

## NCTTA Player Spotlight: **Dave “The Forehand Slam” Llona**

By John McNerney and Liang Liu

The new face of college table tennis isn't a Pre-Olympic phenom bred from the junior camps. He isn't a 2000+ player with sponsorships, and his competitive experience is actually quite limited. His name is David Llona, or as his fans and teammates like to call him, Dave 'The Forehand Slam' Llona. David Llona has taken the college table tennis world by storm, not to mention the Florida table tennis scene as well. Playing out of the UCF Table Tennis Club in Orlando, FL, Llona is the new face of enthusiasm at all three Orlando area clubs. Led by a ferocious forehand dubbed 'The Forehand Slam,' Llona brings a sense of enthusiasm to the game that is renewing the hopes and spirits of aspirational players all around him. Not only does he project his heart and determination, he has introduced a new grip to table tennis. His one-sided style of play is Seemiller-esque, serving occasionally on the back side with anti-spin—but unique in that the paddle remains upright the entire time, allowing for powerful forehand attacks while maintaining touch and control on the backhand designed for placement.

Dave is guided under the leadership of his friend and teammate, John McNerney, who helps manage Dave's table tennis ambitions. McNerney, a recent UCF graduate and former UCF player, is the founder and patriarch of UCF Table Tennis.

A close runner-up in the state of Florida for the 2007 NCTTA National Championships, the UCF Team, or the “Ping Pong Knights” as they are better known as on campus, are hoping to capitalize on new recruits from around the state. Quickly becoming known as the Ping Pong Posse of the East, UCF Table Tennis has a flavor of its own, and is easily one of the most ethnically and socially diverse clubs on campus.

Now the president of UCF Table Tennis, Llona plans on developing his game and his team even further. Standing at 6'2” in height and weighing 215 pounds, Llona turns heads even when he is not on the table. The fittest he's ever been, he recently lost 60 pounds in an effort to help elevate his game to the next level. A goal setter by nature, Llona aspires to one day compete alongside the U.S. National Team. This might seem like an extraordinary goal for an ordinary 1650 player,

but Llona is no ordinary 1650 player.

His character and goodwill have won him fans and friends alike, and his level of intensity and sportsmanship are contagious. Llona is easily one of the most recognizable faces at any Florida tournament. Playing competitively now for only nine months, his inert sense of hand-eye coordination, combined with natural agility and athleticism, have elevated his game quicker than most beginners. Llona, a former high school baseball player, was a college standout in the eyes of top athletic recruiters, but when a late season shoulder injury sidelined him half-way through his senior year, he re-focused his attention to his other life passion. He recalls beating everyone on his baseball team on a table in the team dugout before and after games.

Only 19 years old, Dave Llona has a fan club on Facebook.com, as well as a Myspace page developed for the sole purpose of promoting his team and the sport which he loves. Llona is an everyday guy who connects with players and fans regardless of their skill level, which is exactly what table tennis needs. He makes people want to become better players.

Although his aspirations may seem steep, one can certainly not count him out considering how fast his game has elevated in such a short time. His mindset is right, and his goals are specific. With more than half a decade to go before even reaching his mid-twenties, Llona seems poised to make a strong charge towards his long-term goals. He aims to reach 2000 by his junior year, and then 2200+ upon graduating from college. With the right kind of foundational support provided by the NCTTA, combined with steady development of an already hurried amount of accomplishment, it may just happen. With his first tournament victory coming just two months after joining UCF, along with two runner-up finishes following shortly thereafter, things tend to eclipse one another quickly.

Upon attaining his desired success in the competitive side of the sport, Llona hopes to one day develop his own paddle, of course appropriately complimenting what will one day become, “the Llona grip.”

You can write to Dave at [dallona44@yahoo.com](mailto:dallona44@yahoo.com) or [www.myspace.com/dallona](http://www.myspace.com/dallona)

To find out more about UCF Table Tennis, visit their website: [www.pingpongknights.com](http://www.pingpongknights.com) or check them out on Myspace: [www.myspace.com/pingpongknights](http://www.myspace.com/pingpongknights)

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