

Sniper shot a winner in table hockey game



Le tir d'élite, un tir gagnant au hockey sur table

By Kristina Davis

With a wicked right hand sniper shot, Captain Éric Desjardins is more than just a table hockey aficionado.

Ranked 16th in North America, he is also among the top 10 best players in Canada. Part of the Ligue amicale de hockey sur table de la région de l'Outaouais (LAHTO), Capt Desjardins practices about once a week; more when a major tournament is looming.

A member of the Canadian Forces Health Services Group, he is the desk officer for medical personnel deployed on Operation ATHENA. In all, there are about 69 health services personnel in Afghanistan, ranging from doctors to dentists and even lab technicians.



PHOTOS: CHERYL MACLEOD

Capt Éric Desjardins pose avec un jeu de hockey sur table Stiga. La table elle-même, y compris les figurines, coûte environ 130 \$.

Le Capt Éric Desjardins photographié près d'un jeu de hockey sur table de marque Stiga. La table elle-même, y compris les figurines, coûte environ 130 \$.

par Kristina Davis

Fort de son tir ravageur de la main droite, le Capitaine Éric Desjardins est plus qu'un simple amateur de hockey sur table.

Occupant le 16^e rang en Amérique du Nord, il figure parmi les dix meilleurs joueurs au Canada. Membre de la Ligue amicale de hockey sur table de la région de l'Outaouais (LAHTO), il s'exerce environ une fois par semaine, et un peu plus à l'approche d'un tournoi important.

Il fait partie du Groupe des Services de santé des Forces canadiennes en tant qu'officier responsable du personnel médical déployé dans le cadre de l'opération ATHENA. En tout, quelque 69 membres du personnel médical se trouvent en Afghanistan, qu'il s'agisse de médecins, de dentistes ou de techniciens de laboratoire.

Au cours des années 1980, comme bon nombre de jeunes garçons canadiens, le Capt Desjardins jouait au hockey sur table avec ses amis. Le père d'Éric, qui considérait l'activité comme un simple passe-temps de jeunesse, s'est départi du jeu lorsque son fils a quitté la maison après ses études universitaires.

In the 1980s, like many Canadian boys, Capt Desjardins played table hockey with his friends. But his father saw it as a childhood pastime and actually threw out his game once his son left home and finished university.

For 15 years he did not play, instead focussing on his career and family, but in January 2003, after reading about the Gatineau league on the Internet, he decided to take it up again.

LAHTO is a large association, currently numbering 25 players. Next year they will become the largest club in North America, with 30 players registered. And their talent is felt at many high profile tournaments.

In early April, Capt Desjardins travelled to Boston to participate in the F1 Boston Challenge 2005 Stiga Table Hockey Championships. There, some of the best players in the world, including Pontus Eriksson of Sweden, battled for top honours. Capt Desjardins placed 10th out of 59, a performance which far exceeded his expectations given the high calibre of play and the participation of the Europeans. "Last year I was 19th," he says. "I expected to do about the same."

The game is based on five minutes of non-stop play. Players can only hold the puck for five seconds and goals are only allowed if they remain in the net. So-called "in and out" goals, those that bounce out, are rejected. There are no referees; players drop the puck themselves and can only score three seconds thereafter. Sportsmanlike behaviour, says Capt Desjardins, is always a given.

Capt Desjardins says players who are just starting out can have up to 15 goals scored against them in the five minutes allotted. But more advanced players typically average between four and five goals, given a more sophisticated and developed defence strategy. He says his best shot is that right sniper; something he developed and honed last winter. He can also, he explains with childlike enthusiasm; hit the net's top corner with his right-winger.



STIGA uses sophisticated 3-D players, which allows for more realistic play. Players are interchangeable and can even be fashioned after your favourite NHL star.

La compagnie Stiga utilise des joueurs tridimensionnels d'avant-garde, ce qui confère une allure encore plus réelle au jeu. Les joueurs sont interchangeables et peuvent même être créés d'après votre étoile préférée de la LNH.

In Canada, the number of table hockey leagues continues to grow. And participation in tournaments like Boston introduces players to new shots and tricks they can then share within their home league.

For Capt Desjardins, there is an added amusement to playing hockey—even if he is not actually lacing up skates—the name he shares with Philadelphia Flyer Eric Desjardins.

"Most people do know my name," he says with a laugh.

For more on LAHTO, visit www.lahto.com or the Canadian Table Hockey Association at www.ctha.ca.

celui de Boston permet aux joueurs d'apprendre de nouveaux lancers et de nouvelles astuces qu'ils peuvent ensuite partager avec les autres membres de leur ligue.

Il est encore plus amusant pour le Capt Desjardins de jouer au hockey – même s'il ne chausse pas réellement de patins – du fait qu'il porte le même nom qu'un des membres des Flyers de Philadelphie.

« La plupart des gens connaissent mon nom », lance-t-il en riant.

Pour en savoir plus, visitez le site de la LAHTO (www.lahto.com) ou celui de l'Association canadienne de hockey sur table (www.ctha.ca).

