the previous occasion was in the Czech Republic in early September 2012.

On that occasion he was beaten in the final by Germany's **Christian Süß**.

## ONE PREVIOUS MEETING

It was the second time that **Jiang Tianyi** and **Jeong Sangeun** had met in an international tournament; the one previous occasion was at the KRA 2010 Korea Open in Incheon in the first round of the Men's Singles event.

On that occasion **Jiang Tianyi** won in six games (9-11, 11-9, 11-4, 11-6, 11-13, 11-9); five years later in Budapest he won again.

## AGAINST THE ODDS, MISAKO WAKAMIYA WINS WOMEN'S SINGLES TITLE

Winner of the Girls' Singles event eight years ago at the 2007 ITTF Junior Circuit Finals in the South African city of Cape Town, Japan's **Misako Waka-**

**miya** secured the Women's Singles title at the GAC Group 2015 ITTF World Tour Hungary Open in Budapest on Sunday 1<sup>st</sup> February.

Against the odds, occupying the no.13 seeded position in the draw and currently listed at no.44 on the Women's World Rankings, she accounted for Hong Kong's **Lee Ho Ching**, the no.3 seed and named at no.20 in the global order.

**Misako Wakamiya** won in six games (12-10, 11-9, 8-11, 11-8, 10-12, 16-14) to add to earlier ITTF World Tour success.

## WOMEN'S DOUBLES SUCCESS

Previous ITTF World Tour success has come in Women's Doubles events, where her left handed top spin attacking skills have complemented right handed partners.

She has won on five occasions with **Hiroko Fujii** and twice with **Ai Fukuhara**.

## TWICE RUNNER UP

However, the win in Budapest is a first ITTF World Tour Women's Singles gold after having twice been close to gold.

She was beaten in the final by Austria's **Liu Jia** at the GAC Group 2012 ITTF World Tour Czech Open in Olomouc and last year at the same stage in Zagreb by Monaco's **Yang Xiaoxin**.

## FOREHAND IMPORTANT

*"Until now I had a second place only, so this Hungarian Open is memorable for me", said **Misako Wakamiya**. "I think my strong point was my forehand which caused her problems."*

Notably **Misako Wakamiya** uses short pimped rubber on the forehand.

## JUNIOR SUCCESS

The win at the GAC Group 2015 ITTF World Tour Hungary Open, to some extent materialises the promise shown as a teenager.

Notably she won the Cadet Girls' Singles title at the Asian Junior and Cadet Championships staged in New Delhi in 2004, whilst five years later once again showed her liking for that part of the world. She won the Girls' Singles title at the Indian Junior and Cadet Open in Goa in 2009.

## FIRST APPEARANCE

It was **Lee Ho Ching** her first ever appearance in an ITTF World Tour Women's Doubles final; it was the first time that the duo had met in an international tournament.





GAC GROUP WORLD TOUR, NIGERIA OPEN, LAGOS (NGR) - CHALLENGE SERIES

# OMAR ASSAR ADDS TO COLLECTION, TITLE DEFENDED SUCCESSFULLY IN NIGERIAN CAPITAL

Defending champion and recently crown African champion, Egypt's **Omar Assar** added to his list of titles on Saturday 14<sup>th</sup> March in the splendid setting of The Sir Molade Okoya Thomas Indoor Sports Hall.

The second seed, playing in his trademark high intensity manner, he won the Men's Singles event at the GAC Group 2015 ITTF World Tour Lagos (Nigeria) Open.

At the semi-final stage he accounted for Portugal's **André Silva**, the fourth seed, in four straight games (11-8, 11-9, 11-3, 11-7), before securing the title at the final expense of the host nation's **Quadri Aruna**, the top seed, in a six games contest (12-10, 13-15, 7-11, 11-8, 11-8, 11-8).

In the counterpart semi-final, **Quadri Aruna** had beaten compatriot **Ojo Onaolapo** in four straight games (13-11, 11-9, 11-5, 11-7).



## SECOND TIME

It was the second time in an ITTF World Tour Men's Singles final for **Omar Assar** and the second time he had emerged successful.

One year ago in Lagos he beat colleague, **El-Sayed Lashin** in the final (11-5, 13-11, 2-11, 11-6, 11-8), after having overcome **Quadri Aruna** in the semi-final (11-5, 13-11, 2-11, 11-6, 11-8).

Suffering heartaches again for **Quadri Aruna** at the hands of **Omar Assar** but one step higher on the medal podium and his best ever finish to date on the ITTF World Tour.



## EXUBERANT FANS

*"It was a difficult match for me because at the start of the match, I was disturbed by the noise from the fans", said **Omar Assar**. "However, as the match progressed I adjusted and I started playing normally and my tactics began to work."*

Gradually **Omar Assar** found his rhythm.

