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2009 College Table Tennis National Championships

April 3-5 in Rochester, Minnesota

WEBSITE: <http://www.nctta.com/champs/2009/index.html>

****NEWS RELEASE****

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ROCHESTER, Minnesota- The Mayo Clinic is often a destination point for patients from around the world.

It's also a must-see stop for many fans, coaches and players in Rochester this weekend for the 2009 NCTTA Nationals.

Andrew Aprikyan, coach of the University of Washington table tennis team, is also an assistant professor of medicine at the school in Seattle. So it was no surprise that he checked out the Mayo Clinic. "It is one of the best in the world," he said Saturday as teams like Mississippi College, Virginia Tech, Georgia State, Wisconsin, Puerto Rico and dozens of others squared off. The original home of the Mayo Clinic is on Rochester, but there are two others located in Phoenix, Arizona and Jacksonville, Fla. It's hard to miss the place in Rochester. Signs appear all over the city pointing people to the world-class facility. Arrive at the Rochester airport, and Table Tennis fans and others will find Mayo Clinic magazines readily available.

Besides advising his players on ping pong strategies, Aprikyan works in the areas of cancer and stem cell research. A native of Armenia, he's cheering on the Huskies to improve upon their No. 11 rating at the Nationals in Minnesota a year ago.

Another West Coast visitor who's planning a Mayo Clinic visit, University of California table tennis player Vega Shah is happy to be making her first trip to Minnesota in early April. "The weather is better than I expected. I thought it would be extremely cold," said the native of India. Still, there's snow in the forecast for Saturday night and into Sunday, TV reports say.

There's much to do for visitors in Rochester with five tournaments from table tennis to hockey attracting 20,000 visitors and they are expected to spend \$1 million for food, lodging, gas and other costs. Rutgers University table tennis player Adam Formal, 22, of Westfield, New Jersey, said he ran into some hockey players Friday night at a downtown Rochester restaurant. He took time to check out other attractions. "I went to the mall underneath the Mayo Clinic and hotel. It was really sweet."

Formal is a second generation table tennis player. His dad played table tennis in college. So he's really more into the game than most folks.

Working on a bachelor's degree in psychology, economics and philosophy at Rutgers- the state university in New Jersey – Formal says psychology is a big part of table tennis. It can often be the difference in winning and losing.

“Psychology is extremely important,” said the Rutgers player just minutes prior to a match Saturday morning. Planning to receive his bachelor's degree this spring, he wants to work for a year, then go to graduate school with dreams of earning a doctorate in psychology. Making his return trip to the Nationals in Minnesota, Formal will need to use psychology to the max all weekend. Compared to a year ago, the New Jersey native said “the competition is more difficult.”

Where to play the NCTTA Nationals next year? It would be hard to top Rochester, Minnesota but the possible sites include Wisconsin, Michigan and Connecticut. Texas Wesleyan manager David Livings raves about the choice of Rochester in the Land of 10,000 Lakes. He's joined Texas Wesleyan's trips to the Nationals dating back to 2002. “The venue is fantastic – it is large and spread out,” he said of the regional sports facility on the Rochester campus shared by such schools as Winona State and the University of Minnesota-Rochester. “The wrestling convention is here,” and so is the Mayo Clinic, he noted. “It's pretty interesting.”

-----Andrew Aprikyan, the University of Washington coach, said his team may have traveled the longest distance to Minnesota – with the possible exception of the University of Puerto Rico. His preference for the NCTTA tournament in 2010 would be a central location. No matter where the Huskies play table tennis next year, the coach is sure of one thing – basketball and football teams will continue to overshadow Table Tennis on the Seattle campus. Five Washington players participated in the NCTTA this year. Three others couldn't come because the school had to chop travel costs.