

The Joola NA Teams tournament takes place every year during the weekend of Thanksgiving (Friday to Sunday). Teams of 3 to 5 players (depending on the team mates) are required for the tournament. I had the opportunity to represent NNTTC this year along with club mates Hal Barnes and Tan Nguyen and Aniket Tadepalli (from Boston). Kuzhichalil Amaljith Jayan was the other club mate who could not make it to the tournament due to some emergencies. He was replaced by Aniket. Here are a few takeaways I had from the tournament:

1. Stamina is key

Throughout the weekend (Friday to Sunday), I played a total of 29 matches which was extremely exhausting. Every other team mate also played lots of matches. Our lack of energy often reflected in some matches especially within Saturday and Sunday when the stress of the tournament began to kick in. With little sleep time over the weekend (less than 10 hours), playing that many matches was really stressful. Ice therapy was helpful for myself and Tan getting us somewhat refreshed around the feet to keep moving daily. I would say that a good workout routine to build stamina before the tournament would have come in handy and I probably would not have lost to too many kids (6 kids) in the tournament (just joking). A team of 4 or 5 people will probably be the best for the tournament especially for teams with elderly folks as well so team members can get some breaks.

2. Coaching and supporting each other is very vital

Team work comes in handy in every team. With the Joola Teams tournament, it appears more of individual effort in winning matches even though the overall results guarantee team success. The first team to win 5 individual matches has the overall win over their opponents. Coaching and supporting team mates that were playing at any point in time proved very vital to their success in some matches and the overall success of the team. I remember on several occasions being able to turn around games with coaching from other team mates. I still remember making the greatest come back in my table tennis tournament history with the support of my team mates. I made 8 points in a row to save Matchpoint at 4 (4:10) to win the match in Deuce (12:10) on the 5th set [Anzagira Allan (1817) vs Quach Hugo (1790) 10,-5,7,-9,10]

There were several other instances when team support and coaching from team mates proved to be the game changer within the tournament for our team. One thing I still feel we could have done better as a team was to scout our opponents games ahead to map out better strategies for guaranteeing a team win. However, the schedules never permitted that entirely.

3. Changing Tactics and Strategies pays off

I still remember before a match against Song Bryan (1654) of LYTTC Boys 2 when he walked up to me in confidence and told me he would steal some points from me indicating that he was going to beat me in the match. I am sure he got confident after watching me play against his team mate earlier. Unfortunately, I went into the game barely switching up my tactics to guarantee the win against him. It is fair to say that I was a little more rigid (not moving as much as I normally would), however I could still have beaten him if I had changed my tactics within that match. In a tournament like this one, some players are able to watch their opponents playing other team mates before they eventually get to play them. So they get to figure out how to play their opponents before hand. Tactical Thinking therefore was the key to winning most matches in the tournament. Tactical changes within matches was more of a necessity given that we had to play different players with wide variety of playing styles. Strategic changes would have also been

helpful if possible even though those are hard to pull off in a short time such as the duration of this tournament.

4. Quickly Getting over Match Losses is Critical

The tournament was somehow fast-paced and so dwelling on previous match losses did not amount to any good. For team NNTTC, I can say that Hal Barnes came with a lot of experience from competitions and never really let an earlier defeat affect his next match. Aniket Tadepalli (kid from Boston) came into the tournament with no expectations than being a substitute and so maintained a very calm demeanor shaking off any defeats and having some crucial victories. This was more of a learning experience for Tan Nguyen and me who get too disturbed over certain match losses and sometimes may have carried it on to other matches. It was very important to keep moving on with other matches in the midst of our losses and only refreshing ourselves with the good memories of some amazing wins to keep winning.

5. Having Fun and Gaining Experience is the Spirit of the Tournament

As a table tennis lover, I believe the spirit of this tournament lies in having fun as a team and gaining experience by playing several players with different styles. Being with a team that shared this mindset was very essential to having a nice time at the tournament. This compensated for all the stress and exhaustion that was accumulated throughout the course of the weekend. Gaining experience in particular is very critical because this tournament provided a rare opportunity to experience a wide spectrum of table tennis talents at different levels. As such, it was easy to identify various aspects of my game to work on (stronger serves, improved serve returns and most importantly engaging my FH more frequently even on the BH side with step overs). I am sure other team mates had several areas to work on and improve upon as well.

6. Play Format

The tournament began with a Preliminary Round which was to determine the Divisions for each team. We had 4 teams to play against in the Preliminary round. Being seeded according to our average team rating to the 10th group, we had two teams above us and two teams below us. We beat the 2 teams below us (lower rated) and lost to the 2 teams above us (Higher rated). At that stage and for the rest of the tournament, the highest rated player we encountered was Centeno David (1979).

We were put into Division 11 (made of 16 teams) - B (8 teams) based on our preliminary performance. We had to play all other 7 teams in the B group of Division 11 and only two teams were to advance to the knockout (semi-finals) stage from the group. We managed to beat two teams and lost to 5 teams (Defaulted matches with the last team though). The lowest rated player we faced was Jenó, George (810) but majority of our matches were players rated between 1600 and 1900 with only three players above 1900 (Centeno Giovannie (1902), Aschenbach Brian (1974) and Centeno David (1979)).

Team results can be found at <https://www.natabletennis.com/tournaments/results.php>. Individual results (summary table) at <https://www.natabletennis.com/tournaments/listentries.php>. You click on the rating of the player and you will see the outcome of all their matches. My personal record was 19 wins and 9 losses

I can go on and on about this tournament being the first time of participation. But I acknowledge the support of the club in our endeavors and allowing us to represent it (Bill was checking in everyday on how things were going). Thanks on behalf of the team.

I can only the club to consider sponsoring two or more teams to the tournament next year where possible to give members an experience of a lifetime. I must say that I see great potential in winning one of the many divisions (definitely not Division 1) from a club team. I feel we could have had more wins with Amaljith who we missed dearly.

Go Team NNTTC. Thanks to my team mates (Hal Barnes and Tan Nguyen) as well for making it to the tournament and hope to see you there (including Amaljith) again next year.

Best Regards,
Allan.