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## International table tennis federation (ITTF): Problems and prospects

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### Abstract

The International Table Tennis Federation (ITTF) is the governing body for all national table tennis associations. The role of the ITTF includes overseeing rules and regulations and seeking technological improvement for the sport of table tennis. The ITTF is responsible for the organization of numerous international competitions, including the World Table Tennis Championships that has continued since 1926. Table tennis is Olympic Sport since the 1988 Seoul Olympic Games, also a Paralympic Sport and on program on all Multisport Games. The ITTF instituted some key changes in the rules of the game following the 2000 Olympics games. The amendments were mainly aimed at enhancing the game's viability as a spectator sport that could be televised. Among the new changes was the increasing of the ball's diameter to 40 millimetres. Soon thereafter, the ITTF changed the game's scoring system from 21-point to 11-point system in 2014. The serve rotation was also brought down from five points to two. Soon thereafter, the global federation of the game changed the rules and effectively prohibited players from hiding balls during service. In nutshell, the ITTF, founded in 1926, is the world-governing body of the sport and the largest International Federation with 220 affiliated National Associations. The ITTF supervises the staging of annual World Championships involving over 800 players from all continents, and 80-90 international tournaments sanctioned by the ITTF yearly. The ITTF governs and develops the sport for the benefit of over 30 million competitive players worldwide. The related problems associated with the said game are analyzed and the prospects for possible solutions evaluated.

**Keywords:** International table tennis federation (ITTF), table tennis, national table tennis associations; Olympic Games

### Introduction

The International Table Tennis Federation (ITTF) is the governing body for all national table tennis associations. The role of the ITTF includes overseeing rules and regulations and seeking technological improvement for the sport of table tennis. The ITTF is responsible for the organization of numerous international competitions, including the World Table Tennis Championships that has continued since 1926.<sup>[1]</sup>

### History

The ITTF was founded in 1926 by William Henry Lawes of Wymondham, the nine founding members being Austria, Czechoslovakia, Denmark, England, Germany, Hungary, India, Sweden, and Wales. The first international tournament was held in January 1926 in Berlin while the first World Table Tennis Championships was held in December 1926 in London. Towards the end of 2000, the ITTF instituted several rules changes aimed at making table tennis more viable as a televised spectator sport. The older 38 mm balls were officially replaced by 40 mm balls. This increased the ball's air resistance and effectively slowed down the game. On 29 February 2008, the ITTF announced several rules changes after an ITTF Executive Meeting in Guangzhou, Guangdong, China with regards to a player's eligibility to play for a new association. The new ruling is to encourage associations to develop their players. The headquarters of the ITTF is in Lausanne, Switzerland. The previous president of the ITTF was Adham Sharara from Canada; the current president since 2014 is Thomas Weikert from Germany.

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## Membership

### • Continental Federations

The ITTF recognizes six continental federations. Each continental federation has a president as its top official and owns its constitution. The following are recognized federations:

Continent	Members	Continental Federation
India	51	Table Tennis Federation of India (TTFI)
Asia	45	Asian Table Tennis Union (ATTU)
Europe	58	European Table Tennis Union (ETTU)
Latin America	40	Latin American Table Tennis Union (ULTM)
Northern	04	Northern American Table Tennis Union (NATTU)
Oceania	24	Oceania Table Tennis Federation (OTTF)

### • National federations

National Members of the International Table Tennis Federation are currently 226 member associations within the ITTF.

## Organizational structure

All member associations of the ITTF attend the annual general meeting (AGM). Agendas on changes of the constitution, laws of table tennis, applications for membership, etc. are discussed and finalized through votes. Also, the president of ITTF, executive vice-presidents and 32 or fewer continental representatives are elected at an AGM, serving for a four-year term. The president, executive vice-presidents, and the chairman of the athletes' commission compose the executive committee. The executive committee, continental representatives, and presidents of the six continental federations or their appointees compose the board of directors (Board). The Board manages the work of the ITTF between AGMs. Several committees, commissions, working groups or panels work under the constitution of ITTF or the Board. Unlike the organizations for more popular sports, the ITTF tends to recognize teams from generally unrecognized governing bodies for disputed territory. For example, it currently recognizes the Table Tennis Federation of Kosovo even though Kosovo is excluded from most other sports. It recognized the People's Republic of China in 1953 and allowed some basic diplomacy which leads to an opening for U.S. President Richard Nixon, called "Ping Pong Diplomacy", in the early 1970s.

## Rules

### • Player Eligibility

For ITTF World Title events, a player is eligible to play for his association by registering with the ITTF. If the player chooses to play for a new association, he shall register with the ITTF, through the new association. The player shall not represent the new association before. The player will be eligible to play for the new association after three, five, seven years after the date of registration, if the player is under the age of 15, 18, 21, respectively. If the player is 21 years of age or older, he will not be registered with the ITTF and not be eligible to represent a new association at World Title events.

### • Service and point system

The table tennis point system was reduced from a 21 to an 11-point scoring system in 2001. A game shall be won by the player or pair first scoring 11 points unless both players or pairs score 10 points when the game shall be won by the first player or pair subsequently gaining a lead of 2 points. This

was intended to make games more fast-paced and exciting. The ITTF also changed the rules on service to prevent a player from hiding the ball during service, to increase the average length of rallies, and to reduce the server's advantage. Today, the game changes from time to time mainly to improve on the excitement for television viewers.

### • Speed glue ban

In 2007, ITTF's board of directors in Zagreb decided to implement the VOC-free glue rule at Junior events, starting from 1 January 2008, as a transitional period before the full implementation of the VOC ban on 1 September 2008. As of 1 January 2009, all speed glue was to have been banned.

