

# Vote Larry Hodges *for the* USATT Board

Dear USATT Membership,

Yesterday you received a mass emailing from Jim McQueen, my opponent in the USATT election. I don't know how he received access to the USATT's email database for this mailing, but since he had access, USATT agreed it was only fair that I have access as well. So here I am!

You should have already received the [USATT election notice](#), explaining how to vote. If you have read our campaign statements, his mass email, or visited my [Election Page](#), you know we have very different philosophies on what a board member should do. I believe we need to actively work to develop the sport in this country, and was very specific on things I will actively work to do.

Legislators need to make things happen, not just wait for things to come before the Board.



So why am I running? For 38 years I've watched as USATT floundered along with misguided and short-term thinking. Our membership of about 8000 is a round-off error compared to other sports and table tennis overseas - and we accept this as the norm. As a member of the USATT Board I will do whatever is necessary to change this thinking. Anyone who knows me or my record knows I'm a doer, and I will do whatever I can to get these things done. Developing the sport in this country is not going to happen overnight, but it needs to start now.

I think this is a good time to get active in USATT matters as we have a new CEO, Gordon Kaye, who seems to share many of my views on developing the sport, and who I think will avoid getting stuck in the rut of past practices that didn't work. I look forward to working with him and others on the USATT board, as well as the staff and many volunteers we will be asking to help us in taking the sport to the next level.

So who am I? I'm a member of the USATT Hall of Fame and a professional table tennis coach. I've spent nearly four decades in the sport coaching, organizing, directing, promoting, and writing about the sport. (See my bio below.) And I still play pretty well!

Below are five issues I will focus on (with links to my blogs about each), my plans on twelve other issues, and info on my background. I want to focus on Progressive Issues - see my [March 19, 2013 blog](#) on this. None of these things are set in stone - if someone shows me a *better* way to reach the same goals, I'll go with that.

## 1. Create a Nationwide System of Regional Team Leagues

(I blogged about this on [Monday, Nov. 24](#))

=>**The Goal:** Dramatically increase USATT membership.

We need to create a prototype regional team league that can spread nationwide, region by region. Right now anyone wanting to create such a league has to start from scratch. In

Europe, the league memberships are measured in the hundreds of thousands. We need to study how the German leagues (600,000 members, overwhelmingly league members) and others were created and grew, and how other sports in the U.S. developed in this way, such as tennis (700,000 members, also overwhelmingly league members) and bowling (over two million, also overwhelmingly league members). Then design and create a USA league system for table tennis.

2. **Create State Associations**

(I blogged about this on [Tuesday, Nov. 25](#))

=>**The Goal:** Dramatically increase membership by organizing on the local level.

The country is too big to have everything run by one centralized group. Model this on tennis or the regional systems all over Europe. We start by recruiting USA state directors.

3. **Create a USATT Coaching Academy to Recruit and Train Professional Coaches**

(I blogged about this on [Wednesday, Nov. 26](#))

=>**The Goal:** Large numbers of coaches, training centers, and junior & adult programs.

This leads to large numbers of juniors and adult players. The Academy would expand on the current ITTF Program. Since the coaches pay for their training (as they do in the ITTF program and in other sports), the system pays for itself.

*More Training Centers => More Junior Programs => More Players and Higher Level of Play*

4. **Turn U.S. Open and Nationals into Premier Events**

(I blogged about this on [Monday, Dec. 1](#))

=>**The Goal:** Attract players, spectators, TV, and sponsors to our sport.

We need to find permanent homes for the Open and Nationals, and develop and market them into big properties, like tennis and other sports did with their major events.

5. **Create a Professional Players Association and Professionalize the Sport**

(I blogged about this on [Tuesday, Dec. 2](#))

=>**The Goal:** For top USA players to make a living playing professionally.

We need to bring in an entrepreneurial leader to create an independent USA Professional TT Players Association. He would focus on creating a professional league or circuit, and bring in local & national sponsorship money for each event to turn table tennis into a money and TV sport. (He'd be paid primarily via commissions, though USATT would need to put in seed money.) This could grow out of the current NA Tour. A possible model is tennis, where there is a partnership between USTA and the ATP (the professional group).

