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WEBSITE: <http://www.nctta.org/champs/2010>

****NEWS RELEASE****

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Year of the Tiger Brings a New Collegiate Men's Singles Champion

According to the Chinese Zodiac, 2010 is the Year of the Tiger. The tiger is admired by the ancient Chinese as a courageous fighter and Yanjun Gao, a Chinese student from La Guardia Community College in New York, has certainly shown his stripes at the 2010 College Table Tennis National Championships.

While Gao has never competed in college table tennis before this year, he brings with him much experience from having competed in Germany for 9 years, and his excellent play propelled him into the men's singles final against Texas Wesleyan's, Mark Hazinski, the top-ranked collegiate player in the nation. Hazinski is also a two-time collegiate men's singles champion, having won the title in 2007 and 2009.

Coach Keith Evans of Texas Wesleyan talks about how they prepare for matches like the final, "We watch and analyze the players before hand, watching them play in their earlier matches find their strengths and weaknesses." When pressed to reveal Gao's weaknesses Coach Keith offered a grin and a "no comment, let's just watch the match".

Just in terms of physical size, the match is a bit of a modern day David and Goliath with Mark Hazinski standing at a formidable 6'4" and Gao at only 5'8". This is not the first time, these two have met, as Gao points out, "we have played in the past and I have beaten him 2 times." Although, Gao certainly isn't overly confident as he quickly adds this caveat, "Both of the times we used speed glue. Last year we just changed to water-based glue. Water-based glue makes the ball very slow." Evidently that doesn't suit Gao's game which is centered around quickness and fast attacks.

Hazinski dominates the match early, taking a quick 2-0 lead with powerful forehand and backhand loops that leave Gao spinning and searching for answers. Gao, however, does not relent and keeps searching for a way to win. "I was always been behind in the match. He won the first two games, and I got the game back to 2-2. Then he won the 5th game and then I got a good start in the 6th game, leading 6-0."

The 7th game continued the pattern, as Gao kept it close early, but then fell behind 8-9 before calling a timeout. Whatever was said during the timeout, it worked as Gao won the next two points.

Gao indicates about the 7th game, “it was 50-50 and during match point, Mark was clearly nervous and seemed hesitant and I was able to control my shots and win the point.” Coach Shih attributes the win to preparation, “We prepared for the match to go to game 7. We have practiced this situation and saved some gears to the end.”

According to the Chinese Zodiac, the tiger is set to aspire to the top spot, and here in the men’s singles event at the 2010 College Table Tennis Championships, Yanjun Gao did just that. As it was reported through the college table tennis Twitter feed, “That’s it folks, we have a new champion, Yanjun Gao.”

About NCTTA

The National Collegiate Table Tennis Association (NCTTA) is a non-profit organization established exclusively for promoting the sport of table tennis at the college level. As the national governing body for college table tennis in the United States and Canada, NCTTA organizes intercollegiate competition throughout North America. www.nctta.org

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