

The use of the sandpaper rackets during the 2013 World Championship of Ping Pong

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Abstract: since the advent of sponge rubber rackets in the early 1950's, traditional sandpaper rackets used in national and international competitions with such longer rallies, less spin and speed have slowly declined and eventually almost forgotten. We investigated the performances of the participants during the 2013 World Championship of Ping Pong held in London, England from January 5-6, 2013. The event offered cash prizes and participated by 64 players from 18 countries (39 rubber, 20 hardbat and 5 sandpaper players) who were selected by Matchroom Sports. To level the playing field, specifically made sandpaper rackets provided by the organizers were used. The double elimination format was played in the qualifying stage with 8 groups of 8 players vying for the top 4 spots going into the final stage where the single elimination format was played with the best of 3 games using the current ITTF rules. A “double pt.” rule was also introduced. The results confirmed that sponge rubber players, who advanced to the final rounds can adapt to sandpaper rackets. With limited or no hardbat training, we felt that some rules can be changed to achieve more rallies with an epic sense and greater balance between defense and offense to further separate significant differences between sponge/rubber and sandpaper game. However, because a significantly statistically greater number of participants used sponge rubber rackets, inconclusive data and evidence exist to determine whether full time sandpaper had an advantage over part-time sandpaper enthusiasts that otherwise use sponge rubber rackets. Furthermore, the format of the competition mirrored to a large extent the modern sponge rubber sport.

Keywords: “liha”, cultural historical activity theory, variant, table tennis, Philippines.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the study

Table Tennis rackets today play an important role in enhancing the performance of a table tennis player. From the earlier vellum battledores of the late 19th century [2-3], the pimpled rubber faced racket of the 1920's, the advent of sponge rubber rackets in the early 1950's to the present times of the “gluemanía” of the 1990's, table tennis rackets have greatly affected the speed and spin of the ball, the style of play as well as the level of performance of players. The traditional sandpaper rackets used in national and international competitions with such longer and exciting rallies, less spin and speed have slowly declined and eventually almost forgotten. It is only in the United States, the Philippines and some parts in Europe which still use the sandpaper rackets and organize tournaments [1, 4]. In the Philippines, since the American colonization in the early 20th century, where they introduced to the Filipinos to the present times, the sandpaper rackets which is termed as “liha”, is still prevalent and often played in the “underground” world and mostly in rural areas by low to middle income families. It has a different set of rules compared to the present ITTF rules. It has also become a past time physical fitness activity for elders in some parts in the Philippines.

The main characteristics of a “liha/sandpaper” game are:

1. Longer rallies (low intensity and longer duration form of activity)
2. One player normally attacks and the other

player defends. (formerly)

3. Exciting to watch than the conventional “rubber” game where points takes a lot of time to gain

4. Elders here only use the “liha” as means for exercise to promote better health, fun and fitness

Table 1 – Differences between a “liha” and a sandwich rubber

| “Liha” / Sandpaper | Sandwich rubber (pips out and inverted) |
|---|--|
| Longer rallies | Shorter rallies |
| Less spin | More spin |
| Less speed | More speed |
| smaller ball (38 mm) – played in the Philippines | bigger ball (40mm) |
| Easier rules | More complicated rules |
| less advantage in service | can gain advantage in service |

To make the sandpaper game popular and “catapult it into the big league”, an event called the World Championship of Ping Pong (WCPP) was inaugurated in 2011 in Las Vegas, USA and was broadcasted worldwide, which attracted live spectators and TV viewers, which is a throwback and evocative to the early days of table tennis with its artistic display of the game. Because of the remarkable response from the table tennis enthusiasts, the said event was again held in January, 2013 in London, England with the top 64 players from 18 countries, which includes a several Olympian medalist and world ranking players vying for a total cash prize of \$ 100,000. The event again became

an instant success and was viewed live all over Europe. There is even a plan to conduct qualifying tournaments in every continent and lead to the main event which will have a \$ 1,000,000 in total cash prizes.

1.2 Statement of the problem

The aim of this study was to investigate the performances of the participants during the 2013 World Championship of Ping Pong held at Alexandra's Palace in London. The event offered cash prizes and participated by 64 players from 18 countries (39 rubber, 20 hardbat and 5 sandpaper players) who were selected by Matchroom Sports, the official event management organizer. The researchers both were members of the Philippine National Table Tennis Team delegation to this prestigious event.

1.3 Significance of the study

To level the playing field, "specifically made" sandpaper rackets, provided by the organizers were used [5-6]. Prior to the start of the event these rackets were mailed to the players weeks before the event to get familiarized with it since majority of the participants were "rubber" and hardbat players.

Total prize money worth \$ 100,000 was at stake and distributed to the top 48th placers out of the total 64 players participated which made the event rewarding for table tennis players since not many events offer lucrative cash prizes for the winners [7].

With longer rallies, lesser spin and speed and even the sound when the ball is being struck, this provided further excitement to the spectators that the organizers were successful in airing this event on TV live all over Europe and other part of the globe including the Philippines [7-8].

2. METHODOLOGY

The descriptive type of research was used in the study [11]. The total population of 64 players was used in the study.

