

EURO-FOOSIN'

At the end of 2006, I reported that “worldwide, foosball has seen one of its most spectacular years ever.” How could foosball have topped a global pro tour that spanned five continents and 40 countries involving 35 national federations competing on four different styles of tables, and which featured tournaments like the Tornado Worlds and the incredible World Cup of Table Soccer in Hamburg, Germany? Well, that *was* a great year for foosball, but 2007 has proven even stronger!!

The explosive growth of organized foosball tournaments, leagues and charitable events worldwide has gained even greater momentum. In the United States, local and regional promoters like Mary Moore (Independent Foosball Promotions) continued to expand the size and number of their tournaments, bringing back the U.S. Open and reaching over \$250,000 in combined prizes on the IFP tour alone. The USA's leading manufacturer, Brunswick's Valley-Dynamo division, together with the Valley International Foosball Association (VIFA) held their traditional Hall of Fame Classic, various state and regional league championships, and finished of the year with a turnout of more than double the number of expected participants at the Tornado World Championship Series tournament in Las Vegas. Valley further saw new sponsorship at Tornado Worlds from Corona Light, with possible expanded opportunities for next year.

Other veteran promoters in the USA also elevated their prize funds to the point that a number of state and other annual tournaments are actually now termed “majors.” And still other tournament organizers found new or expanded ways to enhance the sport's image in the community via corporate and charity tournaments.

At the same time, the International Table Soccer Federation (ITSF) has again coordinated a hugely successful, six-table worldwide tour. The 2007 ITSF tour once again spanned five continents, but this year ITSF sanctioned 62 tournaments for a combined total of nearly a million dollars in total prizes and involved 53 countries, 56 member federations, and the participation of some 100,000 players. All of which again culminated in the October 25-28 ITSF World Championship Finals in St. Vincent, Valle d'Aoste, Italy -- a playoff of all the champions from the entire year's world tour – and which for the first time this year included Junior and Seniors' championship events.

Among both USA and world tour champions, Frederico Collignon of Belgium once again dominated at most every opportunity and every style of table. However, this year saw the remarkable season long consistency and professionalism of new U.S. Team member Terry Rue, the tremendous improvement of 18-year old Ryan Moore (who qualified as a member of the U.S. National Team and who captured the ITSF World Junior Singles title in Italy), and the climb back to the top for USA tour veteran Tommy Adkisson, whose amazing performance and showmanship in Italy (taking second only to Collignon) renewed a great level of awe and respect for the USA from players from around the globe. And again, even though the United States had far fewer ITSF point race events than were held in Europe, the USA ended up with fifteen players qualified to compete in Italy!

Hand in hand with all these tournaments worldwide has been an active campaign both by ITSF and its member national federations to increase public awareness (at every level from grass roots

development to pro tour tournaments), media attention, sponsorship involvement, and recognition by national and international sporting bodies as more than just a game, but as a sport.

Thanks to the ITSF and in particular the United States Table Soccer Federation (USTSF), foosball has received more public and coin industry media attention in the last two years than was received in the entire seven years (beginning to end) of the T.S. Million Dollar Tours -- media coverage that has included recent articles in the New York Times, Christian Science Monitor, SportsIllustrated.com, MSNBC, the Washington Post, and most recently Men's Health Living, as well as global syndication by Associated Press, among many others. (There's far more listed on the foosball.com forum.) Indeed, at the Hall of Fame Classic last March, there was more media present than any other tournament Valley has run in 35 years, with stories during the tournament run on a number of local Vegas television channels in Vegas papers. The same has been true for many of the USTSF/ITSF sanctioned tour events all year.

This kind of media coverage generates exposure, both to the public and the press itself, which in turn draws the attention of potential sponsors, like Corona Light. But it's not just big companies that want exposure in return for sponsorship, since any individual player could show this amount of local, national and international media coverage to obtain their own individual sponsor and the sponsor would likely be delighted to get something more out of their investment than "give me money and I'll wear your logo on my shirt." It was done by countless foosball players in the 1970s, and there's no reason players shouldn't be doing it now, while media coverage (and sponsor interest) is strong.

The United States' designated representative to the ITSF, the USTSF, has also been very busy refining its organization, in accordance with ITSF goals and direction, to address foosball promotions and public awareness at all levels from the pro tour all the way down to grass roots student, youth and recreation centers. For example, USTSF has recently initiated involvement with programs ranging from qualification of players for international competition to endorsement of independent programs such as "Tables for Troops," "Wounded Warriors" and "Tables to Kids," with many more ideas on the radar. And at the request of Valley, USTSF's Equipment Standards Committee has been tasked to provide feedback to manufacturer production issues.

Keep in mind, USTSF is not here to dictate to the foosball masses. It is a 100% participatory process. USTSF (like ITSF) actively seeks volunteers to staff their committees and commissions. If you want to be a part of this process and the future of table soccer both here and abroad, volunteer now!! Please help USTSF to succeed by becoming directly involved. The next USTSF General Assembly meeting will be held at the Tornado International Series Hall of Fame Classic in Las Vegas, NV in March.

There's so much more to write here, I might end up writing a whole Foosball Almanac -- oh, wait, that's already been done this year by Johnny Lott and Kathy Brainard!! (Be sure to buy yours today!!)

As for the way ahead, look forward to another year of expansion as more and more players, promoters, manufacturers and countries join in making 2008 the biggest worldwide tour ever!!

For more information on all the above, please be sure to check out the ITSF and USTSF websites: www.table-soccer.org, and www.ustsf.org. THANKS!!

Who else but... Larry "Lefty" Davis