

Calendar

Two-Color Rubber Law

San Diego Table Tennis Speeds Up

By now, most people know that Ping-Pong resembles table tennis only in the way that, say, commuting to work resembles racing at Le Mans.

"Ping-Pong is the good, clippy little game you play down in Uncle Joe's basement," says 46-year-old Pam Ramsey, who won her first table-tennis trophy at age 11. "Table tennis is an Olympic sport, where players have unbelievably long rallies and hit the ball at 100 miles an hour. The serves are high-toss serves. It's how the Chinese play. And that's how our club players play" — as members of the San Diego Table Tennis Association.

Size is another difference between the two — recreational game and serious sport. While basements may be

LOCAL EVENTS

able to accommodate Ping-Pong, the legal dimensions for a table-tennis tournament court are 20 feet by 40 feet. "You do need a lot of space," says Ramsey, who became the number-two junior in the country at age 15, "because people are going back and they're lobbing."

In the 1970s, table-tennis rackets got more sophisticated than your average Ping-Pong paddle. Materials like rubber and sponge were added, and players began to spin the ball and increase its speed. At that time, too, table tennis attracted unprecedented media attention, thanks to President Nixon's trip to China and Ping-Pong diplomacy. In 1979, the public was so primed for images of Ping-Pong and its high-class equivalents that Ramsey was asked to use her skills in a TV commercial. She went to a New York studio and played table tennis using a ball that had been painted with Maybelline nail polish, and after eight hours it wasn't chipped. She really played eight hours straight? "Actually we played for three days, to get all the taping in."

But then a problem developed for table-tennis-as-spectator-sport. The game had gotten so fast, it became difficult to watch, especially by TV viewers. Media interest declined. Table-tennis players around the world worried and wondered what to do.

"And that's why we're going to the big ball," says Ramsey.

To speak to table-tennis aficionados this month is to remember the relativity of terms like "big" and "small." Starting October 1, the dimensions of the ball increased from 38

to 40 millimeters. The new size, voted into the rulebook by the International Table Tennis Federation, makes the so-called big ball just a bit heavier than the erstwhile small ball.

The change was not welcomed by everybody. According to Ramsey, dissenters included the top players in the United States. "When the vote came across, we were one of three countries against it," she says. "But slower players, like seniors, and those with defensive games, see it as an advantage, because the game is slower overall."

Describing herself as "more of an aggressive player," Ramsey, who won women's and mixed-doubles titles after her junior days, feels "a big difference" when she strokes the big ball. "If you were not familiar with table tennis and you saw one of the new balls lying on the floor, you probably wouldn't notice the difference." A millimeter is, after all, just .0394 inch. "But if you were a regular player, you could tell. I can physically feel the difference when I hold one in the palm of my hand."

Even with the big ball, things happen faster than an unpracticed eye may be able to follow.

A loop, for instance, is an extreme topspin shot, which, when executed properly, can curve in midair before hitting the table, whereupon it may "skip," changing direction sharply and unpredictably.

