

Free Table Tennis 19

ARE YOU HAPPY WITH THE ENGLISH TABLE TENNIS ASSOCIATION?

tabletennischat@hotmail.co.uk

INTRODUCTION

Free Table Tennis has frequently commented upon the lack of activity by the Chairman and Management Committee of the ETTA, but we are sad to report that the Chairman has let down Barry Meisel.

Barry wished to get on with advancing our Sport but Mr Murdoch insisted upon a meeting, and has then failed to confirm that meeting.

Mr Murdoch reported to the January National Council upon his recent visits. Not a single visit to possible sponsor, television company or newspaper! Then he ignores the person who has volunteered to help in that area. This is not good enough Mr Murdoch. You may be smiling, but we want something to smile about so do the job for which you were elected.

Barry has asked FTT to pass on his message to FTT readers, and that is included on Page 2. We cannot sympathise enough with Barry who has put in a lot of effort in order to help the English Table Tennis Association.

I hear that the January National Council meeting had a very early finish, leaving many Councillors wondering why they had gathered together in the first place.

The October National Council meeting discussed a paper from Alan Ransome, the national councillor for Cleveland, upon problems on the junior tournament circuit. This time, Mr Ransome, put forward a paper highlighting the problem of the lack of umpires. A very important problem! What happened you may ask. It was decided to leave this important matter until the next meeting.

There is a lack of umpires NOW. It will still be a problem in April when the matter is discussed. Why didn't National Council, with plenty of available time, discuss the matter in January rather than wait until many people go into a summer hibernation? Before anyone else says it, "has Dr Do-Little already gone into hibernation?"

Mr Ransome can see the problems and is attempting to ensure National Council will discuss these problems. Mr Murdoch continues to be the problem.

Many people, at all levels of our sport, consider that the most important people are the coaches – they help recruit, train and develop the next generation of players at all levels, all over the country. The coaches come from all playing abilities and all ages, and show a dedication to our sport that enthuses many. In fact, most people can point to the influence of a coach early in their career that has resulted in their involvement in the sport.

The ETTA Vice-Chairman (Development) is responsible for the coaching scheme. But that person resigned over four months ago. National Councillors have not been asked to nominate for the position, as they should, so the position remains vacant.

Can the ETTA Chairman explain how he expects this important department to remain leaderless for so long? Or will he wait for Mr Ransome to tell him?

One of the FTT writers nicknamed the chairman “Dr Do-Little”. It gives me no satisfaction that he has been proved correct.

Message from Barry Meisel

Hello Howard,

Please be good enough to pass this message on to your readers of Free Table Tennis. I am very sorry to announce that I will not be able to arrange sponsorship or promotions with the E.T.T.A. The reason for this is that I have not received any reply to my emails from Alex Murdoch the chairman of the E.T.T.A. I wrote to Alex on the 1st January requesting him to confirm that our meeting arranged for April in Gatwick was still valid as I had to finalise my travel arrangements with airlines and hotels. I did not receive any reply, I wrote again on the 11th January requesting him to reply by return, also enclosing a copy of the previous email on the 1st January.

Today is the 19th January and I still have not received any correspondence from him. Due to the circumstances I have decided that it will be impossible for me to deal with any organisation that is not run in an efficient and business like manner.

You may remember that when I first announced that I was willing to promote our sport and arrange sponsorship I did not want to have meetings that only lead to further meetings. I did agree with Alex Murdoch to have one meeting only to finalise details, this was to be at Gatwick in April. I am very sorry that my promotions will now not be run in conjunction with the E.T.T.A.

In the past I have always kept my views regarding criticism of the E.T.T.A to myself but now find that all those articles re broken promises and bad management seem to be correct and nothing is being done by the E.T.T.A to solve the problems.

I have always been a perfectionist and my past promotions with English table tennis were a great success due to the first class team I had which included Mike Ellis, Ruth Miller, Ken Baker, Eileen Koutikoff and public relations office of Cutbill & Co. Back then I also did not receive any cooperation from the E.T.T.A and it looks like they still have the same attitude of keeping the sport strictly amateur with no large prize money for the players.

