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## 2006 Western Open

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Tournament article now up! Read more to see the article and the winners list. Log in to see pictures taken by NATT & Gerry Chua in the photo gallery!

2006 Western Open  
February 18th and 19th

Recreational Sports Facility, University of California, Berkeley

The 2006 STIGA North American Tour was launched in magnificent fashion at the Western Open. The tournament was filled to capacity with 274 impassioned participants, was assisted by a slew of volunteers, and the play was inspired and enthusiastic. The San Francisco Bay area glows with table tennis coaches, clubs, leagues and organizers and their participation made the Western Open one the most exciting tournaments I have ever worked. Media was also more responsive than usual, a clear indication that this region is working up a 'full head of steam' in promoting the sport we love.

Lily Yip operated the vendor booth on behalf of the Tour sponsor, Table Tennis Pioneers, with a full selection of STIGA products. Dr. Azmy Ibrahim, the Tournament Referee, assembled a distinguished group of certified umpires for the Western Open, including Tom Miller, Kenny Tien, Irina Hellwig and Mike Boot. TD Fong Hsu completed the player database and made the draws, and despite only getting access to the hall at 9PM on Friday, the Berkeley volunteers worked like pyramid-builders in getting the tournament to the floor.

We were rewarded for these efforts with outstanding performances by our entrants! In the Ying-Lo Junior Competitions, Eric Shahnazari captured the U-10 year old Boys title in head to head seven game combat with the tournament's youngest player, Ethan Chua, and then came second to Brian Chen in the U-13. Sean C. Lee served notice that he is not to be taken lightly, winning the U-16 over David Chow and finishing second to Misha Kazantsev in the U-18 category, even taking a 3 to 2 game lead against the famous junior. Guo Xi wrestled the U-22 title away from Auria Malek, who deserves some sort of Iron Man award for his near continuous play. Lily Zhang bested Sylvan Guo in five games for Girls U-10 honors, although Sylvan got her first place thrills in the U-1400 anyway. Katie Poon edged out Jessica Yick in the U-18 women and we got a preview of the Women's Final when Shu Fu met Jackie Lee in the U-22 Women's.

The Sol Feingold Memorial Senior events were just as competitive, Michael Greene downing Zhao Mao Lin in Over 60 play, David Sakai getting the better of Mark Johnson in Over 50's and a fine match in the Over 40 capping our senior play, Tuan Le defeating Lily Yip 9,9,10,-8,9!

There was strength and evenly matched play through the ratings events. In the U-2250 category, Nelson Yu fought to a win over the relentless Elie Zainabudinova, 8,-4, 6,-2, 10,-1, 14! No easy way to lay claim to the U-2375 money either, as Auria Malek toughed it out against the steady Shashin Shodhan in a very dramatic Final, -9,4,4,-9,9,-11,6! While Freddie Gabriel managed to make his U-2500 over Samson Dubina a five gamer, at 8, 8, 8,-6, 8, it was no walk in the park either. Samson played well in Berkeley, as you will see shortly.

### Open Singles

Group 1: Feth, Zajac, Hugh, Au

In the NATT scheme of things, the Top 12 players are seeded out of Open Singles Qualifying rounds and, joined by four qualifiers, play in four Round Robin groups of four each with two players advancing. There is now a policy of advancing additional qualifiers if, for any reason, seeded players withdraw or fail to show at this stage. Ben Johnson, coping with a massive East Coast storm, had only managed to get to Los Angeles. His luggage however, including his rackets, did not. This in our first group, we see Kevin Au, the Qualifier joining Stefan Feth and Peter Zajac, the seeds, along with Judy

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Hugh, the „Lucky Loser,“ and fifth place qualifier replacing Johnson.

None of which made any difference to Stefan! Kevin Au managed a deuce game with the defending Western Open champ, but it was otherwise smooth sailing as Feth went 16-0; 4-0 to win the group and advance to Sunday,“s Quarterfinals. Things were more complicated for our other players. Peter Zajac was upset by both Kevin Au, 4-3; (6,-7, 8,-4, 9,-4,-4) and in straight games by Judy Hugh (-10,-7,-11,-11). Judy then took control of her own fate by defeating Kevin 4-2 (-6, 8, 8, 6,-6, 9) and finishing 2nd with a 2-1 record. She became one of the few non-seeds to make our SE Round and the first „Lucky Loser,“ to do so!