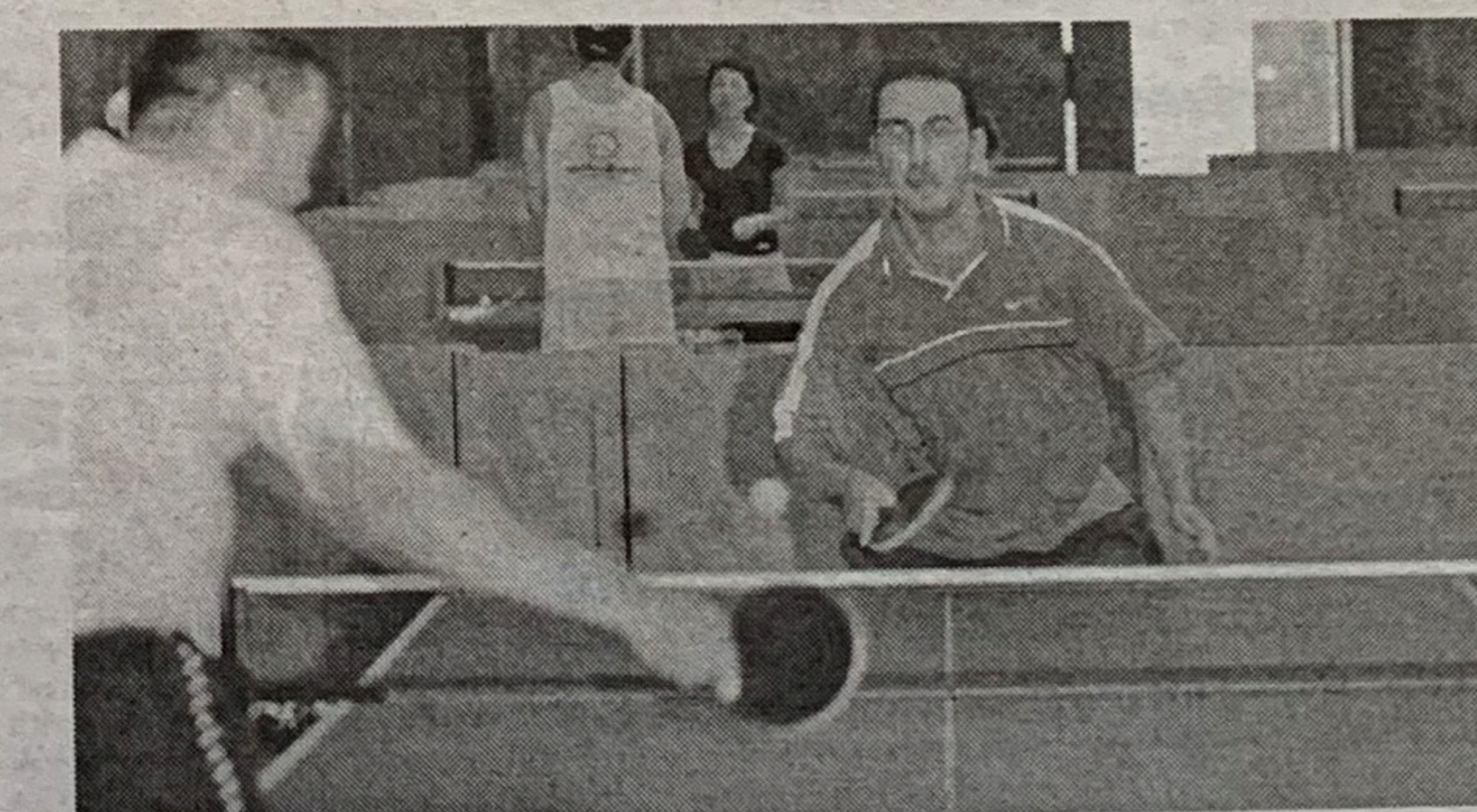
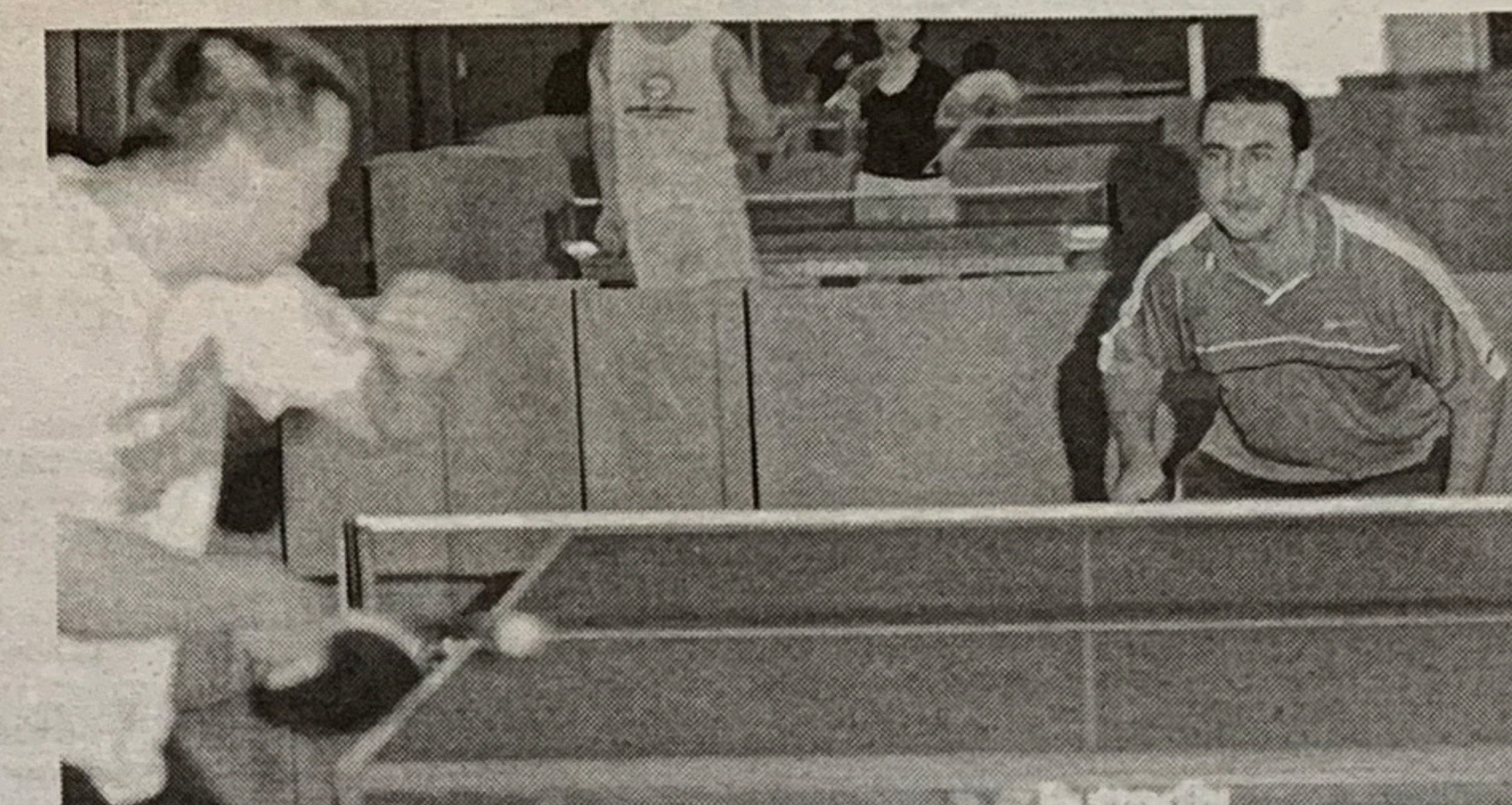
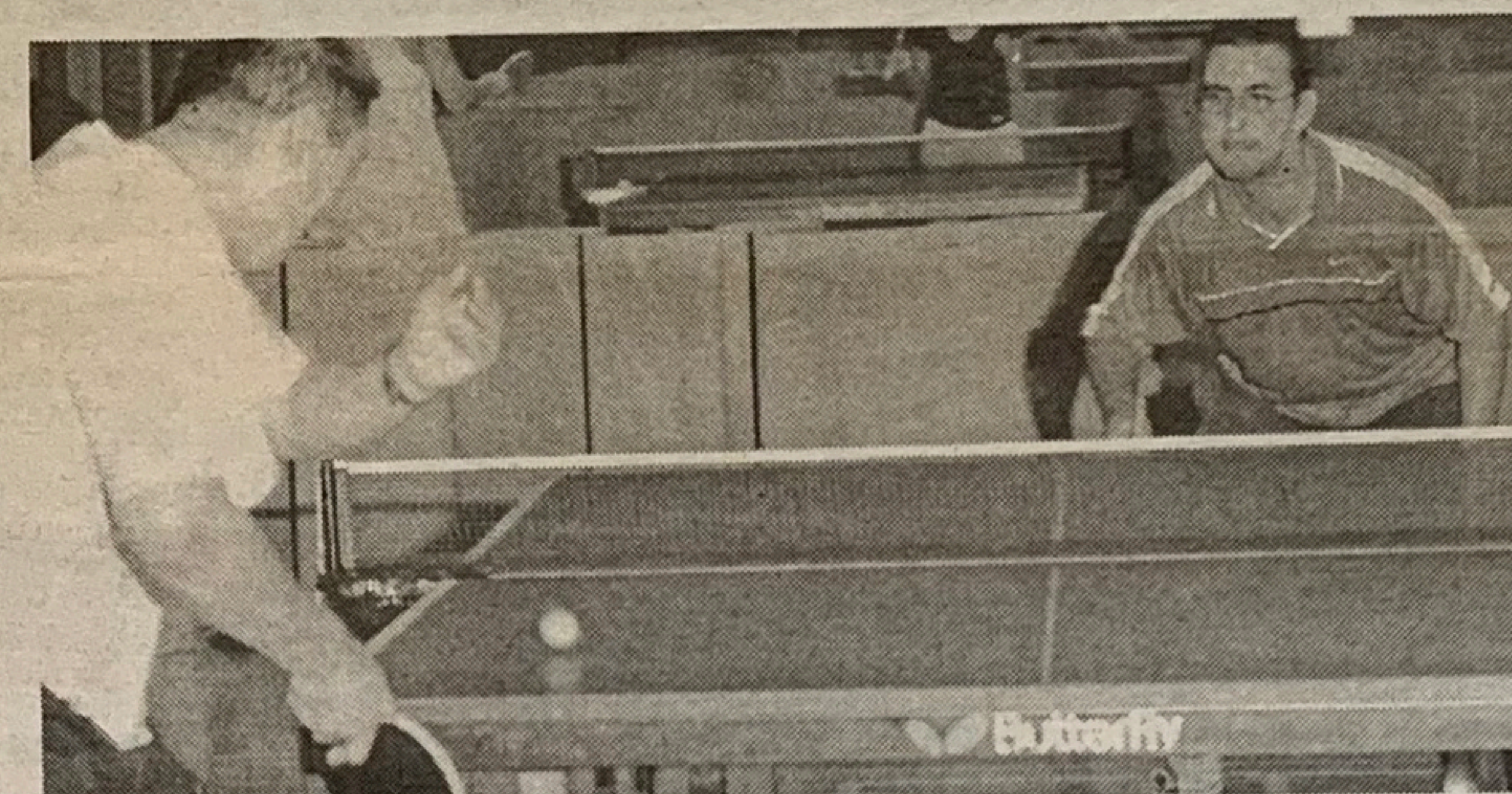
