

DAVID POWELL'S 2012 TT EXPERIENCES

By David Powell

Following from the answers I provided Mark for his 2011 Nov & Dec newsletter, the Olympic Qualifying Events, both Australian and Oceania were next on my agenda and the main goal for the last few years. I came back to Australia around two weeks before the event to make sure I was feeling refreshed and ready to go for day one of qualifying. I worked closely with Mark and also my on-court coach during the events, Kyle Davis.

First up was Justin Han – I had nothing to lose and came out nervous, but swinging. I played a smart match and won 4-1. Second was Simon Gerada, who I knew came off a tough win with Trent Carter the match previous. I was extremely happy with the way I was focused during the match and tactically outplayed Simon in many points leading to another 4-1 win. My third match of the day was against one of my toughest rivals Robbie Frank. Myself and 'Bob' always have good matches in recent times and this one was not to disappoint. I was leading 8-7 in the 7th set, but lost the next 4 points therefore the match. The last match of the day was against No.1 William Henzell. Simply, I was smashed. After day 1, I was reasonably happy with 2 wins and 2 losses.

Day two started with the lightning fast Kiet Tran. Before the match I made sure I was 100% mentally ready to go and fired up, I felt like I played exceptional winning a comfortable 4-0. Next up was Trent Carter, another player who I had many great matches with over the years. On this occasion I was outplayed in nearly every aspect of the game. I felt awful during the match and there was not a lot I could do to change. I eventually lost 4-1. The last of matches was against Wade Townsend. At this point in time the result against Wade irrelevant as the bottom two players (Wade being one of them) would be eliminated therefore result would not carry over to the next stage. I was very conscious of my body during this match and didn't want to push myself as I knew the most important was to come. That being said, I don't go out on court to lose. I was mentally tough towards the end of the match and won 4-2. After the end of Day 2, both William Henzell and Robert Frank had qualified as number 1 and 2, and Wade Townsend and Kiet Tran were eliminated as number 7 and 8. That left 4 players which 2 would eventually go through to join William and Robbie at the Oceania Olympic qualifying. My first match was Simon Gerada. I felt this match was tougher than my first with him 2 days prior, but nonetheless I played a tactically smart game and ended up with a 4-2 win. Next was Trent Carter. I had to put the result of yesterday behind me and go with a new game plan. The night before Kyle and I analysed the video and discovered where I was winning and losing points. I came out of the blocks strongly ending up with a 4-0 win. I put this win down to entirely match analysis – its usefulness should never be underestimated. At this stage I knew where it all stood, I needed at least two games against Justin Han to end up as number three. I felt like I played okay but he was too strong and went down 4-1 which meant we were equal therefore a count back

was required to see who finished 3rd and 4th behind William and Robbie. We had both won five games each against each other. It came down to points and lucky for me I had three more of them which meant I got the third spot and, by the rules at least, a better chance to qualify for the Olympics than Justin as the order of the Australian Qualifying carried over to the Oceania Qualifying just 2 weeks later. I was extremely happy with the result and couldn't have asked for much more given I was the 6th seed.

I spent the next two weeks preparing and training with both William and Robbie to try to get myself in the best shape possible plus individual sessions with Mark. The first stage had 2 groups of 6 using round robin format then the 2 top from each group progress to semi-final and winners play final then winner becomes the first player to officially qualify for Olympics. I made the final and played William Henzell and started with a good 1st set to get a 10-9 lead, but William played a few good points I ended up losing that set. I felt like from then on, I couldn't be competitive with him during the rallies, he was unbelievably focused and determined to beat me as quick as possible. I lost the match 4-0. That meant I had to go into the second knockout draw as the number 1 seed. I came up against Phillip Ziao in the Semi Final and felt confident as I played him the day before and won 4-0. This time it was a different story, he controlled most of the points and determined the type of match we were having. I did everything I could to change but just wasn't good enough and I went down 4-1. That meant Robert Frank was playing Justin Han in the final on the second knockout. The situation stood like this; Robbie wins and I take the 3rd spot in the Olympic Team, Justin wins, and I miss out. Despite a huge effort from Robbie who gave everything he had, he unfortunately went down 4-2 which meant I had missed out on a spot in the team. I was pretty devastated knowing how much I had put in over the years only to come so close. Guess it's just how the cookie crumbles sometimes! After the finish of the tournament I only had around 5 days until I had to head back to Europe to finish my season, one of which I had to play the Dandenong Open as I had already committed to it. I wasn't really in a frame of mind to compete but I had to pull it together and do my best. I got through to the final okay and came up against former Commonwealth Games team gold medallist Shabji Datta. I played a smart match and managed to win 4-2.

