

All welcomed at table tennis tournament in Naperville

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Naperville Park District's table tennis tournament Saturday offered two very different and very telling scenes. On one side of the room, several boys played an informal match, barely keeping score and paddling the ball back and forth.

On the other side of the room, however, the mood was far more serious. Two veteran players pounced from left to right at the volleys on just about every point. Following the match, the crowd applauded and the players reported their scores.

"The tournament is for fun, but it's also for competition," said John Chen, the de facto president of the Naperville Table Tennis Club, who has been involved for roughly 21 years. "Competition and fun can mix together. The people are happy and having fun."

The event raises money for the club, which is open to anybody and meets at 6:30 p.m. every Sunday at River Woods School, 2607 River Woods Drive. The tournament was held at the school.

With the sport's deep-seated roots in Asian culture, Chen said the growing Asian population in Naperville made it a good site for the tournament.

"When we were a very young age, we started to play," Chen said. "We just naturally got into it. Much like Americans grow up watching their family play football or baseball."

Last summer, when membership declined and the club appeared to be in bad shape, Chen stepped up and took on an organizer's role.

On Saturday, it looked like his direction helped the club. About 100 people - men, women, young and, er, experienced - signed up for the tournament.

Itasca resident Phil Moy said he has been playing the sport for decades. He said the tournament is a good way to introduce the casual players to the more competitive side of the sport.

An instructor at the Xilin Table Tennis Club in Naperville, Moy said the mental aspect of table tennis drew him to the sport and that it is often overlooked.

"It's mental as well as physical," Moy said. "If two players are equally strong, how do you win?"