

# **Free Table Tennis 21**

## **ARE YOU HAPPY WITH THE ENGLISH TABLE TENNIS ASSOCIATION?**

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### **INTRODUCTION**

As we enter March, we can look forward to the Masters Table Tennis at the Albert Hall and the English National Championships in Sheffield. We can hope for plenty of exposure in the National newspapers but we may be disappointed.

Coverage of the World Championships must have been the worst ever yet the ETTA website boasted about increased coverage, that being two articles in The Times. Had it not been for the ETTA website, I would not have known about the articles. Maybe if it had been in the Financial Times? Brian Halliday reports on this subject in this issue.

#### **Hello Howard,**

***Re Alex Murdoch.*** The fact is I have never received any communication from him since I suggested that I would be able to meet him in April if the ETTA paid my expenses owing to the fact that he did not answer any of my previous emails. I have only received one email from him confirming that he had seen an article on my TT Promotions in Euro News on the internet, again nothing was mentioned re the meeting or if he would be prepared to pay my expenses as my original plans had been changed owing to no communication from him. I had sent Mr Murdoch a total of six emails regarding the meeting and no answers were received.

My personal feeling is that Mr Murdoch is quite content having a lot of government money coming into the ETTA and this is being mostly spent on expenses for himself and the ETTA staff, and nothing to the players. Just like in previous years the ETTA do not want the sport to advance and see large prize money for the players like in all other sports with large TV and media coverage.

All other associations including Spain and the USA are very keen for the sport to advance and bring out of the dark back room amateur days.

Lets hope that one day there will be a Chairman who has the foresight to see that table tennis can be brought up to date with the right people behind it. The late Mark McCormach of the International Management Group did a great job with lawn tennis in the 1970s and the sport is one of the most watched internationally and the top players are recognised all over the world.

Lets hope the same for table tennis can be done one day.

**Best regards BARRY MEISEL**

## **AWARDS FOR ALL**

There is a Grants Scheme named Awards-for-All that provides finance for projects and table tennis has done well from this scheme.

What annoys me is the ETTA's own Awards-for-All scheme as the number of award of honours has escalated over the past decade.

There used to be Honours awarded at the ETTA AGM, that being Life Member, Vice-Presidents, Ivor Montague, Malcolm Scott and a few others. The number of Vice-Presidents seems to have accelerated during recent years and one questions how the standards have dropped – do some of those who received awards after a lifetime of outstanding service feel cheated by those who happen to have been in a particular post for a year or two?

Add to that British League Player of the Season, Player of the Division, Player of the Month, Player of the Match, Player of the Point: And we have British League, Womens British League, Junior British League, Veterans British League and numerous National Leagues. Then, unfortunately, we have the Development Conference with numerous awards such that you are really unlucky if you attend and do not get one!

One recalls the Leslie Forrest awarded for work in the area of County Table Tennis Championships for which nomination has to be made by a county. Ever keen to give awards, one recipient (the late Tony Wickens) turned it down because he knew that he had not been properly nominated. A couple of years ago, another wrong award was made. That time the Honour was not turned down.

The awards made at the ETTA AGM are made by the National Council after nominations from the Honours Committee. I hope that the Honours Committee will have the conscience to only nominate people who fully justify the awards and not just make up the numbers.

## **ETTA WEBSITE**

In an effort to keep you informed, the ETTA put the summary of National Council meetings on their website.

However there are four National Meetings each calendar year and only two are shown for 2006. Never mind, I thought, when researching something from April 2006 as the summary for that meeting was listed. WRONG. The actual summary is for the meeting in April 2007.

Please don't tell us you are keeping us informed, then not supply the information.

*When signmakers go on strike, how do they make their point?*

## **PRESS COVERAGE AND THE WORLD TEAM CHAMPIONSHIPS - By Brian Halliday**

The late John Woodford provided a table tennis news service to readers of The Daily Telegraph over many years. He kept the flag flying when the rest of the National Press ignored us. With John's sad demise the Telegraph decided that our sport deserved absolutely no coverage whatsoever. Well almost.