*"Also, it was a very tough match because **Quadri** has been in top shape in recent times", added **Omar Assar**. "He beat me in the team event at the recent Africa Senior Championship in Cairo."*

It was revenge for **Omar Assar** and delight.

*"I am so happy that I was able to defend my title and having the record of winning it three times", concluded **Omar Assar**. "Lagos is a good ground for me and I look forward to returning next year."*

In addition to winning in 2014, **Omar Assar** also succeeded in 2013 when the tournament was known as the Lagos International Classic."

## SHAO JIENI STRIKES GOLD

Success for one recently anointed African champion, for another it was defeat.

**Omar Assar's** compatriot, **Dina Meshref**, the top seed, was beaten in the final of the Women's Singles event by Portugal's **Shao Jieni**, a player who has excelled domestically but was not seeded in Lagos.

**Shao Jieni**, having lost to **Dina Meshref** earlier in the tournament at the semi-final stage of the Women's Singles event (11-6, 11-8, 11-8) extracted revenge; she beat



**Dina Meshref** in a full distance seven games encounter (11-7, 6-11, 9-11, 11-5, 10-12, 13-11, 11-8).

At the semi-final stage **Shao Jieni** had beaten Nigeria's **Olufunke Oshonaika** (11-5, 11-5, 13-11, 11-3); **Dina Meshref** had accounted for **Offiong Edem**, also from Nigeria.

*"... Quadri has been in top shape in recent times."*

## CHANGED SERVICES

*"It was a very hard match for me and it was a high level game because **Shao Jieni** changed service and this really confused me", said **Dina Meshref**. "It is always not easy to beat a certain player three times; she is very good."*

## PREVIOUS BEST

It was for **Shao Jieni**, **Olufunke Oshonaika** and **Offiong Edem** their best ever finishes in a Women's Singles event on the ITTF World Tour.

Prior to the GAC Group 2015 ITTF World Tour Lagos (Nigeria) Open, **Shao Jieni** had



never progressed beyond the first round, whilst the best for **Olufunke Oshonaika** and **Offiong Edem** was a quarter-final exit one year ago in Lagos.

Alas for **Dina Meshref** it was once again so near yet so far; it was her second ever ITTF World Tour Women's Singles final and the second time she had been the runner up. In 2013 on home soil in Cairo she was beaten by Russia's **Maria Dolgikh** at the final hurdle.

## WOMEN'S DOUBLES

Defeat at the hands of **Shao Jieni** but together there was success. They secured the Women's Doubles title beating the host nation's **Cecilia Akpan** and **Offiong Edem** in the final (13-11, 11-7, 13-15, 11-2).

The silver medal for Nigeria in the Women's Doubles event, in their counterpart Men's Doubles competition it was gold.

## MEN'S DOUBLES

**Quadri Aruna** and **Makanjuola Kazeem**, who had emerged successful at the ITTF-Africa Championships earlier in the year struck gold.

They beat the Portuguese partnership of **André Silva** and **Diogo Silva** to claim the title (11-6, 11-8, 11-9).





GAC GROUP WORLD TOUR, SPANISH OPEN, ALMERIA (ESP) - MAJOR SERIES

## STUNNING PERFORMANCE, FROM MAHARU YOSHIMURA EXPECT THE UNEXPECTED

Expect the unexpected, it was a phrase oft used to describe Sweden's one and only **Jan-Ove Waldner**, a legend in his own lifetime, who could predict what he may do next as his thought process and dexterity realised a touch of sheer genius?

In a different manner, in the modern era, the same phrase can be applied to Japan's **Maharu Yoshimura**; not that he may produce the sheer brilliance of the Swedish maestro but if the mind is applied, he may conjure results that make the eyes blink.

On Saturday 29<sup>th</sup> March, he did just that; he won the Men's Singles title at the GAC Group 2015 ITTF World Tour Spanish Open, the first such title of his career having never previously advanced beyond the quarter-final stage.

### COMPREHENSIVE WIN

Occupying the no.16 seeded position in the draw; he beat Hong Kong's **Wong Chun Ting**, the no.11 seed, in four straight games to arrest the title (11-8, 11-7, 11-4, 11-6). The margin of victory simply sums up **Maharu Yoshimura**.

### NO PLACE IN TOKYO

At the quarter-final stage of proceedings, **Wong Chun Ting** had beaten **Koki Niwa**, before accounting for **Kenta Matsudaira** in the semi-final; both **Kenta Matsudaira** and **Koki Niwa** were selected alongside **Jun Mizutani**, time and time again, for the Japanese Men's outfit at the ZEN-NOH 2014 World Team Championships in Tokyo.

