

2004 DISABLED PLAYERS COMMITTEE REPORT

In 2004 all of our attention was focused on the players who were going to Athens to compete in the Paralympic Games. The Paralympic table tennis competition took place on September 18-27 at Galatsi Olympic Hall under the same team of volunteers and staff who ran the Olympic competition.

The Paralympic Games are the second largest sporting event in the world, conceding top honors only to the Olympics. The multi-sport competition showcases the talents and abilities of the world's most elite athletes with physical disabilities. The Games feature 21 sports, 18 of which are also contested in the Olympics.

The first Paralympics were held in 1960 in Rome, Italy. 400 Athletes from 23 countries participated. Today more than 4,000 athletes from 120 countries participate in the Summer Paralympics, while more than 1,100 athletes from 36 countries compete in the Winter Paralympic Games.

The 2004 USA Team consisted of two familiar faces to the Paralympic scene in veterans Jennifer Johnson (Port Chester, N.Y.) and Tahl Leibovitz (Elmhurst, N.Y.), while teammate Wayne Lo (Sunnyvale, Calif.) was a newcomer to the Games. Jennifer Johnson was the Team Captain. The Head Coach and Team Leader was Sean O'Neill (Charlottesville, Va.), a former two-time Olympian.

Making her sixth straight appearance for the U.S. in the Paralympic Games, Johnson competed in Class 4 (sitting class) and played for her eighth Paralympic medal. Johnson is the winner of three gold, three silver and one bronze medal in the 1996, 1988 and 1984 Paralympic Games.

Leibovitz competed in the second Paralympic Games of his career and had already won a coveted gold at the 1996 Paralympic Games in Atlanta in class 7. In 1998 his disability classification was changed and he became a class 10 player. At the 2002 World he again was reclassified to Class 9, in which he won a Bronze medal in Athens.

Making his Paralympic debut, Lo competed in both the 2001 and 2003 ParaPan American Games. In the 2001 ParaPan Games, Lo took second place in the Class 8 singles, and in 2003 he took home top honors as he placed first in Class 8 (standing class).

The Paralympic team joined the Olympic team visiting the White House

and the President and Mrs. Bush after returning home after a series of plane delays that kept the team in Athens an extra day. The Paralympic team would like to thank USATT editor/webmaster Larry Hodges for his exceptional coverage of our results and daily updates on the USATT website. Tahl is extremely appreciative of Larry choosing to place him on the cover of the USATT magazine and doing an in depth interview.

Other activities worth noting are:

- 1) President's National Initiative on Physical Fitness for Children & Youth with Disabilities (May 26, 2004) Washington, D.C. Sean O'Neill and Marcus Jackson participated in an event lead by Tommy G. Thompson, Secretary of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Dr. Margaret J. Gianni, Director, Office of Disabilities, U.S. Surgeon General, Dr. Richard Carmona, to demonstrate table tennis to kids with disabilities in the Washington, D.C. area.
- 2) 24th National Veteran Wheelchair Games, (June 15-19, 2004) St. Louis, Missouri with 102 participants in table tennis alone!
- 3) 2004 Killerspin US Open Newgy Robot Auction - Newgy continued support for US Disabled Committee. Newgy auctioned off a robot with the proceeds (\$500) to help with our team as we prepared for Athens. They also provided 3 robots for practice and plan another auction in Baltimore at the 2004 STIGA North American Teams.
- 4) National Junior Disability Sports Championships 2004 (July 11-17, 2004) Mesa, Arizona. 250 young people (6 to 21-year-old) competed in a multi-sport event which table tennis was included. USATT's Wayne Johnson served as Tournament Director/Referee.

Local program set up afterward to promote disabled table tennis:

<http://www.mesadisabledsports.com/pdtabletennis.htm>

- 5) US Paralympic Team member participated in USATT events in preparation for Athens - US Olympic Singles and US/NA Doubles Olympic Trials, California Open, Eastern Open, Western Open, STIGA Open, US Open, Matthew J. Murad Memorial Open, 5th Garden State Open and 2nd Annual NYC Open.
- 6) Paralympian Tahl Leibovitz finished 9th in the US Olympic Singles Trials and 6th in the North American Olympic Doubles trials.

7) Leibovitz and Johnson are active members of NYC2012 Olympic Bid Circle of Olympians and Paralympians. Both have represented table tennis at events, fundraisers, media opportunities on behalf of NYC2012. Johnson is a member of the NYC2012 Paralympic Advisory Committee. Both of whom along with other Olympians and Paralympians were presented with crystal apples from Tiffany at a reception hosted by Mayor Bloomberg at the Philip Randolph High School in the Bronx.

8) Jennifer Johnson and Sharon Frant Brooks elected to co-chair USATT Disabled Committee.

We are currently trying to recruit members for our committee. We have asked Norman Bass, a Paralympian and former football and baseball player and Michael LoRusso, Paralympian to sit on the committee and they have agreed. We would also like to invite Lily Yip to sit on the committee. If you or if you know any one who would like to serve on this committee, please let us know.

Our goal in 2005 is to focus on grassroots development table tennis with all the different disabled sports organizations in order to increase our participation at the national and international level.

We look forward to working with Doru and the Board of Directors.

Report respectfully submitted by:

Jennifer Johnson

Sharon Frant Brooks

Co-Chairs, USATT Disabled Players Committee