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UA SPORTS

Club, event smash hits with just right spin

By Patrick Finley

ARIZONA DAILY STAR

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Mikhail Chernobelskiy has a saying about the sport he loves.

"If you watch a game, it's fun," he said. "If you play the game, it's pingpong. And if you work at it, it's table tennis."

Fans wanting to see the sport can do so Saturday morning, when the Southern Arizona Table Tennis Association holds a tournament in Armory Park.

Here's a look at the tournament:

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Armory Park Senior Center.

What is the SATT? The Southern Arizona Table Tennis Association was formed in March 2006 as a place for interested members to compete against each other for free.

"The major idea was to provide an environment for players, and a recreational environment at the same time," Chernobelskiy said. "If you think you're a good player, you don't know how good until you play against others."

The group now features more than 100 members and holds practices four days a week at

What's the tournament? Thirty-two players will compete in Saturday's SATT tournament, which is sanctioned by USA Table Tennis. The tournament has four skill-level divisions.

SATT events, held about six times per year, are run like a tennis tour. Winners receive two points, and losers one point. At the end of the year, the points leaders will compete for a championship.

Who's playing? About 80 percent of the players are from the Tucson area, Chernobelskiy said. Other Tucson events have featured players from around the country and Mexico.

The oldest player competing Saturday is 77, the youngest 17.

"It's not about being less strong," said Sreeram Parameswaran, 40, who will participate Saturday. "It's about having the right technique and approaching it the right way."

Chernobelskiy said it makes the sport unique.

"That's why it's a good event," he said. "At the same time, men and women, young and old people can play. They can watch others play."

Why do it? Chernobelskiy became the president of SATT to help teach table tennis to children, adults and seniors. Players are grouped by skill level.

He started as an elementary school student in Moscow when his mother took him to an outdoor park and taught him how to hit.

"She was my first and last coach," said Chernobelskiy, 54. He won a trophy in Phoenix last week, and brought it back to show his mom at a Tucson nursing home.

"She's very proud of me," he said.

For more info: For future tournaments — one Aug. 22 will focus on lower-rated players — or find a practice schedule to join the group, visit sattaonline.org.



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IF YOU GO

- What: Southern Arizona Table Tennis tour stop
When: Saturday at 9:30 a.m.
Where: Armory Park Senior Center, 220 S. Fifth Ave.
Admission: Free

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