Japan won bronze, **Maharu Yoshimura** was not even included the squad, he did not even merit a place on the bench.

Seemingly when the moon is in the right direction, **Maharu Yoshimura** can produce a level of play that belies his World Ranking.

### OUTSTANDING RESULTS

Currently he is listed at no.61 on the Men's World Rankings, his highest being earlier this year in January when he stood at no.57.

Never in the top 50, yet the 21 year, who won Junior Boys' Singles titles on the ITTF Junior Circuit in 2011 in France and Korea, whilst emerging successful in Under 21 Men's Singles competitions on the GAC Group 2013 ITTF World Tour in Austria and Korea, can stun the aficionados in the tiered seating.







Crowned Asian Junior champion in New Delhi in 2011, the following year he beat **Jun Mizutani** in the final of the Men's Singles event at the Japanese National Championships, before later in the year reaching the final of the GAC Group Asian Cup in Guangzhou. He was beaten China's **Xu Xin** in the final.

Now three years later, against **Wong Chun Ting**, likewise playing in his first ever ITTF World Tour Men's Singles final, it was success in a tournament which is gaining a reputation for being the home for first time champions.

## FIRST TIME WINNER

The inaugural edition in 2011 saw Korea's **Oh Sangeun** win the Men's Singles title, the following year it was Chinese Taipei's **Chuang Chih-Yuan** but since then the tournament has always realized a first time winner.

In 2013 it was Brazil's **Cazuo Matsumoto**, one year ago it was England's **Paul Drinkhall**; now it is **Maharu Yoshimura**.

## LOGICAL PROGRESS

What about next year? There is crumb of comfort for **Wong Chun Ting**. In 2014, he was a semi-finalist; in 2015 it is one step higher, the runner up. in 2016?

## JEON JIHEE STRIKES GOLD IN SOUTHERN SPAIN, ONCE AGAIN BEATS SAYAKA HIRANO

The no.13 may be considered unlucky in some parts of the world, for Korea's **Jeon Jihee** at the GAC Group 2015 ITTF World Tour Spanish Open in Almeria, on Sunday 29<sup>th</sup> March, that was not to prove the situation.

Occupying the no.13 seeded position in the tournament; she beat Japan's **Sayaka Hirano**, the no.3 seed, at the final hurdle of the Women's Singles event to claim the title.

Impressively **Jeon Jihee** emerged successful in five games (11-5, 11-9, 3-11, 11-9, 11-5) to collect her second ITTF World Tour Women's Singles title in her second ever final.

## REPEAT FINAL

Furthermore, on her one other appearance in an ITTF World Tour Women's Singles final, her victim in the gold medal contest was also **Sayaka Hirano**.



At the 2011 Morocco Hassan II Open, she accounted for **Sayaka Hirano** in seven games (11-6, 8-11, 7-11, 14-12, 8-11, 12-10, 11-4) to claim gold.

## FURTHER SUCCESS

Success against **Sayaka Hirano** in Rabat was to be the first of three meetings between **Jeon Jihee** and **Sayaka Hirano** in World ranking events; **Jeon Jihee** won the first, also she won the next two.

She beat **Sayaka Hirano** in their third round encounter in the Women's Singles event at the GAC Group 2013 ITTF World Tour Polish Open and more recently in October 2014 in the first stage of the Women's Team competition at the Asian Games in Incheon.

## SECOND FINAL IN SPAIN

Meanwhile, for **Sayaka Hirano** it was her second appearance in a Women's Singles final on the ITTF World Tour in Spain, she won in 2011 beating Hong Kong's **Jiang Huajun** in the final; overall it was her ninth ITTF World Tour Women's Singles final appearance, the fourth time the runner up.

Additional to the defeat in Morocco by **Jeon Jihee**, she was beaten in the final in Santiago in 2007 by **Jiang Huajun**, two years later on home soil in Wakayama by Korea's **Park Miyoung**.

Once again it was defeat at Korean hands, in Almeria by **Jeon Jihee**.





ITTF-AFRICA CHAMPIONSHIPS, CAIRO (EGY)

## OMAR ASSAR ADDS TO MEDAL HAUL, GOLD SECURED ON HOME SOIL

Crowned Men's Singles champion at the All-Africa Games in Maputo in 2011; Egypt's **Omar Assar** added another title to his collection on the late afternoon of Thursday 29<sup>th</sup> January.

He won the Men's Singles event at the 2015 ITTF-Africa Senior Championships on home soil in Cairo, accounting for **Ahmed Ali Saleh**, the only player ever to have donned the crown three times, at the final hurdle.

**Omar Assar** won in four straight games [11-6, 11-9, 14-12, 11-8] to arrest the title.

### POWERFUL PERFORMANCE

Power was very much the order of the day in gaining success for the 23 year old, the long forehand top spin stroke becoming ever more potent as the match progressed.

