

RTTC Table Tennis Article to run Wednesday, November 26th, 2014
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Rossmoor Resident, Agi Bakondi, Showcases Uncle's World Championship Table Tennis Memorabilia

Photo Caption 1: Agi Bakondi's Uncle with some of his table tennis cups and trophies

Photo Caption 2: A Proud Moment in 1993 For Laszlo Bellak When He Was Inducted into the International Table Tennis Hall of Fame

He won twenty one medals, nine gold, representing Hungary and a further twenty three living in America. He travelled the world giving exhibitions and playing tournaments, he was an acrobatic player who was also an entertainer who played for audiences as large as 10,000. He was a man who injected fun into the game and played a major role in furthering the sport. He was the uncle of Agi Bakondi who has put a selection of Laszlo Bellak's cups, trophies, photographs and a copy of his book: Table Tennis - How A New Sport was Born, the History of the Hungarian team winning 73 Gold Medals, published in 1990 on display in the Rossmoor Table Tennis Trophy Cabinet. *<Insert Photo 1 close to this text>*

Bellak was born in Budapest, Hungary on February 11, 1911. His life is rich with memories. Known as "the Crown Prince of Table Tennis" for his agile style, Bellak was the player the crowd loved to watch. His tricks included playing with the edge of his bat, using three - four balls at a time and blowing the ball back at his opponents. Laszlo could also play alone running round the table to return his own shots!

Bellak spent some of his life living in Paris. During this time he became a close friend of the man who was to direct the classic movie "Casablanca". In a sign of their friendship, the director named the actor who played Bergman's lover after his close friend Laszlo. Paul Henreid's stage name for the movie was Victor Laszlo, the jilted lover from Paris. Bellak lived in Paris for a time as well as Germany and England, Bellak also lived in the United States, first in New York and then in Miami.

Later in his life Bellak was recognized for his many contributions to the sport of table tennis when he was inducted into four table tennis halls of fame: They were the USA Hall Of Fame in 1980; the International Hall of Fame in 1993; the International Jewish Sports Hall of Fame in 1995 and the Florida Hall of Fame in 1996. *<Insert Photo 2 close to this text>*

Bellak volunteered to serve in the U.S. army during the second world war. Most of his time was spent in the campaigns of India and Burma. He was decorated three times, and was honorably discharged with a Victory Medal.

For every table tennis victory, there was a fascinating story to be told. In 1938, on his farewell appearance in the world championships playing for Hungary in London, he finally departed with the Gold. A local girl, Wendy Woodhead needed a mixed doubles partner. She was paired with Ballak. Incredibly they won the title. They had never partnered each other prior to then, and they never partnered each other again after the event. Any player will recognize the difficulty in winning a championship with someone you've never played with before.

Another story documented in book describes how he was a vital member of the team that captured the Swaythling Cup in 1928, at the age of seventeen. He came within a hairs breadth of winning the men's Singles event. In the final match against compatriot, Zoltan Melchovits, he led by two games to nil and 20-17. He had three match points, three championship points! Mechlovits was 37 years old and the more experienced player. He had reached the final two years earlier at the inaugural event losing to Roland Jacobi, also of Hungary. Bellak took risks, but they cost him the vital final games as Melchovits not only ultimately won game three, but

then went on to win games four and five for the championship!

Agi Bakondi has assembled a treasure chest of photographs, cups, trophies and other memories of this inspiring player who brought so much to the game. Rossmoor residents can view the exhibits displayed in the trophy cabinet of the Rossmoor Table Tennis Club during normal playing hours, (Monday to Friday, 9 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. and Saturday, 9:00 am to noon). His niece, a regular player at the club, has many more fascinating stories to tell. Like her uncle, she enjoys the game too, and has many more interesting stories to tell of her uncle's passion for the game.

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