

The Table for Two

Christine suddenly stopped.

- Look there is a restaurant called 'Worldburgers'!' She ran to the other side of the street and the group followed her.

She stepped inside the restaurant and asked the boy behind the counter:

-'Why are you called 'Worldburgers'? We also want to become citizens and even worldcitizens, you know. In Dutch we call it worldburgers like hamburgers. It sounds like a stupid joke.'

The young man looked at her kindly.

-'No no, we make all kinds of worldburgers and they come from everywhere and are healthy too.'

Meanwhile Monique, had rejoined the group. She wiped the mayo from her mouth and said cynically:

'Finally you guys see that there are healthy burgers too. This place proofs that I am right. We only use natural products from the region. Beans and lettuce, for example. If our vegetables could talk, they would be very satisfied.'

Irina intervened between the two of them.

-'You are right, that there is work to be done. I am a sustainable girl in a sustainable world and that is why I like to listen to the song '*Mother Earth*' by Neil Young:

'Oh, Mother Earth,

With your fields of green

Once more laid down

By the hungry hand

How long can you

Give and not receive

And feed this world

Ruled by greed'

The proprietress took over again.

- 'But we have more healthy things on offer. For example you can reserve a 'Table for Two'.'

- 'What the hell is that?' asked Monique in surprise.

- 'That's our special offer, but you'll find out later. Our motto is

'Sport not only gives more life in your years, but also more years in your life'.

That's why we also participate in the Football Makes History Project, which emphasizes on inclusion, diversity and history in order to develop a more integrated vision of sport. It is a global success.

We saw recently in soccer how players of the Dutch national team with shirts drew attention to poor working conditions in Qatar and how in

American football Colin Kaepernick articulated the Black Lives Matters movement.

For several years now, our 'World Citizens' branch in Heerlen has been participating in a wonderful project on skate and scoot, BMX, Freerunning and Urban Team Sports like basketball, soccer, field hockey and judo about respect.

From now on, we want, like in Germany, to put table tennis tables or 'Tables for Two' in schools, libraries, museums and other public places, indoor and outdoor.'

- 'I got it,' exclaimed Monique proudly with a big smile on her face.

- 'During a history lesson my teacher told a crazy story. During World War II many Germans had lost an arm, a leg or more, but they could still play table tennis. It was therefore not surprising that they became table tennis players after the war and that lasted a long time. These were young men. Is it illogical, that Germany was second at the World Championships in China in October 2022?'

The proprietress took over again.

- 'That's really a wierd and great story, but let's now all take a seat at the big round table. Firstly write your name on a card. The waitress will be right there!'

After a while the back door opened and a woman came in.

- 'Hi, I'm Bettine Vriesekoop, and like a table tennisplayer I will serve you. Afterwards we'll do the 'Table Tennis Talk'.'

- 'Another abcadabra', Monique sighed.

Bettine kindly smiled at her and said:

- 'In my whole life I have been involved in table tennis and became a world burger.'

Monique stuck her finger in the air.

- 'Yes you are famous as the 'Bettineburger'. Everybody wants to play like you. It's a pity that table tennis is sometimes called ping pong and is compared with a simple camping game.'

Bettine looked at Monique penetratingly.

- 'Ok, but table tennis is above all a powerful tool for developing life skills and citizenship development. Actually, table tennis consists of life lessons for sustainability.'

- 'Nice going,' Christine interjected.

Bettine, however, did not let herself get off the hook.

- 'That way you can deal with anxiety and stress and become stable and resilient, as the famous coach Anne Vlieg once said. That's why I teach a course about the 'TaTeTherapy' or table tennis therapy. People over 55 stay active, assertive and creative and reduce dementia. That's a sustainable way of getting old. In Germany, it is even reimbursed as therapy.

According to my friend Anne Vlieg, table tennis is total anticipation, because you are constantly reacting to what comes at you and always trying to take the initiative. What you need then is a strategy, a plan. You're never too young to start with this!'

- 'Just like with the Big Mac,' Monique reacted positively.

- 'Ok Monique, but you also have to deal with setbacks and unpredictable situations. How can you get to know your opponent better? Ove Waldner was a

grand master at reading the game of the opponent and so he became the world champion! The Chinese players never understood how he did it.'

There was silence for a while, as everyone had to let it all sink in.

They ordered a drink and Bettine also sat down at the table.

- 'It's true, CHillak said, that as a vital citizen you take initiative and are active and creative. You learn from your mistakes and think sustainably in solutions.

