

The 37th Annual 2-Star Golden State Open

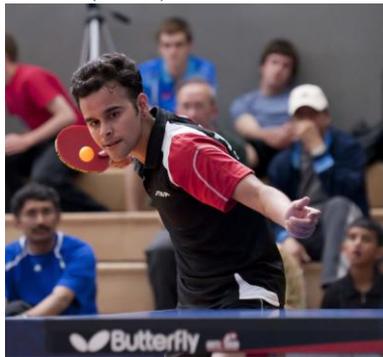
by David Kant



On May 28-29, the Tice Valley Gymnasium in Walnut Creek, CA was host to 165 players participating in the Concord Table Tennis Club's Golden State Open (GSO). Every player had a number which could be referenced to the handout tournament program. Last year's tournament conditions were improved by the gym's lighting renovations; this year, it was further improved by tournament registrar Phil Hudson, who raised the screen on the glass wall so the entire wall was covered which in previous years had been notorious for letting unwanted glare into the gym. Having played in the tournament myself, I experienced firsthand the improvement in playing conditions. Furthermore, the tournament was run very smoothly and efficiently by Tournament Director Phil Schafer and the experienced GSO staff who oversaw the tournament from beginning to end, ensuring all events went as planned and were under control.

Tournament conditions set, the players entered the arena; but unlike most tournaments, the results provided for a change of pace. Last year's Open Champion Xibo Liu returned to defend his title, only to be knocked out by a big upset from a young and emerging player to watch – Truong Manh Tu. Although less experienced, Truong had nothing to lose and played great table tennis. He was slow to start, allowing Xibo to comfortably take the first two games 11-8. Remaining collected and playing well under pressure, Truong took the next two games 11-8 and gained momentum. Going into the fifth game, Xibo became more cautious and conservative, while Truong only became more focused and aggressive, making for a close finish at 11-9 Truong, putting him in the Finals RR and denying Xibo the chance to defend his title.

Thus, the Open Finalists were declared as follows by seed: Weijian Zhang, coach at Ping Pong Dojo (2618), Anal Kashyap, coach at ICC and former Indian National Doubles Champion (2579), Khoa Nguyen of Top Spin, former Olympian and GSO Champion in 1987, '89, '91-'94, and 2003 (2455), and Truong Manh Tu of Top Spin, first timer in the GSO Open Finals (2422). At this level and era of table tennis where the game is so fast, it is not uncommon



Anal Kashyap (Open—2nd)
Photo by Son Lu



Wei-Jiang Zhang (Open—1st)
Photo by Son Lu

that all four finalists are two-wing loopers; however, each player has his nuances. Weijian's weapon is his forehand loop, being much more powerful than the other finalists, although he has a tendency to over hit it and allow for unforced errors. Anal's game is much more controlled and consistent, keeping the ball on the table and patiently awaiting the right opportunity to hit a winner. Khoa is the most experienced of the finalists, playing a very steady and smart game; he controls and places the ball very precisely and sets up powerful kills on both wings. Truong plays a very hard style, in that he is very aggressive and hits and creates winners at every opportunity.