Determined and relishing the challenge, **Omar Assar** made the better start, he won the first two games but then it seemed a recovery was in the offing.

The third game was pivotal to the whole contest. **Omar Assar** was in top gear, he established a 7-3 lead but experience entered the equation. **Ahmed Ali Saleh**, now 35 years old, won the next seven points to lead 10-3.

### OPPORTUNITY MISSED

An opportunity beckoned, it was not grasped and any hopes of **Ahmed Ali Saleh** adding to his list of gold medals at an Africa Senior Championships had evaporated in the Cairo night air.

The fourth game was hard fought but the writing was on the wall, the inscription was on the trophy, it was that of **Omar Assar**.

### GREAT FEELING

*"Yes it is a very great feeling for me, I won the African championship for the first time and it was a big dream for me since I was a child", said **Omar Assar**. "I started table tennis in a small club here in Egypt and then moved to a bigger club and I watched **Ahmed Saleh** and **Sayed Lashin** playing and I didn't imagine that I am going to play*







against them in the final; it was a great day here in Cairo."

It was a confident performance from **Omar Assar** in the final, the win over **Mohamed El-Beiali** in the semi-final, the man who one day earlier had beaten Nigeria's **Quadr Aruna**, undoubtedly gave the champion elect an injection of self-belief.

"I have played against **Mohamed** since I was 15 years old in national and African Championships; I cannot speak too much about the tactics because we know each other so well", explained **Omar Assar**. "I put so much value for this match, if I could win this much I knew I had a great chance to be champion."

## CLUBS CLASH

It was success for the **El-Ahly** Club against Zamalek and later in the evening, the Cairo Stadium hosted a top division football match between the two clubs.

Zamalek are currently top the table, the match was drawn, one-all but in the International Hall of Police Sport Association there was no doubt as to the winner; in that venue it was **El-Ahly**, it was **Omar Assar**.



## DINA MESHREF WINS IN CAIRO, ADDS TO TITLE SECURED IN LAGOS

Winner at the 2014 ITTF-Africa Top 16 in Lagos last June, when beating Nigeria's **Olufunke Oshonaike** in the final; the host nation's **Dina Meshref** won the Women's Singles title at the 2015 ITTF-Africa Senior Championships in Cairo on the afternoon of Thursday 29<sup>th</sup> January.

Occupying the second seeded position in the draw, she accounted for Congo Brazzaville's **Han Xing** at the final hurdle.

Impressively, she recovered from a two games to one deficit to post a four games success (11-7, 3-11, 9-11, 11-9, 11-6, 11-5).

## SPECIAL TITLE

"I am very happy winning this title because this is a title that is not easy to win especially against a Chinese player", said **Dina Meshref**. "It is special for me winning it in Egypt with all the support from the local people; today is also special for me."

In the final, **Dina Meshref** made the better start but then experienced problems.

## CHANGED SERVICE

"I had problem in the second and third games because I was not serving well but in the fourth game, I started serving with topspin into specific place not just anywhere", added **Dina Meshref**. "It was vital to make those changes."



However, **Dina Meshref** did experience a problem which was out of her own hands. **Zhang Coa Ling**, the Egypt National Coach, sitting courtside was sent off.

"I don't think it made too great a difference, we had discussed the tactics before and I was clear what was needed", continued **Dina Meshref**. "The most important fact was that I kept my concentration; certainly this is one of the most important titles of my career."

## THREE GOLD MEDALS

Victory means that **Dina Meshref** departed the International Hall of Police Sport Association, with three gold and one silver medal to her credit.

Earlier in the tournament she was a member of the successful Egyptian outfit in the Women's Team event, before securing the Mixed Doubles title with **Omar Assar** and finishing in runners up spot in harness with **Nadeen El-Dawlatly** in the Women's Doubles.

## COLLECTION COMPLETE

Furthermore, it means she has now every of ITTF-Africa Senior Championships title to her name; in November 2012 on the most recent occasion the tournament was staged, also in Cairo, the Women's Singles title was the only one to elude her grasp.

The house is now full.



GAC GROUP WORLD TOUR, ASIA CUP 2015

## XU XIN REGAINS CROWN BUT BUT DAY BELONGS TO FENG TIANWEI

On the opening day of play at the GAC Group 28<sup>th</sup> Asian Cup 2015, Singapore's **Feng Tianwei**, even though the second seed, had caused an upset of note by beating China's **Zhu Yuling**, the fourth seed (11-7, 11-5, 11-5).

It was an upset because it was their ninth meeting and **Feng Tianwei** had lost the previous eight encounters!

