

Making more elbow room at the table

B.C. table tennis president says more and more non-Asian players are playing the sport in Richmond

Alan Campbell / Richmond News

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Bumper to bumper and zig-zagging their way right to the front door, vehicles are wedged in, one presumes, in an order of sorts outside Bridgeport Sports Club's table tennis facility in Richmond.

It's 2 p.m. on a Monday, yet this 20-table complex off Bridgeport and No. 5 roads, is jam-packed with lovers of the sport of all ages and stripes, firing a small plastic ball back and forth at each other across a miniature net - most players grinning from ear to ear.

The scene comes as no surprise to the club's owner, Amelia Ho, who's also the president of the B.C. Table Tennis Association (BCTTA) and just happens to be the mom of Richmond's Olympic table tennis star, Andre Ho.

As head of the provincial body for the last 12 years, Ho has witnessed a marked shift in the sport's popularity across the province and more locally in Richmond, where the grass roots BCTTA calls a small office on Minoru Boulevard home.

"We estimate about 20,000 people are playing table tennis in the province right now and about 2,000 of them are from Richmond; maybe more if you include students at school," said Ho.

"There are more people playing because more people are getting active and table tennis is such an easy way to achieve that.

"The technical skill has also improved greatly in (the last 10 or 12 years) and that has a lot to do with the game's exposure in Richmond and across the province."

Role models Young people, said Ho, are watching role models such as her son, Andre, up close and are seeing the results of his hard work taking him to the Olympics and to this week's Commonwealth Games in Scotland.

"The older ones are being exposed to the sport through the BC Seniors Games and through livestreams and videos of the game being played online," added Ho.

"For that age group, it's perfect for their eyesight and co-ordination. And it can be good also for cross-training for the likes of hockey players in terms of their feet movement."

Recreation centres, Ho understands, have also started putting in more tables over the last few years.

And while the predominant culture playing the sport remains Asian - not least in Richmond due to its high Chinese demographic - Ho is seeing more non-Asian enthusiasts. "When we host our leagues here, there have been a lot more Caucasian people coming in to play in the last few years, more than ever before," she explained.

"I think more and more workplaces are having tables brought in and that's producing more players."