What I cannot understand is how an organisation such as the E.T.T.A can ignore sponsorship which is given to them as a gift and only request a meeting which they cannot confirm by a simple email. I would finally like to say that although I do not wish to continue with the E.T.T.A I would be pleased to arrange sponsorship for players prize money in tournaments direct with the organisers, I would be pleased to hear from any tournament players regarding this.

BARRY MEISEL

FTT comments –Barry, I am sure that I speak for the majority of ETTA members in this country when I apologise for the lack of activity by the ETTA Chairman.

GRASS-ROOTS SECTION (PART EIGHT)

In FTT18, Twenty one year old “anonymous” suggested that recruitment was for clubs not leagues, yet his reasoning seems to be based upon the few large clubs around the country.

Most of these ‘larger’ clubs are already making their contribution in the recruitment and development of players. The majority of the clubs around the country are the small clubs and, unfortunately, their numbers are falling. One of their problems being that if they find and develop a promising player, that player wants to join the more successful ‘larger’ club.

Most of the ‘one table – one team’ clubs find recruitment and development very difficult, and they possibly do not want any more players to disrupt their weekly fixture. Yet a second team would ensure their future involvement. How often has a team disappeared because one player left the area or retired? I suggest that it often prompts the retirement/loss of the remaining team members.

The local leagues should have the manpower and resources to hold ‘Come And Try It’ sessions in their area, and then recommend and introduce the newcomers to the most appropriate local club.

While I do not disagree with twenty one year old “anonymous”, I have said that we should explore all avenues to recruit, develop and retain players – we have a great sport, let’s ensure we spread the word and expand.

STAN JOHNSTONE (PART SIX)

Finally before I finish I must mention another aspect of our game that is SCANDALOUS. There is nothing like a dame? No! There is nothing like pottering about in boats? No!

I refer to the defensive stroke that has almost vanished.

THERE IS NOTHING IN THIS WORLD LIKE BEING ABLE TO RETRIEVE A MIGHTY SMASH FROM FLOOR LEVEL OR FROM SOME REMOTE PART OF THE COURT. Even I have enjoyed that. It is a great thrill and breeds confidence.

How exhilarating is the high ball return by comparison? Believe it or not but I have seen Chinese in a World championship Video who did not know how to play a defensive shot? Perhaps they daren't. Perhaps it is verboten?

But everything is now loaded in favour of the attacking player. Tennis is going the same way and we have to watch in disbelief as servers attempt to pulverize the opposition with their aces,

YOU CAN'T BE SERIOUS?

Yes I am and that is why in many respects the women’s game of both Tennis and Table Tennis are better to watch than the men's. It is that bit slower and demands more guile.

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I remember watching Linda Lomas playing at Cirencester for England against Italy some years ago. She was a revelation, retrieving the ball from long distances with her returns just skimming the net. It was wonderful to watch with her bat striking the floor with every defensive stroke. I cannot remember whether she won her games or not but there is no doubt that the defensive player has a much more TORRID time these days than the attacker.

The same can be said for Matthew Syed. IT IS SCANDALOUS.

I cannot say what the ETTA or the ITTF's response to all this will be so I am left only with suggestions.

1. To have one HARDBAT division in all leagues commencing from September 2008 for new entrant teams.
2. The occasional HARDBAT tournament to be held. They will find that the number of players in the ETTA will explode, but let me first explore their fears.
3. Will the elite players from the sponge era suffer from playing HARDBAT?
No! If there is one thing about sponge it has improved the skills of the game out of all recognition creating lightning reflexes. Elite players will still be the best but they will find that they have to work much harder to win their games.
4. Will it affect the professional game that we see in such places as the Crucible? Not at all. In fact it will enhance it because people like myself i.e. the grass roots are greatly interested in seeing what these stars are getting up to and to marvel at their skills. If I am able I shall be along to the Royal Albert Hall next March.
I fully expect that the numbers playing Table Tennis will mushroom and will make our Sport more popular both in our leagues and on TV.
5. Finally give our game back to the grass roots and do not expect them to practice 6 hours a day like so many professionals have to do.

I REST MY CASE!

THEY ALSO SERVE WHO **STAND AND WAIT** **(PART ONE)**

ETTA membership numbers for 2007/08 season again make dismal reading. Affiliated teams fell from 6806 to 6588. 218 teams have disappeared.