Two days later, on the concluding day of action in the Indian city of Jaipur, **Feng Tianwei** caused another major upset, she beat **Liu Shiwen**, the top seed, in six games to arrest the title (8-11, 11-8, 11-9, 7-11, 11-1, 12-10).

### RECOVERED FROM DEFICIT

Defeat for China in the final of the Women's event, by definition it had to be success for the world's premier nation in the sport of table tennis in the Men's event.

**Xu Xin**, the top seed, recovered from a three games to one deficit to beat compatriot **Fan Zhendong**, the second seed, to regain the title won two years ago in Hong Kong (11-8, 11-13, 11-13, 5-11, 11-8, 11-4, 11-7).

### THE CENTREPIECE

A high class final to conclude proceedings but it was the victory of **Feng Tianwei** that was proved the centrepiece of the occasion.

After totally dominating the fifth game, allowing **Liu Shiwen** just one point, it appeared that matters would be levelled and a deciding seventh game would be needed. In the sixth game, more positive than in the previous, **Liu Shiwen** established a 6-2 lead, a four point gap, surely it was too great to expect any player to close against an adversary of **Liu Shiwen**'s calibre?

### TIME OUT

**Feng Tianwei** reduced the deficit to two points at 6-4; immediately and understandably, Yan Sen, the Chinese National Coach sitting courtside, called "Time Out".

The break worked but not for **Liu Shiwen**; equally **Feng Tianwei** had received sound advice from **Jing Jun Hong**, she levelled at 6-all but at 10-9 **Liu Shiwen** held one point to level matters.

She was not to win another point; **Feng Tianwei** secured the next three, Singapore celebrated.



## NERVOUS

*"I never thought that I would win", smiled **Feng Tianwei**. "In the sixth game I knew I had a chance, I wanted to win so much, I was so nervous."*

**Feng Tianwei** controlled her nerves; she won the game but did the words of **Kong Linghui** resonate.



## SINGAPOREAN NIGHTMARES

*"**Liu Shiwen** has problems mentally playing against Singapore", he said, after she had beaten **Feng Tianwei** by the very narrowest of margins in the Women's Singles semi-final encounter at the GAC Group 2012 ITTF World Tour Grand Finals in Hangzhou (11-6, 11-2, 11-7, 8-11, 9-11, 12-10, 11-9).*

Does the memory of the Women's Team final at the Liebherr 2010 Women's World Championships in Moscow still haunt **Liu Shiwen**? She was beaten by **Feng Tianwei** in the vital fourth match of the contest against Singapore that secured the title for the south east Asian city state (11-7, 14-16, 11-7, 9-11, 11-7).



## KEPT CALM

Pressure told in Moscow in 2010, arguably it told in Jaipur in 2015 and it also told in the Men's Singles final that ensued, with **Xu Xin** responding in style after losing three games in a row.

*"I won the first game quite comfortably; I believed I could win, I made some mistakes and **Fan Zhendong** played well, he was very positive", said **Xu Xin**. "After losing the fourth game, I tried to stay calm."*

He stayed calm and he secured the fifth and sixth games to force a decider; in the seventh game **Xu Xin** established a 5-2 lead after the first six points had all gone with the server. **Fan Zhendong** elected for "Time Out"; he reduced the deficit to one point at 6-5.

The title last won in Hong Kong was regained, the player who had been beaten by **Koki Niwa** in the group stage of affairs and had only secured first place in the group on games ratio, had finished the day on a high note and on the highest step of the podium.

*"It was just as hard today as two years ago in Hong Kong", concluded **Xu Xin**; it most certainly was the situation, very hard, very hard indeed.*

Very hard and if anyone did things the hard way it was **Feng Tianwei**, the only player in the whole tournament to remain unbeaten and the victor over two of China's elite.

Now that does not happen very often, in fact very rarely and who was the last player to achieve that feat; **Feng Tianwei** in 2010 in Moscow?



## VITAL BREAK

Sensing danger, **Xu Xin** called "Time Out" but the break seemed to have worked in favour of **Fan Zhendong**. He levelled at 6-all. However, he was not able to seize the advantage, the next four points went to **Xu Xin**; one match point was saved but not the next.



# WORLD RANKING LIST - MEN



Ma Long (CHN) • No. 1



Xu Xin (CHN) • No. 2



Zhang Jike (CHN) • No. 3

- Top 3
- Player was active in the previous month
- Player had no activity in the previous month
- No activity within the last 4 months
- The first list where their Starting Points have become final, having attained 5 Significant Wins
- ^ Indicates the player is not eligible to represent the Association in World Title events
- ^^ Indicates the player is not eligible to represent the Association in World Title, Continental Title and International Team events.

