



2013 Sierra Vista Open Table Tennis Tournament

Holman fends off game Hlushko for the singles crown

Matt Hickman Sat, 02/09/2013 - 10:17pm

SIERRA VISTA— When it began five years ago, the brand new Roy and Janet's Table Tennis emporium was a perfect site for the ping pong portion of the Sierra Vista Senior Games. Due to the city's budgetary constraints, those turned out to be the last Senior Games, but Roy Pugh and Janet Kempf kept pushing the gospel of table tennis anyway — without age restrictions. Of the 51 registered players in Saturday's fifth edition of the Sierra Vista Table Tennis Open sponsored by SSVEC, 11 were under 60 and six of those were under 50. Those six included the club's three most improved players over the last year — Diana Wilcox, a teacher at Buena, under-30 Adam Woodrow, and under-40 Michael Hammerschmidt.

Hammerschmidt, 38, carried the banner for the local club on Saturday against more seasoned veterans from clubs in Green Valley and Saddlebrooke in Oro Valley. In the semifinals, he went against Saddlebrooke's Greg Hlushko, whom he'd already beaten in preliminary rounds. But fighting off a migraine, Hammerschmidt fell to Hlushko 3-1, dropping the fourth game, 11-8.

"He's just tough right now; he's a good player," Hammerschmidt said. "I was getting tired, sick. I tried to recover for that. I had no energy, but it's OK — next time."

Hammerschmidt, a native German, moved to Sierra Vista 10 years ago to be closer to his wife's family. Two years ago, his wife introduced him to the sport and Hammerschmidt found the game and its fitness benefits to be intoxicating.

"It's kind of addicting once you get the hang of it, the feel of the ball," he said. "In the first month, I lost seven pounds. After that, I controlled my food and my eating habits, and two years later, I'm 45 pounds down. It's amazing really. People look at it and think, 'yeah, table tennis,' but play it — it's a great sport."

Hlushko advanced to the final against Ken Holman from Green Valley, the No. 1 seed going in.

Holman took the first game, but Hlushko battled back to take the next two games, getting a little help from the net-cord on game point to go up 2-1. Backed against the wall, Holman turned his game up, winning the fourth, and the deciding fifth game, 11-9.

“He’s always a challenge,” Holman said. “We’ve played a number of times over the years. Greg is very consistent. He always gets the ball on the table. You can’t get too many cheap points off Greg.”

Hloshko said shot-making was the key to his surge into the lead.

“I snapped a few fast shots past him he wasn’t expecting,” Hloshko said. “I push a lot against younger, faster guys like Ken. Once in a while, I’d snap one into the corner, but I try to avoid to get into a hard-hitting contest because Ken is quicker than me.”

Holman grew up in England playing table tennis before moving to Canada at age 19 and leaving the game across the pond. He picked it up again in retirement six years ago as a snowbird in Green Valley, splitting the year with his home on Vancouver Island, B.C.

“It is a good workout —it certainly can be,” Holman said. “It’s a fascinating game. There’s more to it than just hitting the ball. The modern game revolves around spin. With the advent of sponge and sticky rubbers, it allows players to put on an inordinate amount of spin.”

Holman carries a rating of 1700. Hammerschmidt’s resides in the 1500s, but by this time next year, he expects to be in Holman’s class. Next up for him is the Arizona Open in Phoenix on Feb. 28.

Hammerschmidt took gold in the under 60 mixed singles, followed by Tim Ingold and Carl Muggenburg. Holman took first in the 60-69 group with Hlushko getting the silver and Smith the bronze. Al Douglas of Sierra Vista was the gold winner in the 70-plus mixed singles group, followed by John Laverty and Will Smolak, who came all the way from Santa Fe, N.M.

Mary Hughes was the under-60 winner in the women’s singles division, followed by Wilcox and Jackie Hill. Cate Janssen of Sierra Vista was the 60-69 winner with Rose Mika taking silver and Laura Lowden of Saddlebrooke getting bronze. Linda Taylor was the 70-plus winner with Kempf second and June Coe third.



In doubles, Holman and Claudia McLean of Green Valley took gold over Hlushko and Jerry Sbarra of Green Valley. Ed Mandler of Saddlebrooke and Smolak got third. Sierra Vista Table Tennis President Larry Smith said he's seeing an influx of younger players taking advantage of the club's practice facilities, which include a serving net and an automatic ball machine.

"We have more young people this year than we've had any other year — young being under 60," Smith said. "It's a popular sport. An awful lot of people play it in the basement or the backroom without any instruction whatsoever. We do want everybody to play but, especially with young people, we want to teach the basics of the game so they can continue to improve."

As competitive as things get inside the emporium, its founder Roy Pugh, who built the addition to his property as a thank you to the players at the Ethel Berger Center who helped him convalesce after the passing of his wife.

"I only have three rules here," Pugh said. "1) Have fun. 2) Get some exercise. 3) Try to win a game once in a while, and if you don't really want to win a game, go back to rule No. 1 and rule No. 2."