Group 2: Nguyen, Dubina, Yip, Schmidt

Khoa Nguyen and Lily Yip are tied at 2 games apiece when Khoa asserts himself and takes the fifth and sixth games, 8 and 6. Avishy manages a game from Khoa as well, but goes down 5, 9, 7,-6, 4. Samson also beats the C and D players, defeating Lily in straight games, 7,12,6,6 and Avishy in five, 9,8,-13,2,2. Lily and Avishy, take one look at each other, and elect not to play their now meaningless match, a double default. So Khoa and Samson both come through, and the question remaining is which is seeded first and which is seeded second. Samson pulls off a major „is that right? Did he do that?“ upset of the San Jose star by scores of 9,-8,-13, 7,-5, 8, 7, coming back from 2-1 and 3-2 game deficits! Dubina gets the better of the Quarterfinal draw positions as a result and a lot of congratulations.

Group 3: Owens, Gabriel, Lu, Kazantsev

The most surprising outcome of any of our groups in quite some time! Not a tremendous surprise, just a great effort by Freddie Gabriel in coming in first place. He defeated Misha 4-2, and Lu Guo Hui 4-1, which takes some doing. Then he made it a clean sweep of the group by upsetting the top-seeded Eric Owens, -8, 8, 8, 7,-8,-8, 9. Eric,“s troubles were not over however! Although he beat Lu in four straight games, 4,5,5,4, Eric soon had his hands full of Misha Kazantsev. Misha is traditional a slow starter, not trying to accomplish too much in the opening minutes, and dropped game one, 11-2, but takes the next two, 15-13 and 11-7. Eric is real fighter, and 11-7 evens the match only to go down again 11-7 and trails three games to two. The crowd is heavily Californian, but Eric has his posse too. 11-4 he looks to have righted himself, but,“in the end it,“s Misha, 12-10 in the seventh game of a real barnburner. But Lu had defeated Misha, and that leaves everyone but Freddie tied with records of 1-2. Thanks to his straight game win over Lu, Eric squeaks out of this dangerous group as the #2 seed for a Quarterfinal berth.

Group 4: Kamkar-Parsi, Gombos, Lee, Malek

Homayoun had to scramble to make his group, travel problems having trapped him in Philadelphia. Having arrived, however, he hands a loss to Jackie Lee, four games to two, 4,4,10,-10,-6, 8. Second seed Ludovic Gombos is not out there very long with the Qualifier, Auria Malek, but that,“s because Malek is in a „take no prisoners,“ mode, and Ludovic has no chance to get anything going! Malek notches a 4-0 surprise, 10,4,7,9. Gombos has no such trouble with Jackie, and 6,6,7,6 salvages some pride. When Jackie defeats Auria, Malek must defeat Homayoun to advance cleanly. Auria takes the first game 11-5, only to lose the next three, 12-10, 12-10, 11-4. Digging deeply, the Californian takes two in a row to even the match, 11-4, 11-8 before Kamkar-Parsi takes the final game from Auria, 11-6. Gombos plays Kamkar-Parsi, and 3-4, nearly pulls off the upset. But here it's Kamkar-Parsi that advances and Malek winner of a three way tie for second, who joins him, from the D seed position!

Quarterfinals

Stefan Feth vs. Auria Malek

And this is Malek,“s reward for all that excellent play on Saturday, to face the defending Western Open Champion in the Quarterfinals. „Auria,“s got a nice game,“ Stefan said afterward, „but sometimes he tries too hard, always looking for the big shot. He should relax and change speeds a little more.“ Stefan advances to the Semi-Finals, 5,7,9,7.

Khoa Nguyen vs. Freddie Gabriel

Freddie played great in his Round robin, while Khoa had that disappointing loss to Samson. So how would this pairing turn out? We aren,“t to know, because nursing a sore arm, Khoa withdraws and Gabriel advances by default.

Homayoun Kamkar-Parsi vs. Eric Owens

Eric was not dominant in Saturday,“s Round Robin play, but Sunday he,“s a different player. Eric,“s not only got the skill set, but also the smarts to quickly analyze his opponent and adjust. Here he applies his best against the worthy Canadian, and 9, 7, 8,-5, 8 advances to the Semi,“s.

Samson Dubina vs. Judy Hugh

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What,Âs not to love here? Samson has clearly elevated his game recently, and Judy has been on a steady and inexorable climb for years. These two play extremely lose games through the first three, Judy Hugh winning the opener 13-11, Samson taking a one game lead, 11-9, 15-13, before he wears Judy down and 11-4, 11-4, eliminates the young lady from New Jersey.

#### Semifinals

Stefan Feth vs. Freddie Gabriel

No one would have faulted this match as the Championship match, but it is ,Âonly,Â a Semi. Freddie is playing strongly, and it shows here. Stefan, a former German National Men,Âs Singles Semi-Finalist is ,Âretired,Â from International play and moving to the Bay area, but is still clearly a 2700 level player. Freddie,Âs excellent service game does not embarrass him here, and they are tied after two, Gabriel winning the second game 11-6. Not many in this country can nick Stefan for a game, but a game is all Freddie gets, as Stefan advances in his Title defense, 8,-6, 4,5,5.