RANKING	PREVIOUS	NAME	ASSOC	RANKING PTS.
1	1	MA Long	CHN	3113
2	2	XU Xin	CHN	3028
3	4	ZHANG Jike	CHN	2937
4	3	FAN Zhendong	CHN	2900
5	5	MIZUTANI Jun	JPN	2776
6	6	OVTCHAROV Dimitrij	GER	2773
7		BOLL Timo	GER	2662
8	9	FREITAS Marcos	POR	2648
9	10	SAMSONOV Vladimir	BLR	2623
10	8	CHUANG Chih-Yuan	TPE	2614
11	11	YAN An	CHN	2569
12	12	NIWA Koki	JPN	2543
13	13	TANG Peng	HKG	2521
14	14	FANG Bo	CHN	2478
15	15	GAO Ning	SIN	2438
16		ZHOU Yu	CHN	2436
17	16	JOO Saehyuk	KOR	2406
18	34	WONG Chun Ting	HKG	2399
19		BAUM Patrick	GER	2377
20	18	GARDOS Robert	AUT	2371
20	17	APOLONIA Tiago	POR	2371
22	19	GIONIS Panagiotis	GRE	2354
23	24	MURAMATSU Yuto	JPN	2353
24	20	JUNG Youngsik	KOR	2347
25	27	MATSUDAIRA Kenta	JPN	2333
26	26	STEGER Bastian	GER	2329
27	22	YU Ziyang	CHN	2325
28	35	MORIZONO Masataka	JPN	2306
29	21	CHEN Chien-An	TPE	2293
30	23	GACINA Andrej	CRO	2291
31	27	MENGEL Steffen	GER	2286
32	38	YOSHIDA Kaii	JPN	2273
33	32	KIM Minseok	KOR	2270
34	25	CHO Eonrae	KOR	2265
35	29	MONTEIRO Joao	POR	2261
35	29	GAUZY Simon	FRA	2261
37	69	KIM Donghyun	KOR	2259
38	56	FILUS Ruwen	GER	2255
38	31	ARUNA Quadri	NGR	2255
40	39	MATTENET Adrien	FRA	2245
41	44	LIANG Jingkun	CHN	2242
41	37	ASSAR Omar	EGY	2242
43	61	YOSHIMURA Maharu	JPN	2241
44	49	ACHANTA Sharath Kamal	IND	2240
45	40	DRINKHALL Paul	ENG	2236
46		SHIONO Masato	JPN	2226
47	33	LEE Sangsu	KOR	2222
48	41	JEONG Sangeun	KOR	2208
49	47	SKACHKOV Kirill	RUS	2206
49		CRISAN Adrian	ROU	2206



RANKING	PREVIOUS	NAME	ASSOC	RANKING PTS.
51	44	KARLSSON Kristian	SWE	2198
52	62	LI Ping ^	QAT	2195
53	80	YOSHIDA Masaki	JPN	2193
54	68	SHIBAEV Alexander	RUS	2189
54	42	TSUBOI Gustavo	BRA	2189
56	60	FRANZISKA Patrick	GER	2185
57	57	OSHIMA Yuya	JPN	2178
58	51	TOKIC Bojan	SLO	2176
59	52	GORAK Daniel	POL	2172
60	73	CALDERANO Hugo	BRA	2168
61	36	JIANG Tianyi	HKG	2167
62	52	PITCHFORD Liam	ENG	2154
63	43	GERELL Par	SWE	2153
63	50	FEGERL Stefan	AUT	2153
65	71	WANG Yang ^	SVK	2152
65	54	LIVENTSOV Alexey	RUS	2152
67	48	HABESOHN Daniel	AUT	2150
68	63	LI Hu ^	SIN	2149
69	55	CHEN Weixing	AUT	2147
70		HE Zhiwen	ESP	2137
70	66	CHIANG Hung-Chieh	TPE	2137
72	64	WANG Zengyi	POL	2136
73	65	VLASOV Grigory	RUS	2133
74		TAKAKIWA Taku	JPN	2129
75	72	WALTHER Ricardo	GER	2127
76	83	PROKOPCOV Dmitrij	CZE	2126
77	81	HUANG Sheng-Sheng	TPE	2122
78	59	TAN Ruiwu	CRO	2117
79	76	JANG Woojin	KOR	2115
80	94	PERSSON Jon	SWE	2114
80	67	KOU Lei	UKR	2114
82	78	SMIRNOV Alexey	RUS	2104
83	75	WANG Eugene ^	CAN	2102
84	69	LEBESSON Emmanuel	FRA	2100
85	74	MACHI Asuka	JPN	2099
86	79	HO Kwan Kit	HKG	2098
87	77	LUNDQVIST Jens	SWE	2095
88	108	SAMBE Kohei	JPN	2079
89	81	WU Zhikang ^^	SIN	2078
90	86	KREANGA Kalinikos	GRE	2077
90	84	PATTANTYUS Adam	HUN	2077
92	85	OUAICHE Stephane	FRA	2066
93		CHAN Kazuhiro	JPN	2065
94	89	LI Ahmet ^	TUR	2056
95	92	MATSUDAIRA Kenji	JPN	2054
96	87	ELOI Damien	FRA	2048
96	91	STOYANOV Niagol	ITA	2048
96	88	LASHIN El-Sayed	EGY	2048
99	89	KONECNY Tomas	CZE	2044
100	97	ALAMIYAN Noshad	IRI	2036

