

## **Officials View**

**By Dr. Azmy**

### **The Plight of the Officials and Umpires**

In the busy city of Chicago and on a beautiful part of it, Navy Pier, the Killerspin US Open and ITTF Pro Tour took place. Despite any difficulties that surrounded the tournament, the comments of the players indicated that they enjoyed it. The Pier itself had an atmosphere of joyfulness, especially with the festivities of the 4<sup>th</sup> of July.

Behind the scenes negotiations, compromises and occasional surprises were faced before and during the tournament. Thanks to Sheri Pittman, Doru Gheorghe and Richard Lee for their support, firm standings, quick thinking and solutions. The USATT staff with its new additions, the tournament staff, the officials, the umpires, the volunteers, the players, coaches, and all those who contributed to the tournament, worked together in an atmosphere of cooperation. We were also very fortunate to have an ITTF Competition Manager, Didier Leroy who was very understanding, who contributed positive suggestions and ideas, and who accepted all the changes needed to accommodate a smooth-running tournament.

This article is concerned with the role of the officials and umpires through the tournament and beyond. The change of the size of the venue and the number of the tables created a serious problem for the officials and umpires. Faced with these problems the tournament schedule was changed. The organizers had to be there every day from 7:00am till the lights were turned off at the venue. The players played from 8:30am till after 10:00pm. The Chief Umpire, Aly Salam, took it as a challenge and succeeded to create a suitable schedule for the umpires. However, that schedule had to start before 8:30am and end at 10:00pm. The umpires worked so hard and worked long hours with superb performances.

The Officials Committee in its meeting was concerned about several issues. Few umpires had applied to serve at the tournament. Several reasons were mentioned, but the main one was the lack of financial support to cover the full expenses of the umpires. One has to dig in his pocket to come and serve at tournaments. Of course the added problem has been the longer hours of service every day of the tournament. Sometimes the umpires did not have time to have a break to eat. When the schedule is so demanding, it requires the presence of the officials for even longer hours. Special thanks have to be given to our guest umpires from overseas, especially the Japanese umpires, who pay more of their own expenses. But that also led us to other problems. Usually, at an international tournament, there is a party for the umpires. It is in a way a thank you party for all the services the umpires have done. Some tournaments will provide three buffet meals for the umpires, two at the hotel and one at the venue, especially when the bottle of water at the hotel costs \$5 and a cup of coffee costs \$4. The schedule will be merciful, with a long break at the middle of the day and a day off for sightseeing. This time the shortage extended also to the number of volunteers, such as those who work on the computers all day. They are useful as they provide the information to be posted for players, coaches, and the audience in general, including results, match schedules, player names, and the tables where they are playing.

It is not my intention to be just critical; I hope these observations will be taken in a spirit of helpful hints. I also hope that we can find constructive ways to deal with these shortcomings in future tournaments.