

## **2009 WORLD CUP - DEBRECEN, HUNGARY**

**By Vernon Vig**

The 2009 World Cup in Pipe Smoking, which took place in Debrecen, Hungary on October 10 & 11, 2009, was another outstanding event. The United States was represented by a 3-man team: Jeff Weiner from Miami, the current U.S. national champion, who won that title in the May 2009 competition at the Chicago Show; Wilson Cornelius (aka "Buddy") Weinmiller from Baltimore, who came in second at Chicago; and myself. Hopefully more of us will compete in the World Championship to be held in Estoril, Portugal on October 9 & 10, 2010. See below.

Buddy and I caught a British Air flight from New York to London on Wednesday evening, October 7 and then transferred at Heathrow airport the next morning to another BA flight to Budapest. Arriving early Thursday afternoon and a little worse for wear, we were glad to learn we could take a train to Debrecen right from the airport - a trip of about 2-1/2 hours. Things got even better when it turned out that the train had a smoking car! Buddy raised his pipe to ask the conductor if that would be okay; the conductor smiled and gave us a thumbs up. We promptly lit up and puffed peacefully all the way to Debrecen. As we passed through the flat, fertile Hungarian farmland, Buddy serenely observed: "This looks like Indiana."

On arrival in Debrecen, we checked into the Grand Golden Bull Hotel in the center city where all the World Cup festivities would be held. It was a perfect location, not exactly modern but very spacious and elegant in an old-fashioned way - the kind of place you can't build any more. The staff was very friendly, welcoming, hospitable and helpful the whole weekend and the food was very good. Buddy and I would go back to the Golden Bull for its buffet breakfast any day!

Debrecen is the second largest city in Hungary and a center of the country's tobacco industry. It was famous for the production of clay pipes in the 19th century. Fine Burley and Virginia tobaccos grow in the light, sandy soil in the neighboring countryside and are manufactured locally into a variety of tobacco products. The contest pipe tobacco, Black Gold Special, was a local product and quite nice. In keeping with the city's history, the interesting Deri Museum, which we visited on Friday, featured colorful paintings and lithos of elegant Hungarians on horseback smoking long-stemmed clay pipes with tall bowls.

The Golden Bull Hotel is situated on a large open, pedestrian-only area, about 40 yards wide and several blocks long. It is filled with trees, fountains, benches and cafes. Buddy and I sat down at one of the cafes soon

after checking into the hotel on Thursday to enjoy a couple of beers and watch the passing scene. Not really having eaten since the night before, we then went to a nearby restaurant and ordered - what else? - Hungarian goulasch. It was delicious; we had arrived!

We took it easy on Friday, walking around the city like good tourists and chatting on and off with smokers from other countries who were starting to arrive at the Golden Bull. We also took the opportunity to visit the beautiful old (bright yellow!) Protestant cathedral near the hotel and bravely climbed up the long series of rickety stairs and ladders to the tower where we could look out over the city. I don't know about Buddy, but I prayed to the smoking gods and asked for their help in the smoking contest. That evening we attended the CIPC Presidents' Dinner for the officers and representative of its member country federations. This was a nice opportunity to introduce Buddy to old friends and to make new ones.

The pipe show and exhibition opened on Saturday morning. It was organized and supported by Peter Heinrichs from Cologne, Germany who owns two extraordinary pipe shops in that city (one of them known as "the house of 10,000 pipes"! ) - a must stop for any pipe smoker visiting Cologne. Peter had personally invited a number of well-known pipe makers from Hungary, Germany, Denmark, Italy, France, Poland, Ukraine, etc. It was not a large, large show but many of the usual suspects had tables and there were enough beautiful pipes to keep anyone occupied for several hours - and plenty of opportunities to sit down and visit with the pipe makers. (Okay, I bought a very nice straight grain WO Larsen ( billiard of course) and two or three or more spectacular pre-1900 Genod pipes from Jacky Craen.)

I represented UPCA at the CIPC annual meeting on Saturday afternoon, where we heard reports on developments in all the member countries. The anti-smoking forces are active every where, but this seems to be strengthening the pipe clubs. It was agreed that CIPC needed to take a more aggressive global stance to promote a positive image of pipe smoking and all member clubs were encouraged to stand up and be more assertive. Alain Letulier of France was elected President of CIPC, replacing Geert Derkse of The Netherlands who had served for the last 18 years. (Note that Alain was very helpful in the founding of UPCA and is a member of the New York Pipe Club.) I resigned as CIPC Vice President for the Americas in favor of Pierre Pams, President of the Mexican Federation of pipe clubs, who is better placed to expand CIPC membership in Latin and South America.

