

THE DAY LUBO CAME TO TOWN

By Sam Steiner

One hot summer's day in 2009, out of the blue came a call that one Lubomir Pistej, the #106 rated table tennis player in the world, was in town (Erie PA) with his family visiting relatives, and wanted to play. Lubo as he is known is a 25-year old player from Slovakia and is best known for knocking former world champion Werner Schlager out of the 2007 Worlds. His ITTF match sheet shows wins over Bobillier of France and Blaszczyk of Poland, and a 4-3 loss to Smirnov of Russia. He and partner Odorova reached the Mixed Doubles quarterfinals at the 2009 Yokohama Worlds before losing to the Chinese team of Zhang & Yao. Ratingscentral lists him at 2808 in the U.S. rating system although this was his first visit to the U.S.

So with these credentials we wondered why he wanted to play at a local club. Turns out that his relatives in Erie, businessman Joe Prischak and family, had never seen him play and were probably not aware of his lofty status. Lubo just wanted to hit around some for their benefit and we local club players of course were not about to say no.

With both the Erie and Meadville clubs closed for the summer we didn't even have a good venue, but luckily Miklos managed to make arrangements to open up the Meadville club for an evening. We made some hurried calls to Canton and Pittsburgh for reinforcements to no avail, so the best we could muster were our own local 1900 & under stalwarts.

Lubo turned out to be a friendly and gracious player and 'played down' to our level, and we had an excellent time and even some creditable rallies. Of course none of us could begin to show his abilities but he did throw in the occasional awesome bullet loop from either wing.

We all had a good time with this mini 'Ping Pong Diplomacy' get-together, and look forward to Lubo's next visit to Erie.



Front Row Tom Burik, Alric Beach.

Middle Row Tundi Balogh, Lubo's mom, Lubo's sister, Andrew Prischak, Joe Prischak, Lubo's Erie cousin.

Back Row Jim Burik, Lobomir Pistej, Sam Steiner, Lubo's dad.

Photographer Miklos Balogh