Eric Owens vs. Samson Dubina

Samson already has that upset win over Khoa and a full head of steam. Eric has the experience of International and top-rank competition. Plus it seems the entire female contingent of the USC club has become his very vocal fan club here. Samson never gives less than best, but Eric has the wind beneath his wings, 8,6,8,7, a straight game win and a ticket to the Championship match.

#### Final

Stefan Feth vs. Eric Owens

Umpire Tom Miller presides and the aisles are packed to see these two top-rated players compete for the Title. The winner gets \$1500 and the title, the runner-up has a \$700 payday, so the motivation is in place! But all the heart in the world (11-8) is no substitute for true skill level (11-6). All the desire on the planet (11-6) can not substitute for world class skill and conditioning. Leading 10-7 in the fourth game, Stefan gets a net, a ball that springs up, down, hits the table and falls to the side, next to the net post. Eric, in a flat-out, give-it-your-all effort, goes to the floor and makes an amazing return, a good return, but Stefan swats it away down the centerline into the unoccupied backcourt for a straight game win. Eric just can,Ât buy a break.

There is no disgrace in having lost and every reason to praise Stefan Feth, King of the Western Open. Stefan, as a growing number of USATT members are learning, is not just a tremendous player, but a tremendous person as well! Always a gentleman, well-mannered and cheerful, we are fortunate to have Stefan in our ranks and very pleased that he has chosen so frequently to participate in NATT events. Now that he has decided to make his home here in the United States, we are all enriched by his presence.

Hats off also to the Cal volunteers, Yuntao Zhou (Club President), Matthew Ma, Kyle Perry, Grace Ma, Michael Blum, Haoyu Zheng, Ryan Hsu, Deborah Leong and Lucas Siow who assisted with the tournament setup, and Kenny Schang, Minh-Chau Nguyen, Erik Tsou, Allison Seibel, Yuntao Zhou and Lone Chan who assisted with the cleanup. Special thanks to Mark Hikin of the Recreational Sports Facility for his help throughout the tournament.

#### 2006 Western Open On The 2006 Stiga North American Tour

Event Name

Champion

Finalist

Open Singles

Stefan Feth

Eric Owens

Women's RR

Sara Fu

Jacqueline Lee

Ying/Lo Junior Competitions Under 22 Men's RR

Xi Guo

Auria Malek

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Ying/Lo Junior Competitions Under 22 Women's RR

Sara Fu  
Jacqueline Lee

Ying/Lo Junior Competitions Under 18 Boys RR

Mikhail Misha Kazantsev  
Sean C. Lee

Ying/Lo Junior Competitions Under 18 Girls RR

Katie Poon  
Jessica Yick

Ying/Lo Junior Competitions Under 16 Boys RR

Sean C. Lee  
David Chow

Ying/Lo Junior Competitions Under 16 Girls RR

Stephanie Chow  
Melody Wang

Ying/Lo Junior Competitions U13 Boys RR

Brian Chen  
Erick Shahnazari

Ying/Lo Junior Competitions U13 Girls RR

Lily Zhang  
Sylvan Guo

Ying/Lo Junior Competitions U10 Boys RR

Erick Shahnazari  
Ethan Chua

Ying/Lo Junior Competitions U10 Girls RR

Lily Zhang

Feingold Memorial Over 40 RR

Tuan Dai Le  
Lily Yip

Feingold Memorial Over 50 RR

David Sakai  
Mark Johnson

Feingold Memorial Over 60 RR

Michael Greene  
Mao Lin Zhao

Under 2500 SE

Freddie Gabriel  
Samson Dubina

Under 2375 RR

Auria Malek  
Shashin Shodhan

Under 2250 RR

Nelson Yu  
Emira Zainabudinova

Under 2125 RR

Wei-Sung Tsao  
Joey Juin-Yuan Hu

Under 2000 RR

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Johnny Huang  
Jaime A. Melgarejo Munoz

Under 1850 RR  
Gary Fang  
Pratul Bhaidasna

Under 1700 RR  
Jessica Yick  
Gan Wah Lee

Under 1550 RR  
Do Van Tran  
Mike Labins

Under 1400 RR  
Sylvan Guo  
Adam Banghart

Under 1250 RR  
Gabriel Reder  
Victor Kretov

Under 1100 RR  
Jennifer Wang  
Ryan Hsu

Under 950 RR  
Jonathan Orbell  
Saurabh Jain

Under 800/Unrated RR  
Hoang Nguyen  
Alex Tou

Open Doubles SE  
Ludovic Gombos & Eric Owens  
Freddie Gabriel & Trevor Runyan

Under 4200 Doubles SE  
Shing-Li Sung & Bruce Liu

Joey Juin-Yuan Hu & Nelson Yu

Under 3200 Doubles SE  
Gary Baretto & David Hanson  
David Smith & William Lyons

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