### **Other USATT Issues**

(I blogged about these on [Wednesday, Dec. 3](#), but below is the text.)

I'd like to focus on the five issues I've blogged about above. However, there are a lot of other important issues. Some might be just as important as the "Big Five," but as I've also blogged about, I want to focus on progressive issues that develop the sport, and I didn't want to have 17 main issues. That would be a shopping list. However, here are twelve other issues I'd like to take care of. Here they are, in no particular order.

1. **Mailings to past members.** There are something like 60,000 former USATT members on our database, and I'd like to try to bring them back. That's what other successful organizations do. I still get regular mailings (both email and postal) from USTA and other organizations that I once belonged to. We should do the same. We don't have emails for most of them, so we need to do at least one big mailing to all of them. We

might want to wait until we've fixed the sport up a bit so we have more to offer, but eventually we need to do this. I'd like to have someone "famous" be the "face" of USATT. I want these past members to get a personal invitation from one of our past big stars to rejoin USATT. Sure, a mailing is expensive, but you can budget an overall profit from this - plus you get new members, which should be high priority. (I blogged about this on [Feb. 19.](#))

2. **Hidden serve rule.** The current rule is that the ball must be visible to the opponent throughout the serve. The problem is that umpires cannot usually tell if the serve is visible or not. The rules state that it is the responsibility of the player to serve so that the umpire is satisfied that he is serving legally, and if an umpire can't tell if the serve is visible or not, then he cannot be satisfied that the serve is legal, and should warn or fault. In reality, few umpires do that, and so many or most of our national titles go to players who abuse this rule and hide their serve. I'd like the rule changed so that it says that the ball must be visible to both umpires, or where the umpires would sit. I'm going to keep pushing for this rule, probably looking for a USATT tournament to test it, and then to the ITTF. (I blogged about this on [Nov. 11](#) and numerous other times.)
3. **Rules changes and the plastic ball.** I'm not interested in more rules and equipment changes, other than fixing the hidden serve rule. I'd be very hesitant on any others - I'm tired of rule changes. Aren't you? However, I am going to look into the problems with the new plastic ball - the ITTF jumped the gun on this. They shouldn't have made the change until the balls were high quality, standardized, and training balls were available.
4. **USATT Advisory Committees.** A few years ago most of the USATT committees had the word "Advisory" added to their names, which emphasized that they are only advisory rather than action committees. That was a mistake. We need committees that get things done, not just sit back and advise.
5. **Committee Chairs.** Too often committees are chaired by the first person who volunteers. We need to do searches and recruit the right candidate for each. I've seen times where a committee chair was decided like Jeopardy - whoever hit the buzzer first (i.e. raised their hand) got the position. Additionally, task force committees need to have deadlines set up for when they'll report back. Far too often these task forces are set up and never even meet, or if they do meet, nothing gets done and they are forgotten, and become just another inactive committee on the USATT committee page.
6. **NCAA recognition.** I want to work with NCTTA on this. [Here's some info on this.](#) I blogged about this on [November 18.](#)
7. **Fix rating system.** Too much to go into here. To start with we need a USATT Ratings Committee. We don't have one.
8. **Publish USA citizens ranking lists.** This was actually required by a past USATT board vote that's long since been forgotten. Too often U.S. players are buried in the rankings behind foreign players. We need both an open listing and a citizens listing.
9. **U.S. Open and U.S. Nationals info.** The dates and location of these events should be available *at least* one year in advance. The U.S. Open *Tennis* Championships the next two years will be on Aug. 31-Sept. 13, 2015, and Aug. 29-Sept. 12, 2016, at Flushing Meadows, NY. Where and when will the 2015 U.S. Open and Nationals *Table Tennis* Championships be held? We don't know yet. Many people need this info far enough in advance so they can schedule for it. Also, by getting the info out way in advance, players begin thinking about it, and are more likely to attend.