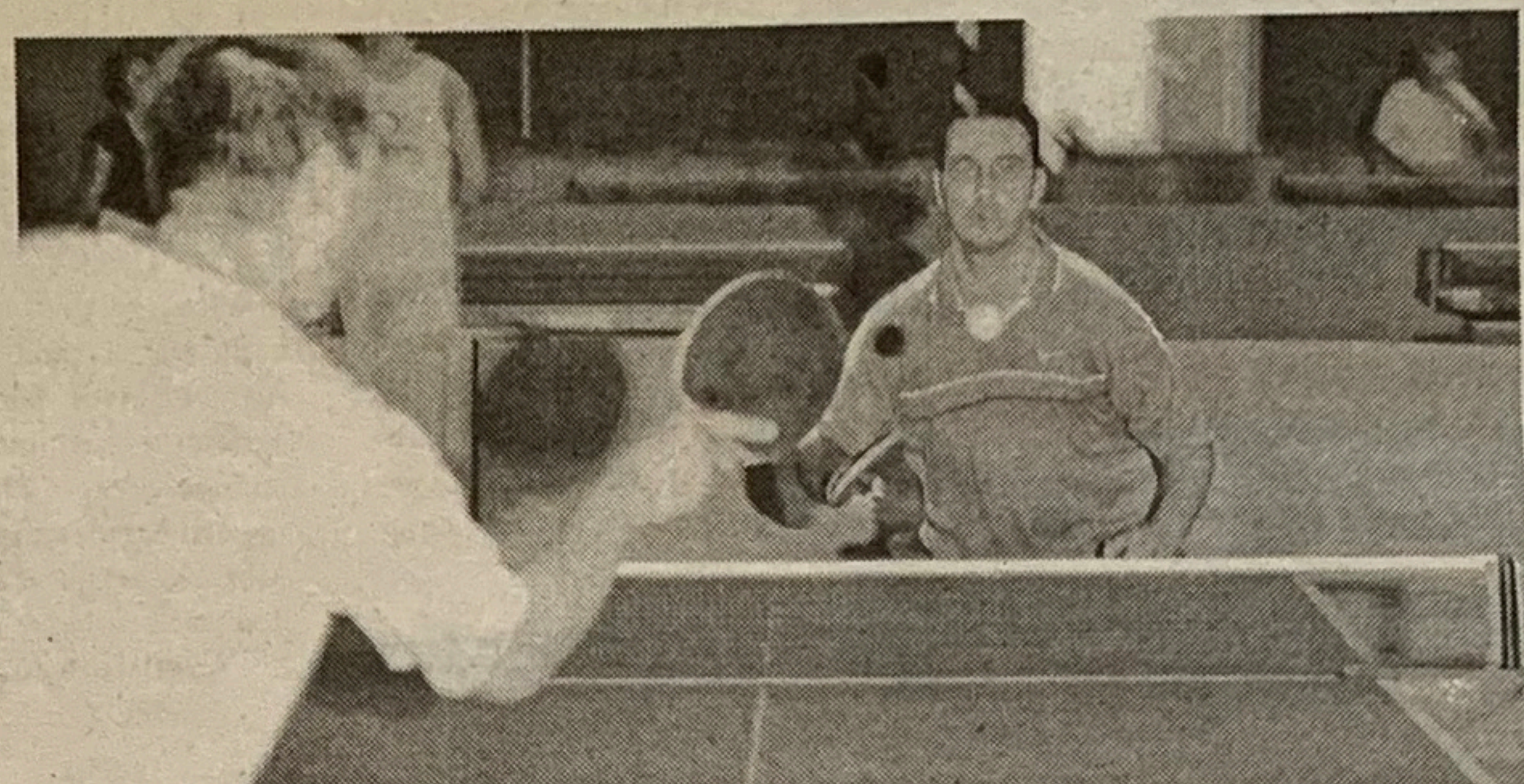
A twirl is a rapid turning of the racket in midserve or midpoint. Its purpose: deception. The hope is that an opponent won't know if the shot is to be made with the spin side of the racket or the anti-spin side — and anti-spin can be just as deadly as spin.