Just look at the wonderful clip "Pong" by Eisenfunk on YouTube, in which two young dancers depict table tennis with dance and music. It's fashionable, sporty, curvy and alternative with a gothic outfit and long black hair. Yes, table tennis can be sexy too!'

Irina had shining eyes and said.

- 'Yes, but table tennis is also art and shows its beauty and creativity in an effective top spin, a sharp drop, a good return or a nice curve. I really enjoy the beauty of it.

As a player, you can develop a 'Multiple Choice Identity' by making the right choices, thinking in solutions and learning from mistakes. As a vital citizen or player, you are alert, agile and resilient like a dancer.'

- 'That's great, because I'm a dancer you know'. Monique had shining eyes.

I heard, that the table tennis player Britt Erland used dance beforehand to increase concentration and reduce stress'.

Christine explained.

- 'So table tennis is actually a thinking sport, because all parts of the brain are triggered. Just like music, by the way! You have to learn to reflect, pre-reflect and ask yourself questions like:

What is the effect in that serve? Why didn't I get the opponent's topspin under control? How can I better deal with setbacks?

Yes it's about learning in complex situations and it's like network-thinking.

Table tennis is complex as well as a simple. Can you still follow me?'

A part of the group nodded yes.

Christine raised her finger.

- 'Yes I understood that table tennis is like philosophy. The brilliant German philosopher Kant became famous for his slogan: 'Dare to think'. He also became very famous in the Netherlands about the Kantbal, when the ball touched the side of the table. It just happened, but nobody was to blame. Some called it a shitball.'

Nobody reacted, except Sandis, because he was a supporter of Putin.

- 'What a bullshit, but I will tell you about a brilliant idea of the great leader Putin. On behalf of the Communist Party, he made a special rule for the service. You must first hold the ball firmly in your hand. The opponent cannot see it and then you quickly throw it up for the service. A violation of this rule is punishable for one year in prison.'

- 'Sorry Sandis, but this Putin-service is not allowed' Bettine reacted indignant.

It makes me think of playing in the dark in China to hear where the ball was. The Chinese were good at it, but it disturbed me. At night I couldn't sleep at all.'

Christine's eyes began to shine.

- 'After all, table tennis is hard fun. It's a bad thing that it's not played by all young people, though. Young people with a disability or a different sexual orientation (the LGBT+ community) or from other cultures and disadvantaged areas don't feel attracted to this sport!

Iqbal looked upset.

- 'I almost dare not say it, but as a young Syrian woman, I also don't feel at home among all those white and male table tennis players. But nevertheless I continue to believe in this beautiful phrase by Frank Boeijen: 'Don't think white, don't think apart, but in the color of your heart'.

- 'Well said, Iqbal. Thanks,' Bettine reacted.

Everybody felt that the moment suprême had finally arrived. Bettine slowly stood up, walked to the door and opened it.

In a small hall a beautiful blue table tennis table stood in the middle.

-I like to invite you at the Table for Two. Unfortunately, there is not much time left, but you will get a first impression.'

Hakan and Monique immediately grabbed a bat, got behind the table and hit their stroke with topspin, backspin, a block and a smash.

They moved a bit mechanically, because '*We are the robots*' from Kraftwerk sounded through the speakers.

The onlookers applauded after every rally. Everyone got his or her turn. It was astonishing that the identity of a player could clearly be seen in the style of playing. Monique often returned the ball without risk with backspin, while Hakan always took the initiative with top spin. When the return of Monique was a little too high, Hakan finished the rally with a hard smash.

Monique then picked up the ball a bit dejectedly. She faced a behind, although she was already used to that in her daily life.

She bounced the ball on the ground a few times to come up with a ruse.

Then she hit the ball with great effect. In this way she was preventing Hakan from spinning. Monique then gave a top spin herself that took Hakan completely by surprise. He could only block and then Monique placed the ball on the corner of the table, which was unreachable for Hakan.

-'Shit,' muttered Hakan.

-'Yes,' cried Monique loudly.

After everyone had played one game, they thanked Bettine for the great coaching.

Monique clapped her hands and gave Bettine a high five.

-'We understand better now why we like table tennis so much. We can really change the world in a sustainable way as table tennis players, because it's a way of life. So let's place tennis tables at all places like terraces, libraries, schools and museums. Such a small place or hall is sufficient for 3 or 4 tables without high heating costs and low material costs. Sustainability is in the air for you and me.'

The group walked out and headed for the next spot of the walkshop, the harbor. They were very excited, because they didn't know what to expect. But they were certain that they could use, what they've learned from the table tennis talk.