

Comparative analysis between hardbat and “Liha” (sandpaper) brand of play during the 2010 Philippine national open table tennis championships

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Abstract: Sandpaper and hardbat rackets made significant contributions which dramatically improved over the years resulting in the introduction of the sponge/rubber racket in the 1950’s. The sandpaper racket was introduced in the Philippines during its American colonization. It’s popularly called “Liha” among Filipinos and still prevalent especially among middle-aged to elders who may not only want to compete but hope to maintain an optimum level of fitness. It has a different “service” rule compared to the current ITTF rule. The study aimed to investigate if there is no significant relationship between hardbat and “Liha” game during the Philippine national open table tennis championships in 2010. Three events with the corresponding participants were analyzed: men’s team Liha event using the national rules (Easy Serve, Easy Receive or ESER rule), men’s singles Liha and hardbat events using ITTF rules. Descriptive statistics and Spearman rank correlation were used to analyze the results of the matches. It showed that no significant relationships were found between men’s Liha team and men singles Liha ($r = 0.358$) as well as between Liha singles and hardbat ($r = 0.509$). The research clearly indicated that one player does not have a monopoly of skills playing with different brand of rackets. The “ESER” rule also contributed significantly where players need to adapt to it through regular practice, familiarization and participation in tournaments in order to perform at their best. Performance of table tennis players using different types of table tennis rackets and rules vary in all sorts depending on how well one can adapt to it.

Keywords: “Liha”, hardbat, ESER rule

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the study

Table tennis has its own historical beginnings. Through the years, there has been a tremendous flow of evolution on table tennis rackets, which greatly influenced the sport in terms of the spin and speed of the ball. The earliest rackets were vellum battledores originally made for the ancient game of battledore and shuttlecock, a primitive form of badminton [2,4]. These rackets were used in the very first 'ping pong' sets sold by Jacques out of England. Parker brothers in America was a licensed company for distribution of Jacques products so time wise Jacques started making trademark 'ping pong' sets in the late 1800's - probably around 1895 [1,5]. Sandpaper and hardbat rackets made significant contributions which dramatically improved over the years resulting in the introduction of the sponge/rubber racket in the 1950’s. Sandpaper rackets ruled supreme in America from around 1905 through 1929 - although some sandpaper rackets were in fact introduced into some sets in a limited manner even earlier. Sandpaper rackets were never 'banned' from the USTTA regulations for approved equipment. What happened was when inverted sponge rubber took over in America in the early 1960's, it was simply forgotten about and excluded because tournament players had literally forgotten that sandpaper could be used in tournaments - and by then, nobody was using sandpaper. They had

switched to hard rubber and slowly replaced sandpaper in tournament play. Sandpaper rackets were still allowed in tournament play in the late 1920's by both the American ping pong association and in the early 1930's through the newly formed US table tennis association but as the decade progressed, sandpaper rackets phased out slowly from tournaments because players liked the new “mechanical advantages” that hard rubber could provide compared to sandpaper [1]. These rackets are still prevalent among the Americans where major USATT sanctioned tournaments are held such as the US open and other local events. However, sandpaper rackets are still manufactured and sold in mass quantities globally - including in America - but it is now the “low end” recreational sector that uses these rackets. The sandpaper racket was introduced in the Philippines during its American colonization [3]. It’s popularly called “Liha” among Filipinos and still prevalent especially among middle-aged to elders who may not only want to compete but hope to maintain an optimum level of fitness. Top players would engage in private “underground” betting, which also serves as their means to supplement their livelihood. It has its own “national” rule compared to the current ITTF rule especially on the service, which is popularly called the “ESER” or “Easy Serve, Easy Receive” rule [3].

