

SPORTS / OUTDOORS

MINNESOTA TEAM WINS CANADIAN OPEN SEPAKTAKRAW CHAMPIONSHIP 2001

By Pheng Vang

On August 4th to the 6th, one of the local Minnesota takraw teams, representing Team USA, went to Edmonton, Canada to compete in the 2001 Canadian Open Sepaktakraw Championships. The Canadian Open is a 3-day feature event of the Edmonton Heritage Festival, which alone attracts 300,000 visitors to experience over 50 different cultures that are show cased through clothing, song, dance, artifacts, food and drink. Also occurring in Edmonton at the same time of the festival and the takraw event is the World Track and Field Championships. The Canadian Open is an event to decide which Canadian team will hold the national title for Canada. There are four divisions of competition, including: Girls, under 19; Boys, under 19; Women's; and Men's. Last year, a Canadian team from Winnipeg won the national title; and a guest team from Minnesota, representing Team USA, won the all around competition.

The U.S. team was the only international guest team at the Open last year; but through hard work this year, Rick Engel, President of the Sepak Takraw Association of Canada, was able to get a national men's team and a women's team from Japan. Since there are not enough teams entered for both of the Boys and Girls U-19 Division,



Photo courtesy of Pheng Vang

A high sole slap spike by Loui as Japan tries to block.

the Japanese women's team had to compete with the Boys under 19. For the Japanese men's national team, they and the U.S. team were the feature attraction Sepaktakraw event at the Open. However, Japan ranked higher than U.S. at the King's Cup in Thailand and they are in Division One and U.S. in Division Two. Members of the U.S. team at the Open this year are Pheng Vang, a member of the U.S. National Team for many years, Peng Ti Vang (Pheng's younger brother), Nou Yang (reserve player), and a young new spiker Loui Tienthong.

To attract and get the crowds into the game before the start of the tournament, the U.S. and Japan were scheduled to

play in two special exhibition matches. U.S. first exhibition match against Japan was quite a battle, Japan took the first set and then U.S. came back and won the second set but Japan went on to win the third set in a tied-breaker. The second exhibition match later on in the day also went into a tied-breaker but luck went with the U.S. this time. A huge crowd was going wild and amazed when U.S. and Japan were battling. These two teams were the only competitive takraw teams with high levels of skill at this tournament. Talk about high level of skills — the U.S. spiker named Loui, is awesome at spiking. He is flying high in the air each time to spike the ball and the Japanese had a hard time

adjusting to block his spikes. His spiking skills are as good as some of the top Thai takraw players and at his young age of only 19 years old, he surely will be top U.S. spiker for many years to come.

With the exhibition matches behind, U.S. and Japan again had to battle one more time in the finals - in a real match - to see who would play the Canadian champion team.

This time the U.S. is felt more confident of winning; and they did win! But it was still tough to get through the Japanese national team. The U.S. took the first set easily but let it slip away in the second set after they had a comfortable 4 points lead near the end. The U.S. and Japan had to go into a tied-breaker for the third time that they played each other - but luckily the U.S. was able to pull it out.

About the U.S. players: This is the first time they ever played together in a major

tournament and all three of them played very well together as a team. Winning takes good skills and communication and the three of them do just that: with Loui very strong at spiking; Ti good at serving and setting; and Pheng, the more experienced player controlling the game strategy for the team. Anyone who would like to know more about what's happening with takraw in the world or wants more information regarding the sport, you can e-mail Pheng at Mntakraw@aol.com or call at (612) 740-8297.

Canadian Open Results:

Men's Division All Around Champions:

- 1st = Team USA from MN
- 2nd = Team Japan
- 3rd = Canada

Canadian Champions (Men):

- 1st = Lao Community of Edmonton
- 2nd = Saskatoon

Women's Division:

- 1st = Japan
- 2nd = Regina

Youth U-19:

- 1st = British Columbia Sockeye
- 2nd = Winnipeg



Photo courtesy of Pheng Vang

Loui, roll spiking high over Japan.



Photo courtesy of Pheng Vang

Top: Japan Team, Bottom: US Team: Loui, Nou, Ti, and Pheng.

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