

2013 WORLD CADET CHALLENGE

FROM A COACH'S PROSPECTIVE

By David Powell

The World Cadet Challenge (WCC) is the pinnacle event on the calendar for the best cadet talent worldwide. An initiative developed by the ITTF from 2002, it showcases the best cadet athletes from all corners of the globe which can help identify future champions such as the Boy's winner in 2002, Zhang Jike (Men's Single Champion at 2012 Olympic Games plus 2011 & 2013 World Championships). It is based on six continental regions, a host, and a World Hopes team consisting of young players from different countries. A total of eight teams in each category therefore 32 boys and 32 girls. As a cadet player in 2006 I was fortunate to participate in this event that year and 7 years later was selected as the Boy's Coach for this year's event – apparently is the first time a player of a WCC has coached a team at a WCC.

The WCC is a unique event as the make up of every continental team, there must be four athletes from different countries; that is not two players from the same association are permitted to play in one continental team. Inclusion is an important factor for the ITTF and this event not only helps development of table tennis, but also teaches young people to learn about the cultural differences between the countries, even dealing with language barriers within the same team.

Team Oceania departed Sydney on the 19th of October bound for Schwechat, Vienna in which a preparation camp was held at the Werner Schlager Academy (WSA). The WSA is currently the leading training centre in Europe boasting some of the best coaches Europe has to offer, in addition to many full time athletes practising at the centre.

Players from this region of the world are not accustomed to full time intensive training (2 sessions per day equalling approx. 5 hours on the table), so this was an invaluable experience for the athletes. They had the chance to work hard, fine tune some of their skills, while learning new ones from the coaches on hand and prepare for the beginning of the competition. The team was lucky enough to have some one on one advice from the Head coach at the Werner Schlager Academy, Richard Prause who is widely considered as one of the best in Europe. I am confident all the players have new ideas to work with back home in their daily training environments after this camp.

At the conclusion of this camp, we travelled by bus to Otocec, Slovenia where the WCC was being staged. Prior to the start of the teams' event starting, a two and a half day training camp was ran by the ITTF with all eight teams attending. During this camp there was five two sessions, in which Oceania had the opportunity to train with each of the seven other teams. Again, this teaches inclusion and working collaboratively with other players, an important factor for the ITTF.

This was my first role as a coach at an international event, however having competed in the event myself in Serbia, 2006 I knew what to expect so was able to pass on some of my experience to the this year's Oceania Team. The team's event was conducted over the first two days, Oceania unfortunately placing 8th in both the boys and girls categories, equal to our seeding. It is important to remember the competition has only the best players from around the World, so to manage even one individual singles win is a feat in itself as most/all players train more often week in week out therefore the skill level, speed and strength is generally higher than the Oceania players.

There was a one day break in between the teams' events and individuals. This gave everyone the chance to taste the Slovenian spirit with a visit to postojna caves, the best known cave in the World! I think this was important, as it gave players the chance to rest, both physically and mentally while getting themselves up and motivated for the individual event.

The singles event was unique in that all players played off for positions; that is all players would receive a final placing at the end of the tournament. The style of event favours participation and giving athletes as many matches as possible during the week event. Eight groups of four, in which the top two placed athletes from each group would play off for positions 1-16, while finishing either 3rd or 4th means you would play for positions 17-32. All Oceania players finished in the 17-32 placing's however there were some close matches and chances for some players to get into the top 16 which is a positive sign for the future.

On the final day of action in Otocec, a highlight for Team Oceania was Jake Duffy (AUS) receiving one of two fair play awards available. This award reflected one of the goals of the competition, the education of promising young players to conduct themselves in a manner that is a credit to the sport. This is why the ITTF cadet challenge is of high value, not just a competition but an educator to the young players. Above all, it teaches respect and self-discipline. A credit to Jake, a credit to all of Team Oceania.

Acknowledgment has to go to the Oceania Table Tennis Federation and in particular Michael Brown, the Oceania Development Officer for their work in giving Team Oceania great opportunities and preparation for the event, such as the camp at WSA. Many opportunities now exist for young players, of course it is up to the players to get involved as much as possible, "**with the future in mind**" which is the catchphrase for this event/concept.

Whatever the role in Slovenia, whether coach, player, manager, or administrator, a worthwhile and successful venture was completed, and completed in style.

For full results, check

http://www.ittf.com/competitions/competitions2.asp?Competition_ID=2251&category=WJCF