



By KELLY MARIANI  
UW News Lab

## Table tennis: From old-country tradition to new club in Bellevue

Table tennis is a strong sport in Vietnam and China, and many immigrants have brought their love of the game with them to America.

Chris Pham, a coach at the newly established Seattle Pacific Table Tennis Club, is Vietnamese and from Cambodia. Pham said he started playing ping-pong at an early age after trying other sports.

"I played soccer when I was young, but it's a tough sport in my country and I was fed up with it so I started playing ping-pong," Pham said in an interview Oct. 21 at the club in Bellevue.

Pham remembers playing ping-pong at recess with his classmates and said he ended up watching most of the games because he lost.

"I practiced at night and soon began beating everyone at school and I remember thinking, 'I love this sport,'" Pham said.

When Pham reflects on his early years of ping-pong, he says, "Ping-pong saved my life."

When Pham was drafted into the Vietnamese army at age 22, his table tennis skills prevented him from having to go to war. Instead, he played for the army's table tennis team.

After the war, Pham coached eight to 10 hours a day to make a living and taught lessons at night for extra money.

"There was a time when hearing the sound of the ball on a table made me scared, like a nightmare. ... I coached that much," Pham said.

The Seattle Pacific Table Tennis Club was founded two months ago and has already seen great success. The players travel all over the country for tournaments

and practice ping-pong up to four hours a day. Most of the members are Chinese.

"We already have 115 members in the club, with 20 of them being under the age of 10," said Coach Judy Qi, who founded the club and spoke Oct. 21.

Qi moved to the U.S. from China four years ago and taught students who played on China's National Team. She said her goal for the club is to share her ping-pong skills and continue teaching kids to get to the national level.

Alan Lee, a member of the club and marketing assistant, said, "The club is a good environment for both kids and adults and you can really find some high-quality players."

However, some Vietnamese-Americans are seeing a lack of interest from their younger members.

Hoa Dang, a Vietnamese club member, said in a phone conversation Oct. 25, "I don't see many young Vietnamese kinds playing ping-pong; kids born in America want to play football, basketball, baseball or soccer."

Dang said he took up the sport about 40 years ago, for similar reasons as Pham.

"We only had a few things to do in Vietnam – swim in the ocean, play ping-pong, play soccer or hang around," Dang said.

Dang joined the club because he had friends who were members and because he says it's a better club and more affordable than most.

Pham thinks there are also other reasons for the lack of Vietnamese-American interest.



Hình trên: Chris Pham, Huấn luyện viên gốc Việt từ Cambodia đến, cũng là người thành lập Câu Lạc Bộ Bóng Bàn "Seattle Pacific Tennis Club", bên cạnh là Kelly Mariani. (hình: tác giả cung cấp)

"The Vietnamese-American players are more casual players," Pham said. "You feel good, you go! You want to have fun, you go!"

Dang is hopeful that his daughter will actively pursue the sport. He plans to teach her at home and take her to lessons at the club.

"I took her to the club last week to play and she said, 'Yeah Dad, let's do this again!'" Dang said.

The Seattle Pacific Table Tennis Club is open seven days a week. Membership fees are \$45 per month for adults, (senior discount available), \$28 for juniors (under 17) and drop-ins are always welcome. For more information, visit [www.spttc.net](http://www.spttc.net).

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Hình trên: Alan Lee (trái) và một bạn trẻ là những thành viên của "Seattle Pacific Tennis Club". (Photo: Kelly Mariani)

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