

## The Not-So-New Kids on the Block



*Universidad de Puerto Rico*

Though in its first year with the NCTTA, the table tennis program at the Universidad de Puerto Rico has a history dating to the early '80s. It was not until this past fall that the club decided to get involved with American collegiate table tennis.

For nearly 30 years, UPR has been competing with other Puertorrican university clubs in what's called the Liga Atletica Interuniversitaria (LAI), similar to the United States' NCTTA. Because of the sport's immense popularity and support in Puerto Rico, UPR's players train as full-time athletes and receive full scholarships to pay for tuition, books, meals, and table tennis equipment.

UPR players prepare for competition with preseason and in-season training. Men's coach Joel Alvarado divides preseason training into what he calls "off the table" preparation, including weight lifting and long distance runs, and "on the table" preparation, focusing on technique work with spin, speed, and control. In-season training drills players on principles like strategy, tactics, and different in-game situations.

In addition to scholarships and top-notch training, the LAI team finals receive full television coverage. "All that creates an environment of great motivation for our players to continue training and studying hard," said Coach Alvarado.

This year, UPR sent the best athletes from its 15-player club to compete in the NCTTA's Florida division. After winning both semester regionals, the team advanced to nationals with high hopes. Their stellar 3<sup>rd</sup> place finish fulfilled the team's season goal of ranking among the top four schools in the nation. Coach Alvarado looks to the future: "We are working very hard on our training and recruiting programs to become a real menace to the reign of the Texas Wesleyan team."

Look out next year, Rams.