

THE INTERNATIONAL TABLE TENNIS FEDERATION

Marius Widmer, ITTF Media Coordinator

ITTF Headquarters
Chemin de la Roche 11
1020 Renens / Lausanne, Switzerland



Website www.ittf.com **Tel** +41 21 340 70 90 **Fax** +41 21 340 70 99 **E-mail** mwidmer@ittf.com

Press Release: ITTF President Speaks about the Year 2008

– Marius Widmer –

Lausanne, 2nd January 2008

“The coaches must find innovative ways”

The year 2008 is an exciting one for the International Table Tennis Federation (ITTF). The two most important events will be held in the People’s Republic of China, the table tennis country par excellence.

The World Championships in the city of Guangzhou will take place from 24th February to 2nd March; the Olympic Games in Beijing will see table tennis events from 13th to 23rd August.

ITTF President Adham Sharara, who is on top of the federation since 1999, speaks about the Olympic Games, about the challenge to beat the superior Chinese players and the importance of promotion in the 21st century.

Marius Widmer: *Mr. Sharara, what do you think of when you see the numbers 2-0-0-8?*

Adham Sharara: Of course the first reaction is to think of Beijing and the Olympic Games. This will be a very special occasion where our sport will be a feature sport at the Games based on its immense popularity in China.

And what else?

Before the Olympic Games we have what I think will be a superb World Championship in Guangzhou. I am sure it will set a new standard for future World Championships. We have all this, plus the seventeen Pro Tour events and the ever-growing World Junior Circuit. It will be a very exciting year.

The Opportunity in Beijing

Are you well prepared for all the events to come?

For me personally it's business as usual. I always have to try to lead the federation in a calm and steady way and help find the right solutions for any problems that may arise. The question is if our staff is well prepared for all we have coming. In my opinion they are, and we are adding, restructuring and improving continually the professional staff structure to meet all the challenges ahead.

Which things are going to be most challenging in 2008?

The biggest challenge will be how to best use the opportunity of being at the Olympic Games in Beijing, in China, and take full advantage from a promotional and marketing point of view. We do not want to miss this opportunity.

Events in China for the Good of Table Tennis

Some fans are bored of the Chinese domination in table tennis. Is it for the good or for the bad of table tennis to have the most important events in China this year?

I think it is good for table tennis. In the past the "underdog" would go and challenge the best in their own territory. Now it seems this is not the approach. So, it's good to have many events in the country that dominates the sport so others can see what the top level is all about and how to counter it.

But what about the Chinese dominance?

Of course it's very boring to see the same nation win over and over, but this is the challenge. The others must rise to the challenge and find new ways to defeat the best. It has been done before, so why not again?

Popular in China, Unknown Abroad

What do you personally expect of the Chinese players in 2008 regarding their performances?

The Chinese dominate the sport completely and until their opponents find new ways on how to play them and beat them, China will continue to dominate. You cannot beat the Chinese by playing like them, or by playing like ten years ago. The coaches must find innovative ways to deal with this challenge.

What do you expect of their worldwide popularity and their function of figureheads of the sport?

In China the Chinese players are very popular and are stars. Outside China they do not play the same role due to their often lack of knowledge of foreign languages and perhaps due to some cultural differences.

New Developments and Promotion

Do you have an idea yet how the year 2009 will look like? Are you afraid of a sinking interest?

No, I am not afraid because all happens in cycles. We will have a new glue rule and that may shake things around and perhaps bring new players into the forefront. In the early 1980s China

was omni-present and dominated totally, then the Swedes were able to change things. Perhaps we could see some new developments in the future.

What are the most important things to develop the sport of table tennis within the next decade?

In this era if you do not promote, your product it will go unnoticed. But once you get attention, then you must have a good product to sustain the interest. I am counting very much on our Global Junior Programme to help push our sport forward over the next decade.

Table Tennis online

The free webcast of the 2008 Volkswagen Pro Tour Grand Finals in Beijing is now available on itTV. See further the World Cups as well as pictures from the Fashion Contest in Chengdu. Click on www.ittf.com and choose itTV!

For pictures, articles, results and further information please consult www.ittf.com or contact me.