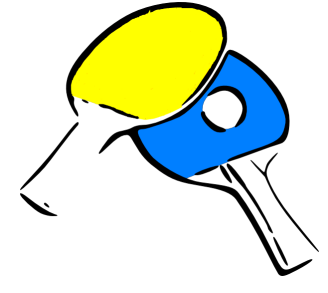


## टेबल टेनिस स्पर्धा



Participation at this year's TT Tournament was pretty healthy - with 27 men in the fray. A knockout format was chosen and matches were played in a best-of-three format. The Semi Finals and Finals were played in a Best of Five Sets Format.

Men's 1st round got off to a scintillating start in a keenly fought match between Ashutosh Khuperkar and Amit Mehta. Ashutosh's top spins, loops and guile were ably matched by Amit who won with his controlled offense and classic serves! Dhananjay Deshmukh predictably sailed through his match with Rishi Purekar. Mahesh Kotnis was already thanking his stars at getting a bye during the initial draw, when eventually Harsha Ghatakpanadi turned up and Harsha was defeated in their hard-fought match despite his superlative defense! Mahesh effectively used his 1st round match to loosen up his arms and hit the ball all over the ceiling! Mahesh Kotnis and Harsha Ghatakpanadi fought it out with easy mistakes on both sides initially, but Mahesh Kotnis with his controlled game prevailed. Prasanna Aigalikar and Nilay Kulkarni were well matched novices and were neck-to-neck till 12 year old Nilay won. Raw aggression, a la Nilay, was hitherto unknown to the tournament! Sandeep More and Yash Sathe clashed in the first round with Yash winning by a whisker. The match between 12 year old Mandar Patki and Sumit was sprinkled with the longest rallies and looked more like a friendly game that Mandar won. Kiran Ingle sailed through his match with Manish Athavale. This match was avidly watched and cheered by all. There were several long rallies, no smashes, and lot of unforced errors. There were few shots that were quite tricky and eventually named as 'KiranShots'. Manoj Mohile also played a very exciting game against Gopal Halepatti but Gopal defeated Manoj. Vilas Vaidya was uncertain to play but showed up at the last minute taking over Shirish More. Vilas is a regular at the MMD Tournaments and hit some classic topspin smashes but Shirish, a seasoned player turned out to be better in the end.

Second rounds were a lot more exciting .The biggest upset of the Tournament was second seed and Tournament Director Rajendra Kulkarni. Rajendra dominated the first game but Amit fought back with aggression and eventually easily dominated Rajendra by showing his all-round class with foxy spins, serves and some select smashes! Amit sufficiently warmed up from round 1, started delivering on his shots. Amazingly each chop and smash found its target and Rajendra had no answer. In another showdown Shirish More took over the last year's runner up Sachin Bidkar. The 2nd round match was widely looked as the Men's final as it was a match of such a high caliber as has not been witnessed in a long time! Shirish More had to prove his mettle against seasoned player Sachin and the upstart aggressor and newbie member Shirish was out to prove his superiority in the Bhusari Household Table Tennis Hall! They played a best-of-three, with Shirish trying to wrest the match initiative in Game 1 by playing a very unnatural game. He hit out with all the strokes he had, which mostly landed in the nets. Sachin won the game easily enough, mostly riding on Shirish's mistakes. In the 2nd game Shirish changed his track and went back to his patented chops and placements strategy, which had his opponent sweating and reeling. The game went to Shirish. By game 3, both players looked tired and each had now understood the other's game plans and abilities. Here was when Sachin began to excel by a scintillating display of controlled aggression. Many of his serves had no answer, and his smashes found their mark. There was one notable rally where Sachin returned a very well struck smash, with Shirish perfectly smashing it back once again. It was sheer pleasure to watch this battle of talents!

In the First Quarter Final Match Dhananjay Deshmukh nicknamed "DD" had a lot of vociferous support! He took on hot favorite Amit Mehta. There was passion and emotion at each stroke play, and amazingly DD withstood all of that with his cool demeanor, to win Games 1 and 3 and claim a berth in the semifinals!

In another Quarter Final Match last year's Defending Champion Vijay Krishna took over Kiran Ingle .He got a very well deserved victory in a befitting Quarter final! Kiran tried his best to match Vijay ball to ball but in the end Vijay prevailed

Quarter Final 3 -In another Nail-biting Finish Third Seed Abhijeet Bhusari took over Mahesh Kotnis. Mahesh had dominated UDCT, Mumbai in his youth but Abhijeet Bhusari was no novice to Game of Table Tennis. Abhijeet had 03 Michigan Open Championships to his credit. Mahesh and Abhijeet were expected to be a battle between two styles. It was Mahesh's excellent defense versus Abhijeet's hyper aggressive style. Eventually Mahesh fell victim since he was denied the opportunities to smash. Abhijeet had control of the game with an excellent display of short and long chops, and some very good defenses. Mahesh simply could not cut through it and fell.

The QF 4 was between hard hitting 12 year old sensation Mandar Patki and last year's finalist Sachin Bidkar. He had just

defeated Anuraag Bhusari in a nail biting finish . Mandar matched Sachin in Game one but finally experience prevailed and Sachin won the match easily.

The Semi Final line up was decided. It was Abhijeet "AB" against Dhanjay "DD". The reputation of Vidarbha and Marathwada was at stake. DD was crowd favorite because of his easy going attitude. DD reminded AB of his challenge of beating DD left handed. The First Semi Final was Best of Five sets. DD tried his best to match AB's shots but in the end AB as expected emerged victorious. The other Semi Final was played against last year's Finalist Sachin and Vijay Krishna. Both possess great touch and mid-distance rally capability. They wowed the spectators from the start to the end. They battled it out with each other for a long time. In the end Vijay rallied to beat Sachin 3-1

Now it was time for the Finals. AB through his sheer aggression clinched the first set 11-9. The second set started with AB leading 6-4 but eventually Vijay, the champion figured out AB's game smashing and placing the ball in every corner . Abhijeet was no match to Vijay and Vijay easily won the next three Games and retained his MMD crown.

Inventory and paper products were managed by Ash Naik.

All the Players enjoyed the Tournament. Many of us have played this game for a long time and after that because of daily hustle bustle it is left behind somewhere in memories. With beer bellies increasing and life getting humdrum it is time to spice it up again and explore those energetic days when the adrenalin used to flow for these competitions. It was a great event for networking wherein we could meet all the likeminded individuals and have a laugh or two. In the end all the Players thanked the Tournament Director Rajan Kulkarni for organizing such a classic tournament. Rajan and Milind Patki officiated in the matches.

After the tournament , the players flopped down, drained from all energy physical and mental! The food committee had brought some mouthwatering delicacies. Batavada was a hit and was provided by Sagar Kulkarni. Biryani was provided by Royal Indian Cuisine in Troy.

The trophies were presented by Kiran Ingle.

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