Table 1. The difference between the “national” and international rule (ITTF rule with some modification)

National rule	ITTF rule (modified)
Use 38 mm balls	Use 40 mm balls
“Easy Serve, Easy Return” from right to right half court (singles and doubles)	Player serves the ball anywhere (singles)
Game is up to 20 points and best of 3 games	Game is up to 21 points and best of 3 games
If score reaches 19-all, player or pair who reaches 5 points wins the games starting from 0-0. If the score is 4-all, then both players or pairs start at 0-0 again until one reaches 5 points	If score is 20-all, the game shall be won by the player or pairs subsequently gaining a lead of 2 points
The player can touch the table with his freehand	The player shall score a point if his opponent’s freehand touches the playing surface

In the US open table tennis championships held from June 30-July 3, 2010, a special inaugural “Liha” event was included where the researchers attended and celebrated this historic moment and showed the Filipino game of “Liha”. A special ceremony was held where the national anthems of both the United States and the Philippines were sung.

1.2 Statement of the problem

The study aimed to investigate if there is no significant relationship between hardbat and Liha game during the Philippine national open table tennis championships 2010. Three events with the corresponding participants were analyzed: men’s team Liha event using the national rules (Easy Serve, Easy Receive or ESER rule), men’s singles Liha and hardbat events using ITTF rules. The following null hypotheses were determined in this study:

1. There is no significant relationship between the men team “Liha” and men singles “Liha” events
2. There is no significant relationship between the men singles “Liha” and hardbat events.

1.3 Significance of the study

Since “Liha” and hardbat rackets contributed in the improvement of equipment in table tennis, this study serves to inform table tennis enthusiasts that such use of these equipment even though unpopular they are compared to the sponge rackets can still be played whether it is recreational or competitive in nature.

It also serves to encourage middle age to elderly players to play using either the “Liha” or hardbat rackets and promote fitness and health because of “its low intensity, longer duration” type of play.

Hopefully, more tournaments will be organized of this nature which can be used as a “variant” from today’s sponge rubber game and give opportunities to older players to still compete, preserve the beauty and creativity of playing with these equipment.

1.4 Scope and limitations of the study

This study is confined to “Liha” and hardbat players, who competed in the 3rd Philippine national table tennis championships held from November 3-7, 2010 at Philsports Arena, Pasig City, Metro Manila.

2. METHODOLOGY

The descriptive study was used to gather data to compare the relationships between the “Liha” and hardbat brand of play. There was a total of 81 entries, 21 in the men’s “Liha” team events, 29 in the men’s “Liha” singles events and 31 in the men singles hardbat events. The participants were well represented in terms of the geographical distribution from the 3 major islands in the Philippines, namely Luzon, Visayas and Mindanao.

There were 8 teams who were entered in the team “Liha” event. The national rule was implemented. The minimum entry in the event was 2 with a maximum of 4 players. A player could play in both singles and doubles. The orders of play were as follows:

First match: A vs X (singles)

Second match: doubles

Third and deciding match: B vs Y (when the first two matches are leveled 1 match each)

The teams were divided into 2 groups. Team matches were played using the single round-robin format. The top two teams advances to the final stage using the crossover semi-final format where the top team in group 1 plays the second rank team in group 2 while the top team in group 2 plays the second rank team in group 1. The winners in the crossover semi-finals play for the championship match while the losers are automatically third placers. Since it is very difficult to rank the players because of the uneven number of matches played, the number of wins and losses per player were computed in terms of their percentages in order to rank the players who competed in this event.

In the “Liha” singles event, the entries were divided into 8 groups and matches were played using the single round-robin format. The ITTF rules were implemented with some modifications. The top two rank players advanced to the final stage where the single-elimination

format was played. The final rankings of the players were both determined from the win-loss record that they have garnered.

Lastly, in the hardbat singles event, the entries in this event were divided into 8 groups and matches were played using the single round-robin format. The ITTF rules were implemented with some modifications. The top rank player advanced to the final stage where the single-elimination format was played. The final rankings of the players were both determined from the win-loss record that they have garnered.

Spearman rank correlation was used to compare the relationships between the:

1. men's "Liha" team and men's "Liha" singles events; and
2. men's "Liha" singles and men singles hardbat events

3. RESULTS

Results showed that there is no significant relationship between men's Liha team and men's Liha singles event with both 16 subjects competed in these events ($r = 0.358$).

