



EMAIL CONTACT:
championships@nctta.org

2008 College Table Tennis National Championships

April 11-13 in Rochester, Minnesota

WEBSITE: <http://www.nctta.org/champs/2008/index.html>

****NEWS RELEASE****

FRIDAY, APRIL 11, 2008

NEWCOMER SHINES IN SNOWY MINNESOTA EMPORIA STATE'S ALFRED NAJEM CAPTURES MEN'S SINGLES TITLE

Men's Singles Semifinal Play

Returning to the site of his earlier victory against Carlos Chiu (Texas Wesleyan), Alfred Najem (Emporia State) faced top-seeded Adam Hugh (Princeton). This turned out to be the best match of the entire championships. Semifinal matches were best-of-seven, and this match went the distance. Najem's perfect service returns and powerful, attacking strokes won Hugh's respect in the first game, but Hugh won games two and three with spectacular all-around play. Deep topspin exchanges, with Najem exerting control but Hugh defending from the full depth of the court, first with lobs, then with chop, now with a little sidespin flick just off the floor, brought the crowd to its feet with a roar. Najem's incredible service returns secured a win in the fourth, but his mistakes--and Hugh's intensity and concentration--won the fifth. Facing elimination, Najem tied the game score at 3-3, and in the final game, his incredible strength of will assured the upset. Najem, on to the finals.

In the second semifinal, USC's Misha Kazantsev faced the remarkable Tahl Leibovitz (Queens College). Tahl had ousted second-seeded Gombos, but could he get past Kasentsev's serves and devastating forehand? Kasentsev started slowly, and Leibovitz took the advantage 2-0. Misha gets lucky, winning game 3 on an edge ball, but Tahl continues to exploit Kasentsev's undisciplined play--and his serve. Again the young USC player comes back as if to threaten a game seven, only to lose to Leibovitz intensity and display of his own power and ferocious quickness. Tahl Leibovitz is in the finals, beating Kazantsev 4-2.

Finals

Did anyone believe that Tahl Leibovitz could win the men's event? Tahl believed, and showed how his incredible, almost angry intensity enables him to play transcendent table tennis. After losing the first game of the championship match against Alfred Najem, and down 9-10 in the second, Leibovitz played the point of the tournament. Najem, attacking tremendously, forced Leibovitz back from the table. Spinning the ball with utmost power to eibovitz forehand and backhand, with Tahl smacking balls back from both back and forehand sides, it seemed Leibovitz could only capitulate. Lunging left and right, playing the ball defensively and desperately, he suddenly regained the attack and overpowered Najem. This greatest point of the match put Leibovitz even at 10-10, and set up a win to tie the game score at 1-1 But this was the last game Najem would allow, as he began to dismantle Tahl's touch game, and negate his power. Alfred Najem wins the 2008 Men's Championship 4-1.

###