See all



# WORLD RANKING LIST - WOMEN



**Ding Ning (CHN) • No. 1**




**Liu Shiwen (CHN) • No. 3**




**Li Xiaoxia (CHN) • No. 2**


 Top 3


 Player was active in the previous month









 Player had no activity in the previous month

 No activity within the last 4 months

 The first list where their Starting Points have become final, having attained 5 Significant Wins

 Indicates the player is not eligible to represent the Association in World Title events

 Indicates the player is not eligible to represent the Association in World Title, Continental Title and International Team events.

RANKING	PREVIOUS	NAME	ASSOC	RANKING PTS.
1	1	<b>DING Ning</b>	CHN	3176
2	3	<b>LIU Shiwen</b>	CHN	3154
3	2	<b>LI Xiaoxia</b>	CHN	3136
4	4	FENG Tianwei	SIN	3123
5	5	ISHIKAWA Kasumi	JPN	3039
6	6	ZHU Yuling	CHN	2998
7	7	WU Yang	CHN	2888
8	11	FUKUHARA Ai	JPN	2877
9	8	HAN Ying 	GER	2850
10	9	CHEN Meng	CHN	2839
11	10	SEO Hyowon	KOR	2795
12	13	LIU Jia	AUT	2773
13	15	HIRANO Sayaka	JPN	2770
14	33	DOO Hoi Kem	HKG	2740
15	38	ITO Mima	JPN	2737
16	12	YU Mengyu	SIN	2730
17	17	POTA Georgina	HUN	2710
18	14	SAMARA Elizabeta	ROU	2700
19	17	YU Fu 	POR	2677
20	26	ISHIGAKI Yuka	JPN	2667
21	19	YANG Haeun	KOR	2655
22	45	SOLJA Petrissa	GER	2649
23		LIU Fei	CHN	2632
24	33	JEON Jihee 	KOR	2625
25	20	LI Fen 	SWE	2618
26	22	RI Myong Sun	PRK	2605
27	27	LI Jie	NED	2601
28	25	HU Melek	TUR	2597
29	24	SHAN Xiaona 	GER	2591
30	21	LEE Ho Ching	HKG	2588
31	23	WU Jiaduo	GER	2564
32	32	MORIZONO Misaki	JPN	2563
33	27	WAKAMIYA Misako	JPN	2560
34	30	JIANG Huajun	HKG	2557
35	29	SHEN Yanfei	ESP	2556
36	51	HIRANO Miu	JPN	2547
37	41	CHEN Szu-Yu	TPE	2543
38	31	LI Jiao	NED	2541
39	35	SILBEREISEN Kristin	GER	2532
40	43	CHENG I-Ching	TPE	2525
41	36	IVANCAN Irene	GER	2522
42	52	LI Qian	POL	2519
43	36	WANG Manyu	CHN	2518
44	42	TIE Yana	HKG	2512
45	40	LIU Gaoyang	CHN	2506
46	50	YANG Xiaoxin 	MON	2504
47	46	CHEN Xingtong	CHN	2477
48		GU Ruochen	CHN	2474
49	44	LIN Ye 	SIN	2470
50	49	LI Xue 	FRA	2446