With this match up, an intense and action-packed final was inevitable. The first match-ups were Weijian vs. Khoa and Anal vs. Truong. Weijian and Anal proved their dominance as the two top seeds in the draw; Weijian overpowered Khoa with his powerful forehand loop, winning 11-8, 11-8, 11-9, 11-3, while Anal used his control and consistency to prevent Truong from overpowering him and drawing just enough errors to take the match 11-8, 13-11, 3-11, 12-10, 11-7. When Anal faced Khoa, this made for an interesting match-up as both players implemented placement and consistency. What made the difference in this match-up was Anal's style being more offensive than Khoa's. Anal went for a lot more winners than Khoa did, which payed dividends, allowing Anal to take the match 11-7, 8-11, 12-10, 11-6, 14-12. At this point, Weijian was the favor to win, Anal being the only one who could potentially stop his devastating forehand. But, when Weijian played Truong, it was like the seeds were switched and Truong was top seed. Truong played better than ever, hitting winner upon winner by loops, flips, and smashes on both sides. This clearly affected Weijian's game, his nerves emerging and his timing lost. As Weijian racked up the unforced errors, Truong kept making it rain with winners; to everyone's shock, Truong defeated Weijian 4-0, winning 11-8, 11-6, 11-6, 11-8. As the Finals RR concluded, this truly became a nail-biter. Truong was to face Khoa and Weijian to face Anal. If Truong were to lose to Khoa, Weijian and Anal would be left to determine 1st and 2nd. But if Truong were to beat Khoa, he would take 1st, leaving Weijian and Anal to determine 2nd. Weijian and Anal made for a tough match-up, but in the end Weijian's power did it again for him, concluding the match 11-8, 13-11, 7-11, 9-11, 11-9, 11-9. Having played many times together at Top Spin, Truong and Khoa had no surprises in store for each other, knowing one another's game all too well. The key determinant of this match came down to Truong's consistency. Khoa's game is very steady, making it difficult for Truong to attack, all the while setting up his own line of offense. But Truong, playing the amazing offensive game he had been playing, simply needed to keep his momentum going for one last match. Knowing the importance of this match, however, became a detriment for Truong. He started out cautious, allowing Khoa to stay in his comfort zone and take the first game 11-5. Truong recovered, raising his consistency and powering through game two 11-5. But in games three and four, Khoa maintained composure while Truong seemed to lose it, missing many pivotal opportunities to put the ball away; Khoa won 11-5, 11-7. Game five went to Truong who pulled through by sheer necessity and determination. Game six was the most nerve-racking of all, Khoa knowing he would give Truong the momentum and the edge in Game seven if he were to win and Truong seeing the championship almost within reach. In the most incredible exchange of counter-loops, smashes, and an incredible level of vivacity on both sides, Khoa ended the match, taking game six 13-11 and denying Truong the GSO title.



Khoa Nguyen (Open—3rd)
Photo by Son Lu



Truong Manh Tu (Open—4th)
Photo by David Kant

So, after a spectacular finale, the finalists placed by seed, Truong placing 4th, Khoa 3rd, Anal 2nd, and Weijian 1st and the 37th Annual Golden State Open Champion.

Khoa Nguyen also won the U2500 and Over 40 events. Other results worth mentioning are 10 year-old Kevin Li, who won the U1850 and the U12 events, and 11 year-old Kevin Shen, who won the U1700 and was a semifinalist in the U2000. I hope to see more up and coming champions next year, in the 38th Golden State Open!



Kevin Li
(U12 & U1850 winner)
Photo by Son Lu

2011 Golden State Open Tournament Results

Event	First	Second	Third	Fourth
Open Final RR	Weijian Zhang (2-1)	Anal Kashyap (2-1)	Khoa Nguyen (1-2)	Truong Tu (1-2)
			Semifinalists	
Under 2500	Khoa Nguyen	Truong Tu	Philipp Klimant	Yin Zhong
Under 2300	Philipp Klimant	David Zeng	Rico Zhou	Cheng Qu
Under 2150	Trieu-Tien Nguyen	Tony Dhami	Olaf Surmann	Aditi Chodri
Under 2000	Rok Yu	Erica Tran	Kevin Shen	Vivian Sun
Under 1850	Kevin Li	Preston So	Stephen Alfred	Kevin Shen
Under 1700	Kevin Shen	Barry Tesar	Wee Jin Koh	Anthony Cavazos
Under 1500	Ishana Deb	Jerome Poon	Ken Girton	Jim Cembura
Under 1300	Aria Lee	Joe Li	Felix Gao	Ryan Chen
Under 1100	Thomas Currier	Hong Zhang	Scott Fong	Long-Hin Chan
Under 800	Steven Meridith	Aidan Meridith	Kiran Prabakar	Long-Hin Chan
Under 500	Robert He	Stephen Law	Vivian Malcy	Shreyas Ramaswami
Under 250	David Hou	Evan Chen	Malladi Bhargav	Shawn Fong
Under 12	Kevin Li	Victor Liu	Kevin Shen	Brandon Hong
Under 18	Krishnateja Avvari	David Zeng	Victor Liu	Rico Zhou
Over 40	Khoa Nguyen	Kevin Au	Kenny Tien	Ananda Krishnan
Over 55	Mark Johnson	Juno Liverato	Brett Jackson	Thomas Currier
Over 70 RR	Shu-Xun Ao	Harvey Gotliffe	Rod Dorse	Cliff Demartini
2800	Rod Dorse	Paul Beber	Jim Cembura	David Anderson
Doubles	David Smith	Bill Lyons	Ross Sadigh	Reynold Wong
3400	Jace Jackson	Michael Gesner	Adrian Lungu	Jason Balderama
Doubles	Matthew LaBelle	Howard Lindo	Yuri Kretov	Anthony Cavazos