10. **Bring back print magazine if financially feasible.** About one-third of our membership doesn't play tournaments, and that's all they really get. U.S. Tennis still has a monthly print magazine, and it's one of their major membership recruiting tools. I think USATT jumped the gun in canceling it. I'd like to have both the online version and the print version - and by adding the online version to the previous print version, we can bring in more advertising than before. (I had two tenures as editor of USATT Magazine, totaling twelve years, and I increased advertising revenue by a factor of six.) USATT budgeted the advertising for the online version to be the same as the print version, which had no chance of happening, and advertising is dramatically down, unfortunately. (I blogged about this on [February 11](#), where I predicted the large advertising decrease.)
11. **Let members get on the USATT ballot by petition.** It used to be that USATT members could get on the ballot with 150 signatures. That was changed a few years ago - now the entire ballot is chosen by the USATT Nominating and Governance Committee (NGC). We need to allow others on the ballot with the 150 signatures (from adult USATT members), and schedule the election so they can get these signatures during the Thanksgiving weekend (where there are major team tournaments), as they used to schedule it.

There have been a pair of half-hearted attempts to fix this. At the June 2014 meeting at the U.S. Open the USATT Board voted unanimously to "recommend" that the NGC place "all eligible candidates on the ballot." (The NGC didn't act on this.) At the October board meeting Mike Babuin moved that "...all qualified candidates securing the 25 requisite number of signatures shall be placed on the election ballot." However, this standard is too low, and it didn't get a second. If I'm on the board, I'll move that candidates be placed on the ballot with 150 signatures, and that the election be timed so they can do this during the Thanksgiving weekend. Also, the USATT Club Representative is currently an appointed position. I'd like to see this position get voted on by clubs. There's also been talk of having a Coach Representative - I'm all for it!
12. **Change USATT's Mission Statement.** Here is our current bureaucratic shopping list mission statement, followed by the mission statement of the U.S. Tennis Association. I like theirs, and would like to quote the table tennis version of it regularly at USATT board meetings. It needs to be the driving force behind everything we do.
  - a. "The Mission of the USATT shall be to enable United States athletes to achieve sustained competitive excellence in Olympic/Paralympic, Pan American or Para Pan American Games, and other international competitions, and to promote and grow the sport of Table Tennis in the United States, while creating a lasting value for our members."
  - b. "To Promote and Develop the Growth of Tennis."

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**Here is a rundown of my background. I hope I can count on your vote!**

- Member of the [USATT Hall of Fame](#) (for my coaching, writing, editing, and promoting)
- Co-Founder and full-time coach at the [Maryland Table Tennis Center](#)
- USATT Certified National Coach (highest level) and ITTF Certified Level 2 Coach
- Former Coach of USA National Junior Team at tournaments in USA, Taiwan, Canada & Mexico
- Editor of USATT Magazine for 12 years. (Increased advertising by a factor of six.)

- [Six books](#), over [1300 published articles](#), and nearly 1000 blog entries on table tennis (Mon-Fri since Jan. 2011)
- Director of over 120 USATT tournaments and a USATT Certified Umpire
- Former Chair of the USATT Coaching and Club Committees
- Co-Founder (with Robert Mayer) of the [USATT League Rating System](#) (over 480,000 processed matches in 416 different leagues since its beginning in 2003, now averaging over 6700 processed matches every month)
- 2002 USATT Developmental Coach of the Year
- 2007 USATT President's Award for Service to Table Tennis
- 2013 USATT Doc Councilman Science Coaching Award
- Creator, head coach, and daily blogger at [www.TableTennisCoaching.com](http://www.TableTennisCoaching.com)
- Here's a recent [PBS video](#) (4 min) where I'm featured along with junior stars Crystal Wang and Derek Nie from my club (MDTTC)
- Bachelors in math, with minors in chemistry and computer science, and a Masters in Journalism
- 54 years old
- There's a lot more about me on my [other table tennis page!](#)

If you have any questions, feel free to [email me](#), or stop by to chat at the upcoming USA Nationals. And make sure to vote!

-Larry Hodges