## Contests

### • Conventions

- MT/WT: Men's/Women's Teams
- MS/WS: Men's/Women's Singles
- MD/WD: Men's/Women's Doubles
- XD: Mixed Doubles

## Modern Developments in World Table Tennis

Despite being massively popular, not much is known about the characteristics and competencies required for professional table tennis. Due to the sport's complexity, it is difficult for scientists to conduct measurements, for example, at the World Championships or the Continental Championships, to garner appropriate information to present to coaches and players. A world-level competition often lasts a week, with a ranked player competing in many games. The heavy burden involved is always interwoven with various factors like a busy schedule, strong opponents, changes to diet and sleeping habits, a new environment, and time differences. A player must thus be in good physical shape and mental condition. Notwithstanding the above, skill is the decisive factor in a table tennis match. Training at high speeds improves a player's skill and coordination for performing at higher intensities. Changes in a player triggered by training are best achieved when an optimal amount of work is performed at each training session and over a given period. It appears from our interviews with coaches around the world that only a small number of them consider the aerobic and anaerobic endurance factor. This is understandable since most coaches believe table tennis training is highly specific. The question then arises: why spend a lot of valuable time training if improved performance is not achieved, i.e. better results at table tennis competitions? How important is aerobic endurance for table tennis performance? Like other sports activities that on the surface seem not to require staying power, table tennis does have an endurance, or aerobic, component. For example, when doing multi-ball practice, one might overlook the importance of cardio respiratory endurance as an important element of a complete training program. A high level of aerobic endurance allows, for example, stroke quality to be maintained throughout a training session or game and to remain fresh for other games in a tournament. To develop endurance, an athlete must subject-specific muscles or organ systems to increased resistance. It is therefore important to include resistance training as part of a table tennis training program: table tennis performance is not associated with muscular force and thus does not require high levels of strength. There is some fear in coaches' minds that additional strength might impair basic motor movement and fine coordination, i.e. the sense for a good stroke. However, top athletes in all sport disciplines do some resistance training

to boost or at least maintain their general strength. Winning a table tennis match not only requires outstanding technique, tactics, and psychology, but also great physical strength. The winner of a World Championship tournament usually must remain in top physical and mental condition for many competitive matches over 7 days. An athlete's ability to produce energy via metabolic processes is the most important part of their physiology fitness. Understanding the core principles of metabolic processes will permit table tennis coaches to devise a fitness program that suits an athlete. Unfortunately, the understanding of such processes throughout the entire duration of a competition is poor in table tennis, even in the interested scientific community.

An athlete's potential is determined by their genetic endowment, including not only anthropometric characteristics, inherited cardiovascular traits, and muscular fibre-type proportions but also the capacity to improve with training. The amount and suitability of training before a competition is also especially important. The role of a table tennis player's basic training is to decrease stress on the body exercise creates so that workouts can be carried out more comfortably while simultaneously achieving an increase in the maximum number of workouts.

Scientists from around the world generally agree that table tennis is an aerobic metabolism sport that requires great endurance, often alternating with being an intense anaerobic metabolism sport over short periods [2].

#### **ITTF Mulls Cancelling Individual World Championships**

On 13 April 2020, the ITTF decided to suspend all activities until at least the end of June due to the corona virus pandemic with team events in South Korea's Busan moved to late September and early October 2020. As the Tokyo Olympic and Paralympics Games have been postponed to 2021, the ITTF is constantly checking the 2020 and 2021 calendar to try to integrate the ITTF events and also to assess the impact on the continental events, national events, national leagues, and some others. Other measures that will help the sport when the crisis is over include [3]:

- Ensuring that international table tennis events are significantly improved
- Putting athletes and fans more at the heart of the sport
- Redefining the Development and High-Performance pathways

International Table Tennis Federation (ITTF) Chief Executive revealed that the sport's governing body is considering individual World Championships' cancellation. The move is relevant to a possible busy schedule in the future as the newly-established World Table Tennis (WTT) plans to have 3 to 4 "Grand Smashes" every year, reported Xinhua news agency. These events (Grand Smashes) will be equal to or larger than a World Individual Championships. With 3 to 4 'Grand Smashes' per year, we would be overstretching and confusing the calendar and market if we also have a World Individual Championships. The 3 to 4 major events held on the International stage throughout each year will reach a larger audience and will perform much better than once every 2 years. From these events, we would also be able to define an individual world champion. Starting in 2003, individual events for table tennis World Championships have been held in odd years, and team events in even years. The ITTF has also announced that the WTT will introduce a brand-new event structure in 2021. As planned, there are up to four Grand Smashes every year with a 10-day schedule for each

tournament, featuring the top 64 men and top 64 women players. Also, in the structure are WTT Champions Series, WTT Cup Finals, the Star Contender and Contender Series. This approach would allow for a clearer line to be drawn for each of the platforms. The World Team Championships and the Olympic Games, with the team competition as a key component, will remain under the responsibility of the federations, while the professional platform can focus on the growth of the individual events, allowing our sport to pursue the real table tennis stars in the future.

#### **Conclusion**

Founded in 1926, the International Table Tennis Federation (ITTF) is the worldwide governing body for table tennis, which maintains an international ranking system in addition to organizing events like the World Table Tennis Championships. Table Tennis is an Olympic Sport, introduced at the 1988 Seoul Olympics Games, and is also a Paralympics' Sport, introduced at the 1960 Rome Paralympics' Games. [4] In 2007, the governance for table tennis for persons with a disability was transferred from the International Paralympics Committee to the ITTF. In sum, the International Table Tennis Federation is responsible for the global sport of table tennis and has 226 affiliated National Associations.

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