Jeff and Bonnie Weiner, who had arrived Friday evening, joined Buddy and me at the Gala Dinner Saturday night. Together with pipe lovers from all over the world, we were entertained by a variety of spectacular Hungarian singers and dancers. With his fabulous handle bar moustache (49 years in the making),

Buddy was a star attraction. Women from Japan and other countries flocked over to our table to request photos with him. Also, more good goulasch!

The main event, THE SMOKING COMPETITION, got underway about 2:30 PM on Sunday afternoon when 246 men and women from all over the world lit up their pipes in the ballroom at the Golden Bull. It ended 3 hours 9 minutes and 21 seconds later when the winner, Gianfranco Ruscalla of Italy, finally put down his pipe. Gianfranco is the reigning world champion, having set the world record of 3:33:06 in Germany last year. While he did not quite match that time, it was another impressive performance, demonstrating again his real skill. I sat near him during the contest and was amazed by his intense concentration.

Incidentally, I spent a lot of time with Gianfranco at the Saturday CIPC meeting and had a good visit. He is a delightful guy with a great sense of humor. He speaks English as fluently as any of us with a perfect American accent that he acquired when he went to college in Tucson, Arizona. He is a professor of philosophy in Italy and is one very bright, interesting man. By the way, he told me that he doesn't smoke a pipe that often; he prefers those short black Italian cigars and has one in his mouth most of the time. Go figure!

Trubacs Tivadar from Hungary came in second in the competition with a time of 2:59:45 and the Hungarian Pipaclub Dombovan B won the team championship with a time of 8:14:38. (This was unsuccessfully challenged by the second-place Italian team on the ground that the Hungarian team included a "ringer".) The women's side was also won by a Hungarian, Szanyine Sara, with an excellent time of 1:30:40 which put her in 29th place over all.

So how did the U.S. team fare? Despite my prayers, we did not do as well as we had hoped and didn't come close to matching the kind of numbers mentioned above. But we improved quite a bit over last year and put on a respectable performance. Jeff clocked out at 0:46:22, which put him in 138th place out of 246. I did 0:43:13 and Buddy (who no doubt was spooked by all those admiring women the evening before) came in at 0:38:29. As a team, we placed 45th out of 70. Where do we go from here? How do you get to Carnegie Hall? Practice...practice...practice! I urge every one to participate in the U.S. National Championship to be held again at the Chicago show in May and also to take part in the various regional contests that several clubs around the country now sponsor each year.

All in all, I'm sure that Jeff and Bonnie and Buddy will agree when I say that Debrecen was another memorable experience. We showed up in our red UPCA shirts and had a great time - and our presence was appreciated. I'm always amazed how easily and quickly friendships develop between pipe smokers - even when we're speaking different languages. Appropriately enough, about the only Hungarian I learned in Debrecen was that "vig" connotes happiness in that language. That certainly described our

feeling as we made our way back on Monday to Budapest, London, New York and Miami. According to Rick Newcombe, Ed Lehman used to express his satisfaction after a pipe show by saying he felt "filled up". We all know what he meant.

As mentioned above, the World Championship will take place in Estoril, Portugal - a resort and casino on the beach near Lisbon - next October 9 & 10. I know the Portuguese hosts have been working very hard for some time to make this a success and I urge more American pipe smokers to take advantage of this opportunity to participate in the international festivities. UPCA assisted Buddy with his travel expenses and we hope to receive sufficient contributions to permit us to continue to send a Chicago winner to the next international event. But all members of UPCA clubs are welcome to join the U.S. team and the cost can be quite reasonable. The Debrecen trip cost Buddy and me only about \$1000-1200 each, including airfare, hotel, meals, contest registration and everything else. It's an exceptional value so start planning now.!

For more information about the World Championship, go to [www.pipesmoking2010.com](http://www.pipesmoking2010.com) and feel free to contact me at [vervig37@gmail.com](mailto:vervig37@gmail.com).