

Boris Johnson and the Whiff-Waff Gaffe

The Facts as revealed by the Curator of the International Table Tennis Federation (ITTF) Museum in Switzerland



Much has been written of London Mayor Boris Johnson's claims about Whiff-Waff, but all of these comments, including the inevitable rebuttals and follow-up debate, have one thing in common: they forgot to check the FACTS!

The ITTF Museum in Lausanne has all the facts, and also originals of the games. The Museum is especially strong in the earliest years of the game, its birth and evolution: www.ittf.com/museum

Curator Chuck Hoey summarizes the facts, along with illustrations of the actual evidence:

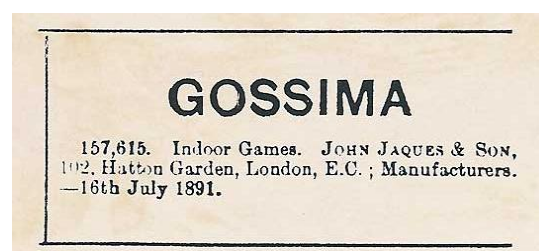
Whiff-Waff, made by Slazenger & Sons, was registered as "a **new game**" on 31 December 1900, Trademark number 235,131, as shown above. No, Mayor Johnson, it was not nearly the first.

Ping-Pong was trademarked (No.233,177) on 20 Sept. 1900 by Hamley Brothers, who became "jointly concerned" with Jaques, as the game was renamed first to 'Gossima or Ping-Pong', then 'Ping-Pong or Gossima', and then just 'Ping-Pong'.



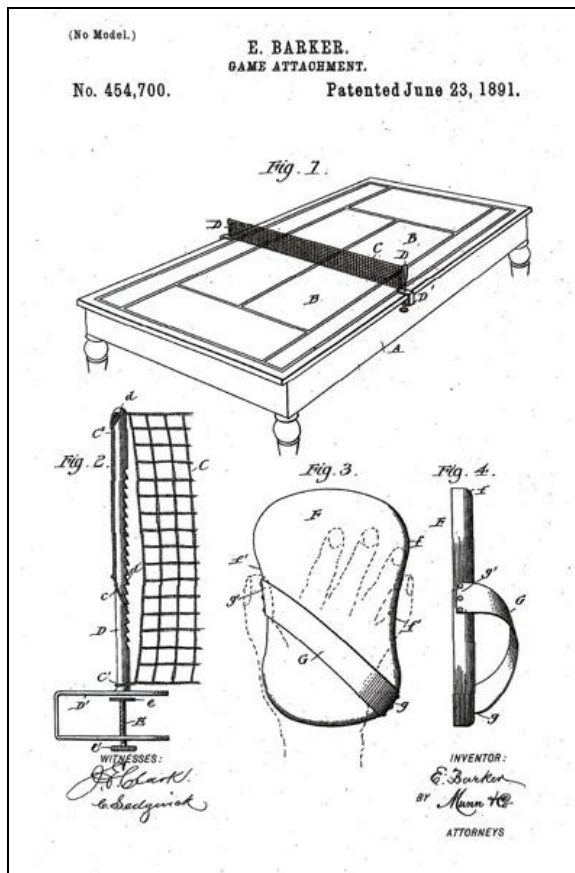
The name Ping Pong was coined by the sound of the celluloid ball bouncing off the sheepskin or parchment drum-style rackets.

Jaques claim to be the first is based on their earlier attempt, named Gossima, registered on 16 July 1891, Number 157,615:



This game featured the familiar drum rackets borrowed from the shuttlecock game, a net 30cm high, and a 50mm cork ball wrapped in cotton webbing. Hardly a formula for success, with such a high net, but Jaques continued advertising the game during the 1890s.

On 12 August 1890, nearly a year before Gossima, Emma Barker (London) patented a table net fixture and rackets with straps for the hands, describing the rules of the game as identical to lawn tennis. In her American patent, No. 454,700, filed 21 Jan. 1891, Emma included a sketch of a table laid out like a lawn tennis court, along with strapped bats.



An 1891 advertisement in the USA by Spalding proves the game was put into production, under the name Indoor Tennis, with the strapped rackets.

Indoor Tennis---Something Entirely New.

A capital Parlor Game, combining the elements of the popular outdoor game of Lawn Tennis.

The Courts are painted on a green or black rubber cloth, which can be spread on a dining table, held in place by handsome Nickel Posts, the Net being stretched across the table. The Ball used is the same as in the ordinary game of Lawn Tennis, differing only in size, it being a trifle smaller. The Racket differs from that used in Lawn Tennis, in that it has no handle, but is made to fit the palm of the hand, firmly held in place by a strap over the back of the hand.

This game, while simple, possesses many of the salient points of the field game of Lawn Tennis, and is decidedly the most fascinating and spirited parlor game yet introduced. Send for circulars with full description.

A. G. SPALDING & BROS.,

CHICAGO: 108 Madison Street. NEW YORK: 241-243 Broadway. PHILADELPHIA: 1032 Chestnut Street.

But the crown jewel of Table Tennis history is the very first game, made by David Foster of England in 1890. Only one example is known to have survived, now featured in the ITTF Museum. Strung rackets were used, with side nets designed to catch the cloth-covered rubber balls. Following is

an abstract for English Patent No.11,037, filed 15 July 1890, a full year before Jaques' Gossima:



We cannot expect the Mayor to be an expert on this subject, but the evidence is convincing – Whiff-Waff was not the first. Only a small point, as in lively style he really captured the essence of British ingenuity in adapting lawn tennis to the dining table, and for having invented many other sports.

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