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2009 College Table Tennis National Championships

April 3-5 in Rochester, Minnesota

WEBSITE: <http://www.nctta.com/champs/2009/index.html>

****NEWS RELEASE****

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THE ECONOMY WITHIN COLLEGE TABLE TENNIS

America's economic crisis is taking its toll on college table tennis.

In some cases, teams at the NCTTA Nationals in Rochester, Minnesota are staying at budget motels, sending fewer coaches or leaving some players behind.

"We would have brought more people," said Columbia University Coach Richard Wagner during a break in the action Friday as mixed doubles action began. Last year, the Ivy League university in New York City brought 17 players and two coaches. This year it was down to ten players and one coach. "We had to fight hard to get funds to go here," Wagner said.

The Columbia team stayed at the Days Inn, a slightly cheaper rate than the Kahler Hotel where most teams are staying in the downtown area. A Columbia graduate and mental health counselor in New York, he said the school had to chop its tournament costs from \$5,000 last year to \$3,200 this year – in large part due to the bad economy.

Other schools privately voiced similar concerns about cutting costs as players were introduced during opening ceremonies at the tournament attracting 39 teams. They came from Texas Wesleyan to Duke, from Princeton to Cal State-Long Beach and Rutgers.

At the University of Puerto Rico, four women's team players didn't travel to the tournament at the Rochester Regional Recreational Sports Center. "They wanted to come – they were freshmen," said Santiago Coste, a player on the men's team that finished third a year ago. "But it was impossible to send them."

Coste, who graduates in May, isn't worried about his future – he will continue his medical studies. "This is the best time to be in school."

It's really not all gloom and doom. NCTTA President Willy Leparulo sees many bright spots. There are 39 teams at this year's tournament- up from 32 last year. That's 250 top-notch collegiate players here to help rev up the Rochester economy. This weekend, five different tournaments in town are attracting 20,000 visitors. Wrestling, table tennis, hockey, volleyball and tae kwon action is all happening through Sunday in Rochester, home of the famed Mayo Clinic.

Nationwide, there are 151 colleges and universities with table tennis teams. And that number is growing from about 127 a year ago.

“Even though times are tough, a plethora of players have come,” Leparulo said.

At Lindenwood University in St. Charles, Mo., the school has been very generous with funds for equipment and travel to the NCTTA tournament, said coach Kelly Kendle, who coaches with her husband, Randy. There are six from Lindenwood here for their first trip to the Nationals.

Georgia Tech’s story is a little different. Coach Ralph Presley said he jammed six of his players into a room at Motel Six where the rates are \$39. He’s also working the tournament as an umpire so he can get his room paid for. Georgia Tech gave the team \$750 for their stay here- not enough to cover all costs.

Still, the economy didn’t stop Mississippi College from making its second trip to Minnesota in two years. MC sent five players to the Nationals, up from four a year ago with the Baptist-affiliated school finishing in 14th place. Table tennis newcomer Nancy Tsai, a music graduate student from Taiwan, is doing double duty. She’s a MC pingpong player. But she’s borrowing a piano on the same Rochester campus to prepare for a piano recital. It’s a big part of her grade with Nancy to perform Tuesday night when she returns to Mississippi College. It’s a case of playing Chopin and then switching hats to play table tennis.