

The Hockey Professionals ... That Is, Table Hockey

by Rejean Tremblay, *La Presse*, Montreal, June 14, 1975

Rejean Tremblay was a senior staff writer for this pre-eminent Montreal French-language daily. His normal beat (the envy of his profession) was to cover the celebrated Montreal Canadiens hockey team. In this article he discovers table hockey, and Marinoff.



Mike Ettinger (left) versus Lou Marinoff (right)
Charity Event, Alexis Nihon Plaza, Montreal

Can you imagine the Philadelphia Flyers coming to play an exhibition game against the Matineux of Montreal-Matin (a rival newspaper's team) and losing the game? This is what befell poor Mike Ettinger, Canadian champion of the World Table-Hockey Association (WTHA).

Youthful Ettinger was playing exhibition games yesterday in the Alexis-Nihon Plaza, at a charity event designed to raise money for paraplegics in Quebec. Anyone who paid \$.50 could play against Ettinger and other professionals from the WHTA.

Everything was going fine until an innocent-looking, long-haired young man, musician by profession, took his place at one end of the table . . . Using his center with the speed of

lightning, checking aggressively with his defensemen, and shooting with the precision of Guy Lafleur, Lou Marinoff won an indisputable victory.

The defeated champion was embarrassed; the challenger, exultant. "I wanted to kill him, or at least get my revenge ..." murmured the humiliated champion. Not too humiliated to provide some details on the World Table Hockey Association.

There are ten member cities, including Detroit, Chicago, New York, Montreal, Boston and Winnipeg. In each city the WTHA organizes a group of players who compete among themselves between tournaments. And during the season, in each city on the circuit, there is a tournament at which prize money can reach \$5,000. This is not yet the financial folly of the major leagues, but it can defray the expenses of the better players.

These table hockey players discuss their favorite sport with the same seriousness as the ice hockey professionals. The first quality of a champion is the rapidity of his reflexes, explained Ettinger. Then there's concentration, knowledge of the game, stamina and competitive spirit. All these professionals practice at least one hour per day, polishing certain plays and incessantly refining their systems.

Ettinger wanted his revenge, and got it: he was beaten again, 6-4.

Only after this second defeat did he learn that the victor, Lou Marinoff, is a devotee of table hockey who played in the WHTA tournament in New York last year. Marinoff, 23, is a musician and former ice hockey player for McGill University. He said he acquired valuable experience at the New York tournament: "I lost because I was too nervous."

What is his strategy at the table? "Since openings do not last long, you have to react very quickly; you have to spot the open man, pass the puck to him and shoot at the same time." His weakness? Defense! In New York, 10 minute scoreless ties were common. This is the Flyers' system. Don't allow goals, and capitalize on offensive opportunities.

The annual tournament in Montreal, to determine the next Canadian champion, will take place on October 25th and 26th. Ettinger and Marinoff will face off again!