The junior story is WORSE, FAR WORSE. Numbers fell from 412 to 325 teams. Perhaps they are still playing, but see no point in ETTA affiliation.

We look through minutes of the ETTA Management and Membership committees, but can find no reference to this subject which does not seem to trouble them in the least. It troubles us that so little concern is felt over the sport's biggest problem. More concern is shown on making the remaining ones pay more, for instance via Individual Membership and compulsory insurance through the ETTA.

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The ETTA does not need more money. The bank account shows a sum of three to four hundred thousand pounds. Why add to this? What would they do with all that money? They seem unwilling or unable to stage the “English Open” once a basic duty which produced sponsorship then and might again and generally stimulated 4 or 5 days of national press coverage and an hour’s television on BBC with very good viewing figures.

But perhaps..... they are right not to stage the “Open” as ETTA minutes show that they can’t even stage the “Closed” properly with many “justified” complaints from participants who pay through the nose for their attendance. Perhaps some of our many and densely populated committees will address themselves to the deadly twin evils of falling membership and lack of effort to publicise the sport. I did see a reader’s letter that seemed to suggest that we need not go out to attract new members (waiting only for the old ones to disappear?) but expect them to arrive at our gates (as ours is such a good sport). Certainly he summarised current ETTA policy to perfection.

Sadly, one thing that never works, after the slide has begun, is doing nothing. Dr Do-Little please note.

Comments upon previous reports

I would refer to the excellent article from David Harvey in FTT18.

I can see that relatively new players will gain from trips to China, but it does not seem to have worked in the case of Drinkhall and Knight who have spent many months in China.

The question has been asked what Liu does while these two are being coached in China by others.

Remedies proposed seem about right i.e. departure of dynamic duo.

John

O – O - O

Hi, Howard,

Although you make a very good point about Alex Murdoch's “conflicts of interest” - he is chairman of the E.T.T.A. and the Veterans Society (nearly one thousand members reported), also secretary of Beds County (which you did not mention) and seems to sit on many committees, some of which he probably promised to scrap (in his Manifesto).

Does it really matter, if we do not have his full attention, when he does so little anyway?

On the other hand, I would not extend this fair criticism to the Treasurer who seems to be doing a good job.

Former International Player (name and address supplied)

O – O – O

Howard says – I have no problem with his county positions. My concern is splitting his time between two National Governing bodies.

Hi Howard,

I read FTT via my club secretary forwarding a copy. I would like to remain anonymous in the FTT if you publish my comments (partly because the proposed project is not fully public yet). I have recently left a new subject on the ETT forum website. The subject I posted (finance/funding for facilities) has some contradictions with the “anonymous” 21 year old in the “The Grass roots write...” section of FTT18.

“Reply to FTT18 “The Grass roots write.....”

The anonymous 21 year olds’ article has inspired me to write! I cannot immediately think of anyone between the age of 21 and 30 playing in our town league and am impressed that he would take the time to write such a well put together piece. I doubt I will match his eloquent writing and will no doubt ramble away!

I do agree with a lot of what is said by anonymous. In our local area (population circa 100,000) I do not know of anybody who only plays socially – they all play competitively in the league other than maybe 10 under 12 year olds who used to go to coaching, my 6 year old being one of them, (this is a different subject altogether and I will only touch briefly on it – the coaching has now been suspended due to lack of interest – the coaches time and effort was very much appreciated and I don’t want to criticise them in anyway but little was done to market the coaching outside of table tennis itself – I believe that every kid attending was related to a league table tennis player – the coaches gave enough of their time and maybe somebody else in the league should have been involved in promoting the sessions through the schools!)

Social table tennis should be encouraged but there are no clubs within 20 miles that have enough tables or timetable to accommodate social table tennis. I know that clubs like Ormesby have sessions for all standards of players not just for those who are competitive in nature (including disability sessions). Following this week’s free publicity on BBC News “exercising regularly adds 15 years to your life” with the older generation playing table tennis in the background social table tennis should be encouraged more.

