

## Frontier High School Championships-Playing Table Tennis with the Polar Bears in Churchill

This past April 7<sup>th</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup>, the top 20 boys and 16 girls from 11 high schools in the Frontier School Division travelled to Churchill to compete in the second ever Frontier High School Championships. In all, over 250 athletes and their teachers made the trek to compete in table tennis, archery, badminton and volleyball. I arrived mid-morning on Thursday a couple of hours after the athletes had arrived having survived a grueling 21 hour train ride from Thompson...but not only that...all of these athletes had to first get to Thompson. Take the team from Wanipigow...they had to first travel some 4 or 5 hours down to Winnipeg and then spend another 6 or 7 to get to Wabowden where they were billeted overnight at Mel Johnson School. The next day it was a couple of hours up to Thompson to catch the train to Churchill. Man, what dedication...my hat goes off to all the athletes, coaches and organizers of these Games...what an undertaking and you did an amazing job volunteers and staff from the Duke of Marlborough School and Heather and company from Frontier. Major kudos!

Thursday was spent teaching the players basic skills and “trick” serves. Coaching in a formal sense was tricky as kids were always coming and going so basically I played “Round the World” with them “Top Table” and “Winner Stays On”...I was dead by Thursday night...but the next day it was neat to see how many players were trying to copy my “fancy” serves and topspin shots.

Friday the table tennis competition began. Two events were officially contested for table tennis: Boys and Girls Singles. The 20 boys were broken into 6 groups of 3 & 4 players with the top two advancing to the round of 16 that then became knockout. The 16 girls were pooled in 4 groups of four with the top two advancing to the quarterfinal knockout stage. Many hours later-because part of the challenge is keeping track of the players-because they can also play the other sports-the winners were as follows:

BOYS: Gold - Geoffrey Bushie, Wanipigow, Silver – Josh Whiteway, F.C.I./ Cranberry Portage, Bronze – Daniel Fredlund, Duke of Marlborough/ Churchill.

GIRLS: Gold – Rene Wilson, H.B.O./ Norway House, Silver – Courtney Moritz, H.B.O./ Norway House, Bronze – Heather Monias, Mel Johnson/ Wabowden.

Congratulations to all players. It was good to see an ever increasing level of play which is no doubt partly due to the distribution of Table Tennis Canada’s “TOPS-Table Tennis in Schools” coaching manuals.

Polar Bears...well, luckily I never did come across any...I of course - before reading the explicit warning note on the Games handout - went for a 1 hour walk all over town...and found out later that a couple of mom and baby bears had been spotted earlier in the week close to town...

...Ron Edwards...still Reporting.