RANKING	PREVIOUS	NAME	ASSOC	RANKING PTS.
51	53	SATO Hitomi	JPN	2443
52		CHE Xiaoxi	CHN	2442
53	47	LEE I-Chen	TPE	2441
54	63	HAYATA Hina	JPN	2438
55	48	POLCANOVA Sofia ^	AUT	2437
56	54	MAEDA Miyu	JPN	2433
57	55	RI Mi Gyong	PRK	2426
58	59	KATO Miyu	JPN	2422
59	57	VACENOVSKA Iveta	CZE	2411
60		PESOTSKA Margaryta	UKR	2398
61	58	WINTER Sabine	GER	2397
62	61	ZHU Chaohui	CHN	2396
63	62	BILENKO Tetyana	UKR	2395
64	63	SZOCS Bernadette	ROU	2384
65	59	ZHOU Yihan ^	SIN	2380
66		ZHANG Qiang	CHN	2365
67	73	HAMAMOTO Yui	JPN	2362
68	70	HE Zhuojia	CHN	2356
69	67	MIKHAILOVA Polina	RUS	2354
70	72	KIM Jong	PRK	2351
71	65	HUANG Yi-Hua	TPE	2349
72	66	SOLJA Amelie ^	AUT	2346
73	69	PARTYKA Natalia	POL	2342
74	99	GRUNDISCH Carole	FRA	2341
75	68	PARK Youngsook	KOR	2338
76	75	EKHOLM Matilda	SWE	2331
77		NI Xialian	LUX	2328
78	91	MATSUDAIRA Shiho	JPN	2322
79	71	MADARASZ Dora	HUN	2321
80		MATSUZAWA Marina	JPN	2311
81	74	NOSKOVA Yana	RUS	2300
82	77	CHEN Ke	CHN	2299
83	90	BALAZOVA Barbora	SVK	2298
83	78	ZENG Jian ^^	SIN	2298
85	85	PASKAUSKIENE Ruta	LTU	2287
86	76	POSTOACA Camelia	ROU	2283
87	83	ZHANG Lily	USA	2281
88	79	EERLAND Britt	NED	2280
89	85	MITTELHAM Nina	GER	2279
90	87	YOO Eunchong	KOR	2273
91	80	MORI Sakura	JPN	2271
92	81	TIAN Yuan	CRO	2269
93	92	XIAN Yifang	FRA	2260
94	82	BARTHEL Zhenqi	GER	2255
95	83	GRZYBOWSKA Katarzyna	POL	2254
95		CHOI Hyojoo ^	KOR	2254
95	94	DOLGIKH Maria	RUS	2254
98	89	STRBIKOVA Renata	CZE	2250
99	92	ZHANG Mo	CAN	2241
100	96	GAPONOVA Ganna	UKR	2235

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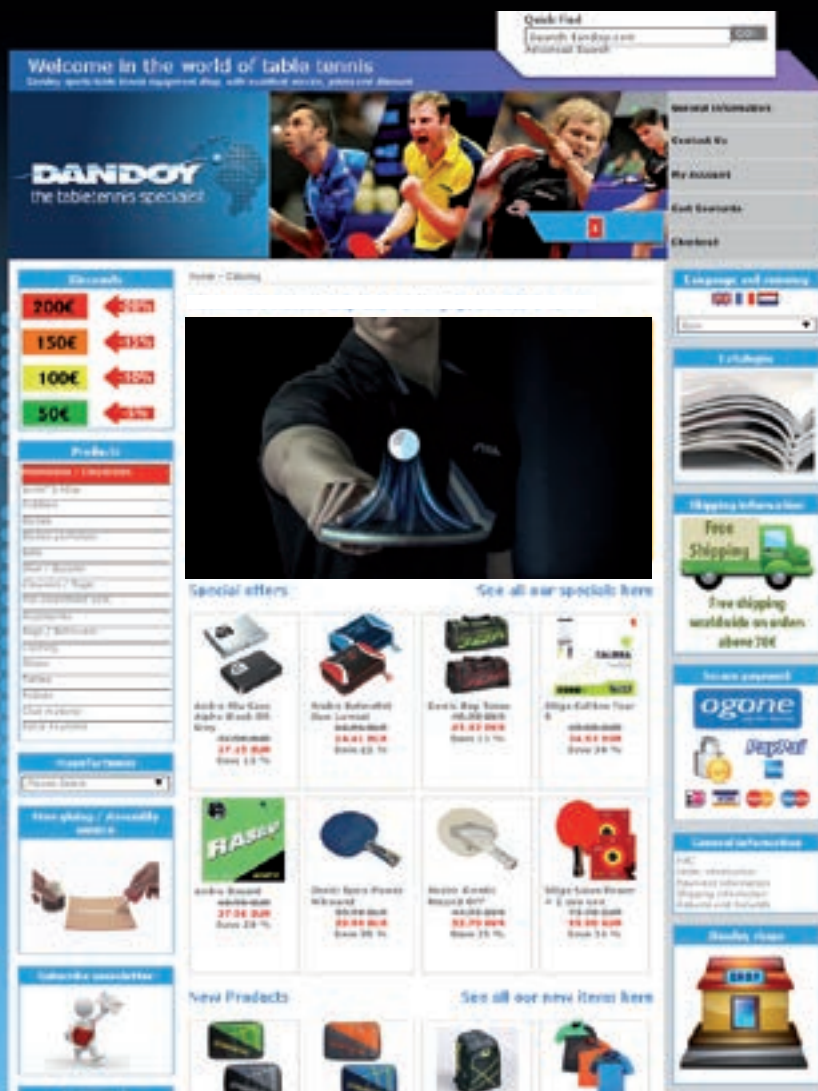
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