

My interview with Jan-Ove Waldner begins with his thoughts on some opponents through the years and some general, related points.

#### **Match statistics against:**

**Kong Linghui:** I am definitely up. I lost the first match we played, but after that I won a lot in a row before I lost the final in the World Team Championships in 2000.

**Liu Guoliang:** 4-5, I think. I lost the five first matches, but won the last four.

Wang Liqin: It is quite even as I played him when he was relatively young. However, I lost the two last encounters in 2004; once before the Olympics and then again during the Olympics.

**Ma Lin:** I am clearly trailing against Ma Lin. I am not certain how many times we have played, but he has for sure the most wins. But I won in the 2004 Olympics.

**Cai Zhenhua:** I didn't play him many times, but we won half of the encounters each. 2-2.

**The following match statistics are not part of the interview, but added by me. They are taken from 'When the feeling decides', the Waldner career bio written by Jens Fjellke. The statistics below cover Waldner's career up to 1997. Unfortunately I do not have updated statistics for the rest of this career.**

#### **Waldner's wins are listed first:**

Chen Longcan 7-10

Chen Zhibin 3-2

Guo Yuehua 0-2

Jiang Jialiang 4-8

Ma Wenge 19-5

Teng Yi 23-7

Wang Tao 5-1

Li Gunsang 9-3

Kim Taek Soo 12-11

Yoo Namkyu 9-2

Kim Song Hui 11-4

J-P Gatién 22-11

Andrzej Grubba 41-20

Tibor Klampar 8-1

Zoran Primorac 20-13

Jorg Roskopf 22-11

J-M Saive 26-21

#### **Which player did you think of as a potential problem before playing him?**

Liu Guoliang had a very good serve and was very good allround. For a time I feared him the most, but once I found out how to play Liu, Ma Lin became the toughest opponent.

#### **A few classic penholders have played in Sweden over the years, among others An Shu, Huang Dawei, Chen Jian and Wang Jianfeng. Do you feel anything out of the ordinary when playing them and what do you think of them as players?**

I actually don't have any particular thoughts on any of them. Out of the ones you mentioned, Wang Jianfeng was quite clearly the best.

#### **If you compare the best Europeans with the best Chinese, what do you think is the greatest difference when it comes to:**

**Technique:** The Europeans have better basic stroke technique and are more imaginative, i.e. they have more options for any given ball, but it is difficult to generalise. The Chinese are more robot-like and limit their options for each ball, but they have much better rallying techniques, something they really excel at.

**Tactics:** The Chinese are much better prepared and are better at applying tactics during matches. They have very competent coaches and trainers. Looking at the Europeans, only the Swedes can compare to the Chinese in this respect.

**Training:** The Chinese practise so much more than Europeans do from a much younger age. That is the biggest difference. At the very top, all elite players practise extremely hard, but the Chinese begin tough quantity training from an earlier age.

**Was there a lower ranked player whom you feared a bit more despite his lower overall ability?**

No, nobody in particular.

**I'll rephrase that. Was there was a specific style of play which posed particular problems?**

I don't want to give away too much, but really good backhand players, like Andrey Mazunov, could sometimes cause me more trouble than would be expected considering their level of play.

**In 2004 you lost the Olympic semifinal to Ryu Seung Min due to lower quality service returns. Before that match you had beaten players with much better serves than him, Ma Lin and Liu Guoliang, for example. What was so difficult with Ryu's serves?**

First I'd like to point out that Ma Lin's serve was not especially good at first. He used a stabbing serve with the only variations being backspin and no spin, that is all. But to answer your question, I didn't play Ryu very often and was not familiar enough with serves, so I struggled. Apart from that, we must not forget the supreme form he was in at the time. He hit the ball extremely hard and was moving superfast.

**We mentioned Ma Lin; which were his strengths and weaknesses according to you?**

His forehand was very, very good, he had phenomenal returns and at the time he was very fast. He is not as fast today, but he is still pretty quick. His main weaknesses are his relative sensitivity to spin and that he is poor against straight attacks.

**You are recognised as being very good against defenders. What would happen if you played Joo Se Hyuk today?**

If the match was played best of five, I would win. If it was best of seven, Joo would win.

**Who is the best defender in the world at the moment?**

Wang Xi, my team mate in Fulda. Just check out his stats for this season in the German League. Personally, I have only 50/50 stats on him in practise. Joo Se Hyuk is the second best defender to Wang Xi.

**Which of your opponents have underachieved relative to capacity and talent?**

Primmen (Zoran Primorac) comes to mind immediately if you think about those who have not won anything. He really should have won something as good as he was for a while during his career. Andrzej Grubba was also incredibly good, but didn't win a major title.

If you are thinking of talented underachievers, I think Magnus Molin has squandered a lot of his talent. He could have become very, very good.

**Which player is well worth watching according to you?**

It was Klampar in the past. He was simply incredible to watch with that forehand and his extraordinary ball contact. Of the current players, I think Kalinikos Kreanga is very entertaining to watch.

**I once asked you to list the all-time best players in the world. You gave me this list:**

1. Jan-Ove Waldner
2. Kong Linghui
3. Guo Yuehua
4. Wang Liqin
5. Liu Guoliang

Hahaha... Did I really put myself at the top? Doesn't look good, does it? People will think I am so arrogant.

**Yes, you actually did put yourself at the top.**

Yes, But it is true though, isn't it? Haha.

**Who would you add to the list in positions 6-10?**

Oh, this will be hard. I would probably add the following:

6. Jiang Jialiang
7. Jorgen Persson
8. Wang Hao

After that it becomes too hard to pick and choose.

**No Europeans? Jean-Michel Saive? Tibor Klampar? Jean-Phillipe Gatien?**

No, none of them. Saive and Klampar did not even win any major titles.

**How about some of the older ones?**

No. It doesn't feel right to add Barna, Ogimura or Bergmann. They played too long ago and it was a completely different game back then. You will have to settle for eight players on my list.

**All players on your list are not entirely contemporary. None in the top five have won a title after 2005. Why are none of the younger ones on your list?**

The younger ones have not achieved enough yet. It is as simple as that.

**I will now ask you to design the ultimate player. I have listed a number of strokes and qualities below. Pick the player you think is outstanding for each of these and we will see what we end up with.**

**Forehand loop, opening:** Ma Lin

**Forehand loop, in open play:** Wang Liqin

**Forehand flick:** Damien Eloi, That was a bit unexpected, wasn't it?

**Backhand loop:** Roskopf, particularly against backspin. Otherwise Kreanga.

**Backhand flick:** Wang Hao, over the table. It was unreal.

**Defensive play:** Vladimir Samsonov

**Footwork:** Ryu Seung Min

**Ball sense:** Mikael Appelgren

**Reading the game:** Jan-Ove Waldner

**Tactics:** Jan-Ove Waldner

**Serve:** Liu Guoliang

**Returns:** Jorgen Persson

**Physique:** Christophe Legout

**Attitude:** Wang Liqin