

A partner in a table tennis firm

Southfield man has handle on Ping Pong racket

By GLENN BUNTING

At 18 years of age, Rochester resident Mike Velette has already accumulated a decade of Ping-Pong, but to listen to him, one would think his table tennis career is just beginning.

A member of the United States Tennis Table Association (USTA) since he was 10, Mike began playing at the urging of his father, who was no Ping-Pong sluff himself. Since then, Velette has climbed the ladder of success, temporarily culminating with a recent excursion to Europe.

After bouncing the ball around the basement for a couple of years, Velette was a national runner-up in the 12 year old and 15-year-old division in one of his first tournament starts. Upon reaching the age of 13, Mike captured the 15-and-under crown and a promising table tennis career lay ahead with it.

A 1974 graduate of Rochester Adams High School, Velette went on to take a pair of seconds in the 15-and-under division along with three semi-final performances in the 17-and-under class. When the national came to Detroit recently, Mike cracked the top 16 (rank) in the open division.

TWO WEEKENDS ago, Velette captured his second consecutive state singles championship by defeating 1974 winner

Bill Lesser of Pontiac in four matches. Lesser is ranked 11th in the country and also lost to Velette in the final last year.

Velette and mixed doubles partner Michelle McKinstry were also successful by taking a first, adding to a host of state championships that Mike has earned since his starting days 10 years ago.

Mike's brother Steve reached the quarterfinal round at Cobo Hall in the boys' 17-and-under division, before being eliminated, placing in the top eight of his field. Rochester West Junior High student Hopping took a first in the girls 15-and-under class.

Velette has competed on higher levels than the state tournament, however, and has his sights set for the nationals in Philadelphia June 10-13.

After completing his freshman year at Oakland University, which included a pair of highly successful collegiate table tennis affairs, Velette took a year off to go to Europe with two other American in November and December.

Mike, along with brothers Dan and Rick Semmler of Pittsburgh, competed in the Yugoslav, Scandinavian and Middlesex

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Opens during their 21-day excursion. Dan Semmler is the country's top ranked player.

ALTHOUGH HE encountered little success while overseas, Velette's game benefited from the trip. He said, "It was truly an educational experience. Playing against men on a higher level, it gave me the opportunity to see how the top players win and their attitudes towards table tennis."

"We did our best, but it didn't come close to the caliber of play exhibited by European and Asian teams. I only won one

ever, that it's important to take a break and get away from the game for awhile to keep the interest up.

Ping-Pong isn't the only activity that takes up Velette's time. In addition to working for the Variety Shop, which recently opened for business in downtown Rochester, Mike is a member of his family's paddle-making project.

Along with his mother Phyllis and brothers Brian and Steve, the Velettes put out nearly 750 paddles a year, sending them off to distributors and dealers across the country.

After Southfield partner George Paydelius cuts the wood, the Velettes attach the handles, sand them down by machine and hand for a comfortable fit and apply the rubber before completion.

The family puts out four different blades with three shapes and 24 various styles of rubber, offering a wide variety of paddles. Mike said that his father started the business as a part-time family project six years ago.

Paddle-making has grown into an activity that keeps the Velettes in table tennis while packing up a few extra dollars on the side. The prices of the paddles range from \$8.50 to \$22.50.

ASKED IF the possibility of the Variety

Shop carrying his product was in the near future, Velette said, "It sounds like a nice idea, but I'm not so sure it would come off."

After June's national tournament in Philadelphia, Velette intends to enroll at Western Michigan University in the fall. He hopes to land a spot on the five-man U.S. table tennis team, which will compete in the 1977 world games at England.

The U.S. is ranked 17th among 60 competing countries, one below the 16-team cut-off point that marks the top class.

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Hawk grad excels in swimming finals

Bruce Howell, a sophomore swimming standout at Eastern Michigan University, has answered the question, "What do you do for an encore?"

Howell, an outstanding swimmer during his high school days at Farmington Hills, placed 20th in the 200-yard breaststroke at the NCAA Swimming and Diving championships at Providence College in Rhode Island March 27. He was the highest finish by any swimmer representing a Mid-American Conference school in nearly a decade.

Last year, Howell, a 5'11, 158 pounder, distinguished himself by placing 30th out of 72 entries at the nationals in the breaststroke with a 2:11.8 clocking. His time this year was 2:07.37 in a field of 20.

"Bruce was only eight places away from scoring," said Eastern coach Mike Jones. "If he works hard over the summer and has a good season next year, I think he'll score at the national."

It's been quite a year for Howell, a biology major. At the MAC championships he successfully defended his 300 breaststroke crown with a variety and conference record time of 2:07.58. He also added the 100 breaststroke crown to his laurels with a 1:02 clocking.

Howell's accomplishments are even more remarkable when you consider that he didn't begin to get serious about com-

petitive swimming until his junior year at Farmington Hills.

"I wasn't a very good freestyler, so in the 11th grade I decided to swim the breaststroke," Howell said. "I guess it came naturally for me. It must be the way I'm built."

Howell can now look forward to next season—and to taking a break from the 12,000 to 14,000 yard-per-day workout he's been going through since September.

BRUCE HOWELL

EMU swimming standout

Lathrup icer picked

Southfield-Lathrup senior Kevin Kowalski had a good year for the Chargers' varsity hockey team. Kowalski, a center, scored 10 goals and provided 22 assists for 39 points to help Lathrup compile a 12-1 overall record. Lathrup finished fourth in the eight-team Suburban Hockey League.

For his efforts, Kowalski has been named to the first team of the AHSIL squad, which was picked by the eight league coaches recently.

Kowalski joined Lathrup's hockey team as a senior after a successful season with Fraser in a Junior B league. "He immediately asserted his leadership qualities and demonstrated lots of motivation and hustle," said Lathrup coach Dave Butler.

"One of the big reasons for Southfield-Lathrup's turn-around this past season was Kevin's performance and winning attitude."

Livonia Franklin dominated the first team. Coaches picked five Patriots and Kowalski for the six-man squad.

The AHSIL team includes:

First Team—goalkeeper Chuck Latour (Livonia Franklin), defenseman Bob McKay (Franklin) and Ken Franklin (Franklin), forwards Nelson Yanich (Franklin), Mike Barto (Franklin) and Kowalski (Lathrup).

Second Team—goalkeeper Mark Kirby (Wyandotte), defenseman John Teskey (Wyandotte) and Mitch Sanchez (Livonia Bentley), forwards Bruce Antich (Allen

Park), Dan Garbutt (Franklin) and Don Delabber (Bentley).

Honorable Mentions—goalkeeper Ron Stros (Allen Park), defenseman Curt Hoff (Lathrup) and Frank Lane (Livonia Stevenson), forwards Jeff Bond (Stevenson), Frank Finn (Stevenson), Tom Ryan (Allen Park), Dave Stewart (Stevenson), Bruce Behm (Wyandotte), Jim Peto (Wyandotte) and John McCracken (Southfield High).

KEVIN KOWALSKI

A goal-getter for Lathrup

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