Table 2. Comparison of the rankings between the men's "Liha" team and men's "Liha" singles events

Subjects	Men's "Liha" singles	Men's "Liha" team
Subject 1	1	1
Subject 2	2	11
Subject 3	3	11
Subject 4	4	11
Subject 5	5	2
Subject 6	6	3
Subject 7	7	7
Subject 8	8	15
Subject 9	9.5	4
Subject 10	9.5	5
Subject 11	14.5	9
Subject 12	14.5	15
Subject 13	14.5	15
Subject 14	14.5	7
Subject 15	14.5	7
Subject 16	14.5	13

On the other hand, results showed that there is no significant relationship between the men's "Liha" singles and men's hardbat singles event ($r = .509$) with 8 subjects competed both in these events.

Table 3. Comparison of the rankings between the men's hardbat singles and men's "Liha" singles events

Subjects	Men's hardbat singles	Men's "Liha" singles
Subject 1	1	5.5
Subject 2	2	1
Subject 3	3.5	2
Subject 4	3.5	3
Subject 5	5	5.5
Subject 6	6	8
Subject 7	7.5	4
Subject 8	7.5	7

4. DISCUSSION

Some who did not perform well in the men's "Liha" team event were able to land in the top 4 positions in the men's "Liha" singles event except for the champion in both these events who was also the top player in the country in the using sponge rubber. The 2 third placers in the men's "Liha" singles event were more familiarized with the international rules. They also belong to the southernmost part of the country which is in Davao del Norte located in the Mindanao Island and all of them are attacking players from both forehand and backhand which are their strongest point. Ironically, in the men's "Liha" team event, they were identically ranked tenth in terms of their win-loss records. On the other hand, the second to two 3rd placers in the men's "Liha" team event were all defensive players which clearly indicates that they are used to the national rules. Two of them belong to the same province and have been using the national rule in all the "Liha" events organized in their province. This clearly proved that one who is good in using the national rule may not be as good using the international rule. Another reason is that the style of play using the national rule is different from the international rule. In the national rule, most of the style of play is defense more than the offense since the start of the rally after the serve is more on "chop" because of the ESER rule. Unlike in the international rule, player can serve the ball anywhere with a certain degree of difficulty and one usually sets up for an attack after service.

Most placers in the men's "Liha" singles event did not win in the hardbat event except for the champion where he landed 2nd place in the men's hardbat singles event. The champion in the men's hardbat event did not even make it to the top 8 placers in the men's "Liha" singles event. This is due to the fact that he is more familiar using the hardbat racket since he is also a member of the national table tennis team with vast international experience using a sponge rubber racket. Besides, he capitalized on his strong points which are the serve and attack technique using both forehand and backhand where he convincingly defeated the champion in the men "Liha" singles event. Results also showed that the

3rd placer in the men “Liha” singles event also placed 3rd in the men’s hardbat singles event. This is mainly because the international rule was used in both this events and it proved effective for him being an offensive player.

5. CONCLUSION

The different rules that were implemented in the three events contested were a major factor that contributed to the results of the study. This clearly proved that one who is good in using the national rule may not be as good using the international rule. Another reason is that the style of play using the national rule is different from the international rule. In the national rule, most of the style of play is defense more than the offense since the start of the rally after the serve is more on “chop” because of the ESER (Easy Serve, Easy Return, from right to right half court,) rule. Unlike in the international rule, player can serve the ball anywhere with a certain degree of difficulty and one usually sets up for an attack after service.

The study also indicated that one player does not have a monopoly of skills playing with different brands of rackets without years of intense training. The “ESER” rule also contributed significantly where players need to adapt to it through regular practice, familiarization and participation using different types of rackets in tournaments can be attributed to peak performance in tournaments in order to perform at their best. Consequently, players who have a sound foundation in using sponge rubber rackets can perform credibly in “Liha” and hardbat events but mostly on the latter. Performance of table tennis players using different types of table tennis rackets and rules vary in all sorts depending on how well one can adapt to it.

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