

OFFICIALS VIEW

In Defense of the Good Old Seasoned and Experienced Umpires

By Dr. Azmy

I received and read very carefully a copy of the Final Report of the ITTF Umpires and Referees Task Force. Let me start by congratulating the Task Force Committee for a job well done. I know how much energy, effort and dedication it takes to produce such a document. However, after reading the report one may feel that parts of it are exclusive and somewhat discriminatory. I hope my comments are not viewed as negative criticism. In fact my goal is to complement the report and create a document which will consider all umpires and referees on an equal basis.

The concern is geared toward part I, article 2.6.3, where it is stated that these (IU – International Umpires) should have a good command of English and should not exceed 60 years of age. In Part II, the same statement is repeated again as, IU A-Category-Maximum age 60 years.

This requirement was proposed several years ago and many associations opposed it. We pleaded our case previously and convinced the ITTF and BGM to vote against the age limit for selection of IU umpires for major events. We seek the help of all concerned and the Task Force Committee to eliminate such restrictions for those selected to umpire the Olympic Games, World Title Competitions, Pro-Tour Grand Finals, etc., for the following reasons.

First, some associations may consider the requirement inappropriate and disrespectful. In the U.S. it is against the law to practice Age Discrimination. It is illegal to base the selection of an umpire on the basis of age.

Second, as the Task Force considered quality over quantity, one hopes that the same logic would apply to age; that means “quality over age.”

Third, some of the best umpires have been top players. Players in their prime do not want to be umpires. They become umpires later in their lives.

Fourth, financial restrictions limit the ability of younger umpires to participate in major tournaments on the local, national, and international level. Therefore, experience may not be developed at an early age. It is mostly those who have retired early who become dedicated and prosperous enough to travel and become more experienced.

Fifth, players do not look at the age of the umpire. They want a knowledgeable, talented, experienced, efficient, objective and fair umpire regardless of his or her age.

Sixth, TV appearances rarely capture an umpire during a match. TV concentrates on the players and the game itself. The cosmetics which have been used in the past, i.e., colorful shirts, etc., did not attract more players, or TV coverage, or larger audiences.

Seventh, let us not forget that some of the best players who survived through the years are not young players. One wonders: are we going to make an age limit for players in the near future to “give a younger image to the sport?”

Eighth, table tennis has flourished on the premise that it is a sport for all ages. As the average life span increases, the number of older players and older umpires will increase.

Finally, umpiring for major events is a great incentive that inspires many older umpires to continue umpiring and improving their performance, looking forward to that day when they can umpire at center court in a major event.

For the above reasons, I am seeking the help of all those who can influence such decisions, of all umpires concerned, and of the members of the Task Force Committee, to eliminate the age restrictions on the selection of umpires for major events.

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