Twirling isn't as effective a strategy as it once was, however, because of the "two-color rubber law," which requires players to use red rubber on one side of the racket and black on the other, corresponding to spin and anti-spin surfaces.

Of course, to complicate matters, color coding isn't uniform from brand to brand. The solution: "A player typically asks to inspect the opponent's racket."

This weekend, the public can watch the flashes of red and black at a major table-tennis tournament in the Balboa Park Activity Center. More than 200 players in numerous categories will play for \$5000 in prizes. The Western Open has attracted several United States Olympians, among them Khoa Nguyen of San Jose and Cheng Yinghua of Montgomery Village, Maryland.

Yi Yong Fan, the top player in the country, will be there, too. Originally



Cheng Yinghua (left) and Samir Tarquisti (right)

PHOTOGRAPHS BY DAVE ALLEN

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from Tsingdow, China, Fan is a former member of the elite Chinese National Team. Though he now lives in Portland, Oregon, he is not yet a citizen, so he couldn't compete in Sydney. One expects, then, that he'll be more than ready for the competition.

— Jeanne Schinto

The Western Open Table Tennis Tournament
Balboa Park Activity Center
2145 Park Boulevard at Inspiration Point Way
Friday, October 6, 6:00 p.m.-9:00 p.m.
Saturday, October 7, 9:30 a.m.-9:00 p.m.
Sunday, October 8, 9:00 a.m.-5:00 p.m.
Free
Table Tennis info: 619-525-7854
Activity Center info/directions: 858-581-7100

EVENTS LISTINGS

HOW TO SEND US YOUR LISTING: Contributions must be received by 5 p.m. Friday the week prior to publication for consideration. Do not phone. Send a complete description of the event, including the date, time, cost, the precise address where it is to be held (including neighborhood), a contact phone number, and a phone number (including area code) for public information to **READER EVENTS**, Box 85803, San Diego CA 92186-5803. Or fax to 619-881-2401. You may also submit information online at www.SanDiegoReader.com by clicking on the events section.

BAJA

A Drama Festival is planned at the Tijuana Cultural Center from October 5-13. Programs begin at 8 p.m. Monday through Saturday, 6 p.m. on Sunday. Tickets are \$7 U.S. Find the center at Paseo de los Héroes and Mina Street in the Zona Río. For more information, call 011-52-66-87-9600. (TIJUANA)

A Sculpture Expo featuring work by Ana María Guardia begins with a reception at 7 p.m. on Friday, October 6, at the Tijuana Cultural Center

(Paseo de los Héroes and Mina Street, Zona Río). Dial 011-52-66-87-9600 for details. (TIJUANA)

La Voz de la Frontera 10k Run, for men and women in all categories, starts at 8 a.m. on Sunday, October 8, in Parque Vicente Guerrero. Call 011-52-66-34-3232 for information. (MEXICALI)

Round Four of La Playa Motocross Series is slated for October 8, at the Cantamar Sand Dunes outside Rosarito Beach. Professional and amateur ATV and motorcycle racers will be competing. Practice runs are slated for Saturday, October 7, from noon to dark, and from 7 to 9:30 a.m. on Sunday. The first race on Sunday begins at 10 a.m. Admission is \$1; parking is \$5 per vehicle. For more information, call 011-52-66-12-2525. (ROSARITO BEACH)

Campo Emiliano Zapata is the site for a 6k run on Sunday, October 8, commencing at 8 a.m., for those five years and older. For more details, call 011-52-66-13-5021. (ROSARITO BEACH)

Celebrating Prosperity, Cultural Diversity, and Mexican agriculture, Mexicali's Fiestas del Sol 2000 continues through Tuesday, October 17, in Vicente Guerrero Park. Mexicali is the state capital for Baja California. Take in the valley expo, featuring agricultural exhibits; a social expo; commerce expo; a section highlighting art, bread, and wine; traditional Mexican arts and crafts; and kids' and youth zones.