I recall at university the table tennis club had quite a good membership and 90% were not interested in playing league table tennis they came for a good time. This is rarely replicated locally with virtually all clubs concentrating on their league players. When I tell non table tennis players I play 95% (I didn’t employ Mori but I won’t be far off) of people I speak to tell me how much they enjoyed table tennis whenever they played and I encourage them to take up the sport but where do they play for fun! There is nowhere locally to me.

My own experience does however contradict some of Anonymous’ points.

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I am involved in a project to build a centre for racket sports (excluding squash). This is intended to include a 6 table exclusive table tennis room (to ETTA specifications “four table design” - 6 for practice). It is being built within the grounds of a local large (1800 pupil) secondary school (with approval of the council and the School Governors) with a primary school also within a stone’s throw.

The school is already a “sports college” and has been promised part access to the facilities during the school day and we are aiming to provide coaches as well for the children – our hope is to promote all of the sports and boost membership and therefore it is as much a requirement of our project as it is a requirement of the school. There was also hoped to be some cross over from the sports boosting participation even further and probably more on the social side. If tables are available anyone can pay to play although there will have to be some restrictions on match nights to minimise distractions.

We have a promise of significant funding from the LTA, a local tennis club has put in an application for planning permission (the council have already marked their land as approved for residential development) to release more funds and Real Tennis have also offered finance. Unfortunately table tennis has not contributed other than my own time (and a former table tennis representative). Although my time is well received by the rest of the committee (as finance officer as well as TT representative) it will not be enough to keep table tennis as part of the centre if the finance raised is not sufficient. I am also captain of a tennis team and therefore have additional interest and know most of the individuals involved in the project.

I have asked for help and emailed and (eventually) spoken to the development officer for our region. Basically after 2 minutes I was told that we were not entitled to assistance because “we are not a premier club”. Anonymous suggests “If you want to start a new club try and build a facility.... speak to the development officer etc”. It appears that there is a chicken and egg principal here. If we were already partially successful we may be entitled to some funding! I am a committee member/treasurer and first team captain of one of the larger clubs in the local league but even we could not justify a full time 6 table centre (without a quadrupling of our membership). The plan was to build the table tennis part of the centre as a league resource and not for a single club (this appears to work in other centres I have played at where several clubs play out of the same venue). The development officer did also not offer any other assistance other than to suggest we apply to be a Premier Club. In reality my predecessor who was chairman of a PremierClub had also tried to obtain finance 12 months earlier but had been told that because it was a multi sports facility there would be no funding. His club are no longer a PremierClub. I appreciate that there have to be rules to prevent valuable resources being wasted but there should be some leeway for what has to be something that will improve the participation in our sport. Maybe I didn’t specifically ask for additional help when I was told that there was no finance from ETTA etc but I would have thought the development officer should have been extremely interested in such a proposal and get involved regardless.

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I do recall querying funding for the proposed coaches and was told to ask again when we were ready to employ a coach. However this is not much help in terms of budgeting for the overall viability of the centre. I understood that it would depend on the level of funding for coaches at the actual time we needed them so I can sort of understand the logic but it does put stumbling blocks in front of any plans, to promote table tennis, other than short term ones.

I personally would love to be able to spend more time promoting table tennis but I have my own business where I work 50+ hour weeks, I have a family to spend time with and I already play table tennis 2 or 3 times a week in 3 leagues.

Signed
Anonymous 40 year old

FTT says – this sounds like a wonderful development opportunity, just what we all want. So why isn't the RDO as enthusiastic as our 'Anonymous 40 year old'?

Grass roots write

Thank you for my emails with FTT. You have done a great job highlighting the need for members to communicate if only to exchange views/suggestions.

I must disagree however with the comment that VETTS play 21-up. I have just returned from the Western Masters at Hereford and if I am not mistaken (?) we play 11-up - perhaps everyone else is now playing to 21 and that is why I lost so convincingly!

Seriously, we DO NOT play 21-up.

Dot Macfarlane

FTT says – sorry Dot. I did not mean to suggest that VETTS played upto 21 points in their competitions.

What I believe I said was that the leagues playing upto 21 points are unaffiliated. Players in those unaffiliated leagues are not allowed to play in ETTA affiliated leagues, yet they are allowed to play in VETTS competitions.

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**I told him, "Son, what is it with you? Is it ignorance or apathy?"
He said, "Coach, I don't know and I don't care."**

O – O - O