

World veterans table tennis championships – Las Vegas 2018 – a personal account by Diccon Gray

250 competition tables, 97 countries and 4,700 players made for the largest table tennis event ever staged. Throw in the Las Vegas, USA and their convention centre as a superb venue, several Table Tennis legends all the ingredients where there for a fabulous experience.....and it did not disappoint, in fact it exceeded all my expectations!

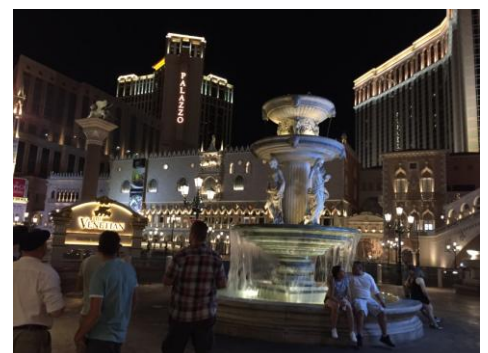
As a regular player on the domestic senior and veteran circuit, this was my first veterans' world championships competing in the O55 mens' singles and O50 mens' doubles (partnered by Phil Cox, from Kent).



Vegas was staggeringly hot - 43°C at its peak - day and night and I had to be on top, hot form to progress through the tournament (Monday 15th – Sunday 24th June). Playing conditions were very good with adequately sized courts, ample circulation room and more than enough practice tables. The organisation too was first class from the website to the accreditation and mobile phone text service that gave individual results and schedule information (time and table number of next match).

Though the opening ceremony was a bit of a damp squib, the highlight undoubtedly was the introduction to the audience and interviewing of a number of Table Tennis legends including former world champions – Stellan Bengtsson (1971), Istvan Joyner (1975), Jorgen Persson (1989) and Olympic medallists – Jorg Roskopf and Erik Lindh. Among other notable names on the entry list, there was more than a sprinkling of former international star players such as Ding Yi (Austria), Danny Seemiller (USA), Lily Yip (USA) Tong Fei Ming (Chinese Taipei), Wang Yang Sheng (Norway), Chen Wei-xing (Austria), Jasna Fazlic (Yugoslavia) to name but a few.

In addition to the table tennis, the camaraderie of competitors was terrific and made for a great atmosphere in the playing hall **and** on the occasions when you bumped into players 'downtown' and 'on the strip'. The casinos (resorts as they are referred to, they are so big), were massive and opulent (everything seems to be on a larger scale in the States) if not a tad expensive – food and drink galore – and of course the gambling! There was plenty of 'free time' to explore and enjoy the sights using the efficient monorail (too hot to walk any distance) in the city, however my best trip was to the Grand Canyon (via Hoover Dam).



Oh... and “how did I get on”? Well in the singles, 464 players were in the O55 mens’ draw (116 groups of 4). I managed to win my group and a couple of rounds to reach the last 32 (losing to Traian Ciocui – current Luxembourg international, WR 968 – I gave him a bit too much respect and lost quite comfortably 3-0, but he showed he was handy by making it to the semi-finals).



In the doubles, we got to the last 32. To get there we came runner up in the group beating a French pair but losing to a German pair and then in the rounds we took out a Swedish and a German pair before losing out to a Hungarian/German pairing (3-1) who again proved to be no mugs by coming overall O50 runners up to former world champions, Jorgen Persson and Erik Lindh!

Following the table tennis, I was lucky enough to extend my trip to Oregon and spent a lovely, contrasting week with friends as part of the family in a rural setting.

Altogether a very enjoyable trip and I am looking at the possibility of playing in the European veterans championships in Budapest, Hungary (June 2019) and the next World veterans in Bordeaux, France 2020.....anyone need a doubles partner?