MC's table tennis team finishes second in nation

Special to *The Clinton Courier*

Mississippi College table tennis members are pictured at the 2019 national championships in April at the Greensboro Coliseum in North Carolina. MC Choctaws finished second in the nation. There are more than 150 college table tennis teams in the U.S. and Canada.

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Wrapping up another season, Mississippi College's table tennis team finished second in the U.S. at the 2019 national championships.

Facing perennial champ Texas Wesleyan University in the finals in Greensboro, North Carolina, MC fell three games to one in coed team matches.

The Texas Wesleyan Rams captured four titles: men's (coed) team, women's team, men's doubles and men's singles. Texas Wesleyan has achieved seventy-three national championships in table tennis since the program started at the private institution in Fort Worth in 2001.

The MC vs Texas Wesleyan rivalry remains a tradition at National Collegiate Table Tennis Association tournaments. The two schools battled in the finals six times, starting in 2012. The Mississippi College Choctaws won their only national championship in the Olympic sport in 2015 in Eau Claire, Wisconsin.

"These mighty MC student-athletes played their hearts out, but came up short against another powerful Texas Wesleyan table tennis team," said Andy Kanengiser, the squad's sponsor the past twelve seasons. "We applaud their grit, dedication and hard work during another terrific year with paddles blazing."

Delighted with the triumph of her Rams coed team, Texas Wesleyan head coach Jasna Rather also praised the MC squad for a fine performance at the Greensboro Coliseum.

"Mississippi College is a very strong team," Rather said after the finals ended.

Texas Wesleyan now holds fourteen men's (or coed) team titles. MC and New York University are the only two schools to beat TWU in finals competition.

A table tennis standout from Kunming, China, Xiang "Ali" He scored the only MC match victory in the finals.

Mississippi College defeated teams such as Duke, Wright State (of Ohio), and Santa Monica College before slamming the University of California-Irvine three to zero to get to the final round. Texas Wesleyan defeated 2018 national coed champ New York University, among others, to advance and face MC. The last time the squads faced off in the finals was in 2016. MC's team finished third in the nation a year ago.

A former MC table tennis standout, Zhicheng "Johnson" Liang coached the Choctaws team. A Michigan-based accountant, he thanked the players for another amazing season.

Besides a second place team trophy, MC earned silver cups for Xiang He and teammate Qingwei Sun for their second place in men's doubles.

The 2019 championships ended Qingwei's four seasons of college table tennis. Coach Liang appreciates his quiet leadership and enormous success for the twenty-two-year-old native of Hebei, China.

Other team members include Captain Harry Sharma, a Nepal native who lives in Japan, Tomotaka "Tomo" Yoshitomi of China, and Vladyslav "Vlad" Totkalo of the Ukraine. A sports media and marketing major, Vlad is MC's first player from the Ukraine. A graphic design major from North Carolina, Caleb Shipman, and accounting major Jeremy Gore of Dallas, Texas round out the squad. Shipman's parents watched the marathon of Greensboro games April 12-14.

Table tennis really never ends for the players. Gore, who seeks to become a Para Team U.S. alternate at the Pan American Games, is booked for an early June tournament in Mexico.

Once they return home, MC players practice to improve their games over the summer.

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