After the finish of the Dandenong Open around 6pm, I had about 3 hours to get home, shower, pack the rest of my things and head to the airport for what seemed like another tirelessly long journey that I was not looking forward to. This was the first time that reality had sunk in – I hadn't qualified for the Olympics and the last thing I wanted to do was sit on a plane back to Europe just so I could get back to a training hall. Fortunately I had many friends and of course my beautiful girlfriend waiting for me in Poland which made things a lot easier to deal with. After I returned I only had a few days in Poland before leaving for the World Team Championships in Dortmund, Germany. The Australian team had a training camp in Dusseldorf a few days prior just to get the players accustomed to the conditions in Europe – which I think definitely helped the teams results. After a few days we travelled to Dortmund and were ready for the start of the championships. I found it particularly hard

playing as I was usually placed in the number 2 spot for the Australian Team which meant I normally had to play the number 1 of the other country. We had great results this year, obviously with the spearhead of the team, William Henzell, winning most of his matches and ended up finishing 35th of 120.

After the Worlds I travelled back to Poland and had around 10 weeks to go to finish my matches and play-offs. The matches went generally well and I ended up with a 20-16 win loss record for the entire season which placed me 10th of the leading player list out of 60 players. I was still training hard in the lead up to the Oceania Championships. When I left Poland I headed straight to Fiji, with only a very short stop in Melbourne on the way. I went Rzeszow to Warsaw to Amsterdam to Beijing to Guangzhou to Melbourne to Suva, which ended up being 60hours plus. Needless to say how I felt when I arrived, I actually got sick at the end of my travel so I wasn't feeling too well until the end of the championships. It was absolutely disgusting conditions to play table tennis in Fiji, you could barely hit the ball on the table as it was so humid and there was no friction which made the ball not grip on the rubber. Australia won the U21 Men's Final team event against New Zealand with Kane Townsend being the standout in the match – taking both his matches against Kevin Wu and Phillip Ziou. I beat Kevin also and we had the match 3-2. Australia also won the Men's Team event 3-0 with William Henzell beating John Cordue, Robert Frank beating Phillip Ziou and myself beating Kevin Wu. In the Under 21 singles event, I played well taking out silver in the event. Phillip again was too strong and dealt with the conditions better than me, I didn't put up much of a fight and lost 3-0. I had to settle for silver in the singles which was a little disappointing as I had won both the Under 15 (against Phil) and under 18 Oceania junior singles titles. In the men's singles I reached my QF fairly easily where I come up against John Cordue from New Zealand. John has spent the majority of the past 12 months in Germany playing pro league and trying to improve his level and he's a player I respect highly. I felt quite uncomfortable for most of the match but played well and won 4-1. It was a much closer match than the score suggests and I never felt like I had it under control. Up next (SF), Rob Frank, again! I played well, but Robbie's short game and control over the ball allowed him to dictate too many points combined with some dumb tactics from me, I lost a very close 4-2. In the final William ended up winning 4-1 and taking out the prize of \$5000.00 and a spot at the Men's singles Cup later in the year. I returned back to Melbourne a few days later and had a very nice 2-3 day break. I had travelled so much in those few months, I was happy to be back in Melbourne for a few weeks.

Next competition coming up was the Australian Open in just under 3 weeks. In the team event most matches Victoria got through comfortable up until our cross-over Semi Final Queensland. We won 5-1 by memory, and I had two good wins 3-0 against Kane Townsend and 3-2 against brother Wade Townsend. Our final was NSW, and this match was going to be a lot tougher with Justin Han, Chris Yan and Kiet Tran. Victoria had lost in previous couple of years so we were eager to win back the title. First up was Justin Han, in the past I had pretty good results playing Justin early up, particularly in Olympic qualifying. I played well,

and ended up winning 3-2 in a tight last set. Next up was Kiet, and I didn't miss too much, it was a fairly comfortable 3-1 win. Last was Chris who I had only played once before and had won. I was outplayed and missed too much to be competitive with him losing 3-0. Overall Victoria won 5-4, so we were very pleased with the result and the title back home.

In the Men's Singles, I had a tough time. I had played so many matches in so many different events my body was really feeling the strain. I came up against Kane Townsend in the round of 16, and I had a 10-7 3-2 lead before losing easy in the 7th. I was really disappointed with this result but credit must be given to Kane. It was a different result in the U21 Men's Singles. I had won the singles title before so wanted to add to my collection. In the Semi, I came up against Dillon Cathcart and played flawlessly with a 4-0 win. In the final, I played up and coming star in Australia Heming Hu. Heming and I practice together on regular basis plus have the same coach so we know each other's game in depth and how we respond to different tactics. I felt like I had the edge mentally and in experience. I jumped to a 2-0 lead before Heming came back strong and took the third. I knew I just had to compose myself and play like I had been training over the past six months. I did, and took the next two sets and match 4-1. After the long week, my shoulder became extremely sore and inflamed so I was glad to take a break from training for a couple of weeks. In fact it was the only break I had for a long time!