Admission for children is 30

cents per day, or free with paid adult admission; adults pay \$2 Monday through Thursday, \$3.50 Friday through Sunday. Hours are 6 p.m. to 1 a.m. Monday through Thursday, 5 p.m. to 2 a.m. Friday and Saturday, and 5 p.m. to 1 a.m. Sunday. For more information, dial 011-52-65-65-6152. (MEXICALI)

"Amazonas," it's the new film at the Omnimax Theater in the Tijuana Cultural Center, screening Tuesday through Friday at every hour on the hour from 2 to 9 p.m., with additional screenings at 11 a.m., noon, and 1 p.m. on Saturday and Sunday. The center is located at Paseo de los Héroes and Mina Street in the Zona Río. For more information, call 011-52-66-87-9600. (TIJUANA)

OUTDOORS

Dense Ground Fogs are a trademark of the onset of autumn along San Diego's coastal strip. These happen during the night and early-morning hours when moist marine air that has settled in valleys and low areas is chilled below the dew point. These ground fogs are distinct from the low overcast that usually blankets the coastal strip on late-spring and summer mornings.

Spider Webs, decorated with myriad tiny dew droplets, are a beautiful sight on foggy autumn mornings. Look for them in San Diego's wild

canyons and park areas, or in your own back yard.

Chinese Flame Trees are now displaying colorful clusters of orange, reddish, or salmon-pink seed pods. Good specimens line the south end of Balboa Drive in Balboa Park and Lake Murray Boulevard through San Diego's San Carlos district. Most of the remainder of San Diego's ornamental trees will continue to remain drab until November, the onset of "autumn" botanically.

Red Gum Eucalyptus Trees all over San Diego County are stressing out of late, having been attacked for some months now by the red gum lerp psyllid, an insect that feeds on the juicy leaves of this particular species of eucalyptus. The red gums under attack have leaves spotted with "lerps," tiny shells that protect the immature insects. The leaves become covered with a black, sooty substance before dying and falling from the tree. Many of the smaller red gum trees, which make up about 40 percent of all eucalyptus in the county, are already dead, and others have denuded and drooping branches. The Scripps Ranch and Rancho Santa Fe areas are particularly hard hit, as they contain tens of thousands of closely spaced red gums.

Biologists are trying to fight the psyllid infestation by releasing a natural enemy of the psyllid, a tiny wasp, into the eucalyptus groves. Both the psyllid and the wasp are from Australia, the home continent of the eucalyptus tree. Some arborists think

that the onset of wet weather this winter will help the surviving red gums fend for themselves and recover by sprouting new leaves.

No Push-Ups Required, some of the buildings are going to survive and some will be razed, so explore the old NTC with Walkabout perambulators on Friday, October 6. Meet in the parking lot inside the main entrance at 9:45 a.m.; take Roosevelt Road, gate 3, at the signal on Rosecrans Street. Free. Call 619-231-7463 for information. (POINT LOMA)

Golden Eagle, warblers, and fox sparrows are possible sightings during an Audubon Society outing at Lake Morena on Saturday, October 7, from 8 a.m. to early afternoon.

The lake is reached from Mission Valley by taking I-8 east to the Buckman Springs Road exit; drive south five miles to Oak Drive, turn right (west), and go about two miles to Lake Morena Drive. Turn right and go through the village and on to the park. There is a vehicle day-use fee. Bring water and lunch. There will be considerable hiking of a somewhat strenuous nature. 619-280-7710. (LAKE MORENA)

Meet an Animal Currently Under "Rehabilitation" when Heise Park offers "A Close Look at Our Wildlife" at 6 p.m. on Saturday, October 7. A member of Project Wildlife will discuss the organization and the animal in question. Find the park at 4945 Heise Park Road; 858-694-3049. Free. (JULIAN)

GETAWAYS

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