

## ***TABLE TENNIS (SPORTS) AS A MICROCOSM OF LIFE***

My father was a two-time All-State quarterback in high school. He loved competition but after high school he applied it to business until starting golf at age 46. He retired to Florida and was a member at a par 72-championship course. At age 68 he called and said, "I shot a 69". I said, "You didn't even shoot your age". At 69 he called and said, "I shot a 65 and broke the amateur course record." I said, "You still didn't shoot your age (69)". At 71 he called and said, "I shot 34 on the front, bogied the 18<sup>th</sup> hole to shoot a 30 on the back and re-broke the course record." I said, "A lousy bogie on 18?" I was mean, you say? I learned from the master! I came off the table when I won the national championship and my mother said, "You were wonderful"; dad said, "You hit lousy backhands the whole match." But, I knew they were both proud and loved me. As someone said, "Your Intention was so loud; I couldn't hear your words".

John Varga was my coach at the YMCA table tennis Club in South Bend, Indiana. My father first took me to Varga's club when I was 11 because I was very clumsy and because John and my father were both from Hungary, sharing the same disciplinary philosophy: "If you do it right, that's what you're supposed to do; if you do it wrong, you should get yelled at". That wouldn't pass muster today but I had no complaints then; again, it was the Intention and Love that came through. Many view TT as a "Sissy" sport. In reality, for the good players, it's more a mix of ballet and marathon. On one shot you might be 20 feet from the table; on the next you're over the table. On a weekend of competition, I would often lose 8-10 pounds. (Next to soccer, more people in the world play TT than any other sport.) I told my daughter that as part of my conditioning, Varga had me run four miles a day. She scoffed, "that's nothing (she was a two-time Intercollegiate Triathlon champion)". I said, "But that was one mile backward, forward, and to each side". She said, "So; no big deal." I said, "But that was with thumb tacks taped in the heels of my shoes, so I had to stay on my toes; anyway, it was just a warm up for six hours of practice on Sat. and Sun. when I could only hit my weakest shot against everyone I played (like backhand topspins or whatever Varga thought needed improvement)." She said, "Sounds like grandpa's six mile walk to school in 3 feet of snow, uphill both ways". "I get no respect". Anyway, Varga believed that the better you got, the harder he should push you; the proverbial pressure that changes the lump of coal into a diamond. Varga was the national rules chairman and when he played us he would call every rule in the book. He would even intentionally cheat. Particularly before the Nationals, he would pull every trick he could think of to rattle me; he expected no negative emotions. Varga preached that "Anger", "Fear", "I don't care" (or any other negative emotion) clouded your judgment and were detrimental to optimal performance. "Predator" was what he wanted- like a big cat chasing its prey, focused and locked into the mind of the opponent and any double cross, triple cross or whatever they might throw at you." And if you screwed up, "Make them think it was part of your plan".

In 1952, I won the Nationals Boys championship. I was down 19 to 17 in the first game in a round before the finals; my opponent started to try mind games on me and I laughed to myself and said, "This guy has no clue about playing real mind games; he should play Varga." Instead of unnerving me, as he intended, it just intensified my focus; I won that game at 19 and the next two at 10 and 9. Varga believed that when two equally physically matched opponents squared off, the one that prevailed mentally/psychologically would win the physical battle.

In the 1952 National finals, I beat Irwin Klein, from Los Angeles. All the TT journal writers predicted Klein was a shoe in to win the Nationals. One lone voice, Dale McCauley, a senior player in our club, wrote to the editor, "No, Krizman will win". Being "Believed in" can be a wonderful motivator/contributor to a child's success.

My sister, Sherry (Sharlene Krizman-Wilson), was one of the best natural athletes I've ever seen; 5 times National Junior champion. In Varga's mold, other than self-pep talks, on the court she became the coolest assassin you could imagine. A few years ago, she won the National Woman's

Senior's Championship and was later inducted into the TT Hall of Fame.

Varga and dad most agreed on the Bottom Line: Challenges in life bring out the butterflies in us all; the secret is to learn to get those butterflies to fly in formation, to be the maestro conductor of your orchestra of emotions. Sports help you do that.

I've heard some say that athletics are a waste of time and energy for young people and it teaches them negatives, such as to try to conquer opponents; actually, it teaches them to respect opponents. It teaches them physical conditioning, discipline, self-esteem, respect for the rules, social skills and on and on.

I'm very proud of my two children; both became exceptional athletes and adults. David was the captain of both his high school Cross country and Golf teams, was a marathoner and played behind Jim Fuyrk on the golf team at the University of Arizona. He now is the only person in the world, that we know of, who is an Oriental Medical Doctor, Rolfer and Feldenkrais practitioner (about 10 years of post graduate work). His clientele could make up Whose Who in Sports, Politics, Business and Hollywood actors. Both kids were nationally ranked junior golfers and they played in junior tournaments with the likes of Tiger Woods and several other now PGA tour players. I have walked with Tiger's dad, Earl, as the kids played, and we talked of concepts not unlike the above. Later, in 1992, Jeanne Anne was chosen as a High School Academic All American and Tiger as Player of the Year for the American Junior Golf Association. At the awards banquet, both their essays included: "Golf (it could have read 'Table Tennis' or 'Sports') is a microcosm of life". (Each said the other was a copycat). Jeanne Anne went on to play on the University of Arizona's NCAA national championship team in 1996 and is now in dental school. As for Tiger, he's not done too badly himself. And so, it is, sport "Microcosms" are often pretty good templates for success in life.

David J. Krizman, MD

*Dave Krizman at the old South Bend Club*



*Sherrie at the new club in front of her image*

