

Global table tennis body sets up lab with NTU

Facility will test ping pong balls and paddle coverings to ensure they meet rules

By FENG ZENGKUN

THE next time you watch Singapore paddler Feng Tianwei battle Chinese rivals Ding Ning or Li Xiaoxia, you may be interested to know that the balls and bats they are using could have been tested right here in Singapore.

The International Table Tennis Federation (ITTF) has set up a joint laboratory with Nanyang Technological University (NTU) to test ping pong balls and the rubber coverings of paddles to make sure they meet guidelines.

The federation and the university's Institute for Sports Research (ISR) were already working together on a unique prototype machine before they announced the joint lab.

Research on this machine, which was designed to test the bounce of balls off table tennis bats to ensure that they meet competition standards, will continue under the joint lab.

The ITTF said, in announcing the lab last week, that the university's engineering research and technology expertise could also help in the quest for other "new innovations that will help our sport to grow and develop".

ISR will host the joint lab, and provide the staff, equipment and technical expertise to carry out the testing. The ITTF will provide the funding.

NTU provost Freddy Boey noted that "table tennis is one of the most Asia-centric sports", and the collaboration would help ensure fair competition in the field.

While the laboratory's specialists will focus on equipment and materials testing, "from time to time, they will also carry out research on the processes and methodologies for the tests", said ISR executive director Leong Kah Fei.

The new joint venture is one of several recent feathers in the sports research institute's cap.

Late last month, NTU announced that it had set up an international consortium to develop materials and processes for sports products.

The venture, called the Innovative Composites for Sports Products, consists of ISR, advanced materials giant Arkema, textile and composites firm Chomarat, bicycle manufacturer Topkey, and tennis racquet maker Babolat, which has supplied top players including Rafael Nadal, Andy Roddick and Caroline Wozniacki.

Arkema, Chomarat and Babolat are based in France, while Topkey is headquartered in Taiwan.

ISR is also working with the Badminton World Federation on equipment such as shuttlecocks, and with other groups on sports footwear, and sportswear that can be heated to keep athletes warm in cold environments.

Founded in 2011, the institute has secured more than \$5.5 million in research funding and generated more than \$1 million in revenue. Funded by the university and the Economic Development Board, it will have 80 researchers and staff by the year end.

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Singapore paddler Feng Tianwei may soon be using table tennis balls and bats tested locally.
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