



Perfect 10 for Chinese juggernaut

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Posted On: February 25, 2018

China are the women's champions of the ITTF Team World Cup for a 10th time.

The trio of Zhu Yuling, Liu Shiwen and Ding Ning dismantled Japan 3-0 at the Copper Box Arena in London today to reach the landmark – astonishingly, China have only failed to win the tournament once since it began in 1990.

Each match saw Japan occasionally threaten but each time China slammed the door shut, to the delight of a partisan crowd.

Indeed, whenever Japan had the temerity to string a few points together, it was a rolling wave of noise from their spectators which roused them.

The doubles saw Liu Shiwen & Ding Ning up against 17-year-olds Hina Hayata & Mima Ito, two right-hand/left-hand combinations.

It was the Japanese who started strongly and, at 7-5 up, they would have entertained thoughts of claiming the first game – until six successive Chinese points put paid to that.

China controlled the next game from 3-3, stretching away to take it to six, but Japan came back in the third as Ito began skilfully manoeuvring the ball around the table, stretching her opponents and allowing the second seeds to build a 5-2 and 9-3 lead which was enough to get them over the line.

But the top seeds were not for shaking and a 10-4 lead in the fourth left them on the brink of getting the first rubber on the board.

Two match points saved prompted a timeout, and two more saved might have prompted the jitters. But China don't really do the jitters, and the next point was theirs, the first step taken towards the trophy.

It was Zhu Yuling who was charged with taking the second step and she barely allowed Kasumi Ishikawa a look-in, though the Japanese closed from 4-1 down to 4-4 in the first and traded points to the same score in the third.

But that was really as good as it got as the powerful up-close play of Zhu was too much for the world No 4. Ishikawa is ranked only two places behind her opponent but the closeness on paper was a chasm on the court.

The other talking point of the match was a yellow card for Zhu, issued by English umpire Josh Reynolds, for taking too long over a serve. It was something she agreed with – her on court interview response of “too slow” needing no translation for the laughing crowd.

And so to Ding Ning, world and Olympic champion. At 0-4 she resembled a classic car with a slightly temperamental ignition. By 4-4 she was firing nicely and by 8-4, she was revving hard.

And like a classic car, there was a grace to her performance, even in lunging defensive shots to get the ball back on the table as opponent Ito tried to move her around court, there was a unhurried poise about her.

That first game was won 11-7, the second 11-9, aided by a net cord on game point as Ito briefly engineered a decent position.

The third saw Ding open a box of tricks. Going 5-2 up, the first energetic ‘Cho’ came out; there was another at 6-4 after an amazing, high-tempo rally. And at that point, the famous tomahawk serve was dusted down, two quick points moving China to 8-4.

The tomahawk wasn't quite the final axe for Japan's hopes – in fact, Ito won the next two Ding serves against the weapon – but after one match point was saved, Ito netted and the title was once again China's property.



A trophy selfie (picture by Alan Man)

Results

China 3 Japan 0

Liu Shiwen & Ding Ning bt Hina Hayata & Mima Ito 3-1 (11-7, 11-6, 6-11, 11-8)

Zhu Yuling bt Kasumi Ishikawa 3-0 (11-5, 11-7, 11-7)

Ding Ning bt Mima Ito 3-0 (11-7, 11-9, 11-8)

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