Table 2 - Demographic profile of the participants

| Country | Number of Participants | Percentage (%) |
|-----------------|------------------------|----------------|
| 1. England | 16 | 25% |
| 2. Nigeria | 2 | 3.13% |
| 3. Holland | 6 | 9.38% |
| 4. Hungary | 5 | 7.814 |
| 5. Israel | 1 | 1.56% |
| 6. Lithuania | 2 | 3.13% |
| 7. Serbia | 3 | 4.69% |
| 8. Ireland | 4 | 6.26% |
| 9. Scotland | 1 | 1.56% |
| 10. Wales | 2 | 3.13% |
| 11. USA | 3 | 4.69% |
| 12. Russia | 3 | 4.69% |
| 13. France | 5 | 7.81 |
| 14. Romania | 1 | 1.56% |
| 15. Philippines | 7 | 10.94% |

| | | |
|-------------|--------|-------|
| 16. Poland | 1 | 1.56% |
| 17. Germany | 1 | 1.56% |
| 18. Bosnia | 1 | 1.56% |
| | N = 64 | ≈100% |

The racket that the players normally use in training and competition plays an integral part in determining whether they still can adapt easily to the sandpaper racket. Table 3 shows the racket orientation of participants.

Table 3 – Racket orientation of participants

| Type of racket orientation | Number of participants | Percentage (%) |
|----------------------------|------------------------|----------------|
| Rubber | 39 | 60.94% |
| Hardbat | 20 | 31.25% |
| Sandpaper | 5 | 7.81% |
| | N = 64 | 100% |

2.1 Format and procedure

The event was divided into two stages:

1) Preliminary round

This round consisted of eight groups of eight players. The double elimination format was played with a total of 10 matches in each group. Two straight wins in each group automatically qualified to the final stage while two straight losses eliminated the player from the event. To stay in contention during the tournament, a player should at least have one win.

2) Knockout and final stage

The 32 players who have qualified from the preliminary stage will play on a single elimination, knockout format.

Time outs were not allowed during the matches unless advised by the umpire. There will be a 30 s turn around between games unless advised by the umpire. The "expedite rule" will take into effect throughout the event [12].

2.2 A special double point ball

To add more excitement to the event, a "double point ball" is implemented. A player can propose to use the "double point ball" once during the match and can only be done by the current server. It can be called either on the first or second serve but can be used up to or when a player has scored 8 points in that game. If the player who served wins the point using the "double point ball", he will be awarded two points [9].

3. RESULTS

Table 4a – Results of the top 32 players who qualified in the final stage up to round of 16

| Players per racket orientation | Top 32 (B) | % (B /32) | Top 16 (C) | % (C/16) |
|--------------------------------|------------|-----------|------------|----------|
| Rubber -39 | 20 | 62.5% | 13 | 81.25% |
| Hardbat - 20 | 10 | 31.25% | 2 | 12.5% |
| Sandpaper = 5 | 2 | 6.25 % | 1 | 6.25 |
| | N= 32 | 100% | N =16 | 100% |

Table 4b – Results of the quarterfinalist up to the finals

| Players per racket orientation | QF (D) | % (D/8) | SF (E) | % (E/4) | Finals (E) | % (E/2) |
|--------------------------------|--------|---------|--------|---------|------------|---------|
| Rubber -39 | 6 | 75% | 4 | 100% | 2 | 100% |
| Hardbat – 20 | 1 | 12.5% | 0 | 0% | 0 | 0 |
| Sandpaper = 5 | 1 | 12.5% | 0 | 0% | 0 | 0 |
| | N=8 | 100% | N=4 | 100% | N=2 | 100% |

4. DISCUSSION

The results confirmed that sponge rubber players, who advanced to the final rounds can adapt to the sandpaper rackets. One possible reason is perhaps because of the same orientation of play based on the current ITTF rule especially on the service rule where there is still a clear advantage on the server to initiate an offensive technique after service. This may not hold true for Filipino players since they have a different orientation in terms of the rules on service where they are used to playing the so called “easy serve, easy receive (ESER)” rule. Although, the rallies were a bit longer than using the rubber sponge rackets because of the limited amount of speed and spin that the sandpaper imparts. Also, with limited or no hardbat training, we felt that some rules can be changed to achieve more rallies with an epic sense and greater balance between defense and offense to further separate significant differences between sponge/rubber and sandpaper game. However, because of the significant and statistically greater number of participants who used sponge rubber rackets, inconclusive data and evidence exist to determine whether full time sandpaper had an advantage over part-time sandpaper enthusiasts that otherwise use sponge rubber rackets. Furthermore, the format of the competition mirrored to a large extent the modern sponge rubber sport.

5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The study led to the following conclusion and recommendations:

1. The game of table tennis using sandpaper rackets can be more exciting to watch because of the limited amount of spin and speed that it imparts in addition to longer rallies.

2. We suggest the use of sandpaper rackets as an acceptable added “variant” to be legalized like another category and hopefully ITTF will recognize such table tennis event as a form of “revival” for more senior players to participate even internationally.

3. That sandpaper rackets can be easily played by young and old individuals who do not only want to

enjoy the game but also to serve as “fallback” grounds from the present fast-paced game of table tennis so as yet to continue to patronize and stay in the table tennis community.

4. A modification of the service rule and that is the implementation of the “Easy serve-Easy return (ESER)” rule, popularly used by Filipinos which will definitely add more excitement and limits the advantage to the server.

5. Introduce the sandpaper rackets in the school athletics and physical education programs where it is more cost effective than using a conventional rubber sponge rackets.

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