Let us examine the position in a little more detail. I have tried to take a reasonable stance at meetings of our National Council in requesting time and again for a more dynamic approach to the publicity aspects relating to table tennis. Nobody would argue that we are well served at local level with volunteers churning out reams of copy on a weekly basis. The problem continues to lie with how we are treated nationally. In order to present you with some proof as to the present position I have kept a record of the Telegraph coverage from 1st January 2008 up to the present time of writing 28th February,

January was a complete blank (unless of course I bought the wrong regional edition), February almost followed suit. I waited with huge expectation for reports and results from the World Team Championships in China. To be fair they did provide some of the men's and women's results but no English results. I double-checked on the ETTA website and the ITTF website and there was the confirmation that England had sent teams and in fact were doing rather well. So well in fact that they were both unbeaten within their categories. If ever there was a time within the last four years when a little publicity was deserved it was surely now. But what did we get? You couldn't make it up -----

Daily Telegraph - Monday 25th February " TABLE TENNIS - Kosovo's table tennis players are set to make history in China this week by playing under the new flag in the first international sports competition since the country declared independence from Serbia earlier this month. 59 days of sports coverage and that's all we got.

This earth shattering news for English fans was obviously deemed more important than our men's and women's teams both having recorded excellent victories over Australia in the 1st round of matches. Both Drinkhall and Sibley remain unbeaten and this should be a cause for celebration. I know Malcolm Macfarlane, from his desk in China, lets the Hastings office have the results and these are duly promulgated on the website. What sticks in my gullet is that the man in the street would not have a clue that we are making a slight impact on the world stage.

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Yesterday I got in touch with Jim Beckley, the Vice Chairman with responsibility for Public Relations, to try to find out where we might be going wrong. Jim was very helpful explaining that the demands for space in the National Press are very heavy and it is not easy to turn the tide in our favour. I pointed out that a great opportunity of a story about England doing the double over Australia had been missed. Jim said that he would pursue the matter. I believe that Hastings are to blame for the fact that nobody had the wit to pick up the story, ring the sports room direct at the Telegraph, lay the law down in the nicest possible way, and try to get coverage so the man in the street at least knows we exist.

Today I read on the ITTF website that Kelly Sibley beat Ni Xia Lian in a 3-2 triumph against Luxembourg. Now I know that Xia Lian is a veteran and a little past her best, however she is still a world class player who not so long ago was European Champion. This is a victory to be saluted and undoubtedly the most significant by an English woman for many years. I wait with baited breath as to how this will be reported.

Jim Beckley and I have worked together on many occasions in the past. Jim listened to me, and if you think something within the publicity world is not quite right, he will listen to you. Don't be afraid to ring him on 0161 439 6001 or email him at [jim.beckley@ntworld.com](mailto:jim.beckley@ntworld.com)

PS. February 29th. Nothing in the Telegraph concerning Kelly Sibley's excellent win over Ni Xia Lian. Ah but wait a moment what is this I see? A paragraph reporting that Scotland have scaled the dizzy heights at the Worlds and had achieved a top 50 position. Maybe we have someone at Hastings with Scottish leanings. I think we should be told.

## **who do you think you are kidding ... Part 2**

From the ETTA Website :

"The World ranking lists have just been released by the ITTF and they see very promising improvement by young English players. Under 18's Paul Drinkhall has climbed to No.6 from No.10. Darius Knight is now 12th, previously 23rd and Gavin Evans has climbed a massive 45 places to reach No.46.

**A wonderful story.** If only this were the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth. That could be found in Brian Halliday's article (FTT16) which reported on the world junior championships. The "very promising improvements" (reported by ranking lists) were not matched on the table, as is so often the case. Paul won one match and lost one, Darius lost his only match, as did Gavin, who thus "climbed a massive 45 places"

A young lad in our club, obviously a future mathematician and wit said "If Evans could have lost just one more and climbed another massive 45 places he would have been No.1".

Our ETTA informant had forgotten, certainly forgotten to tell us, that on the 31st December up to half the population of the ranking list disappears, because they are a year older and so no longer qualified. The rest will "climb" as a result.

Whether "very promising improvement" should be based so exclusively on the birth certificates and whether facts should be so cheerfully ignored is another matter, but probably par for the course in the ethics of current ETTA spin.

One has, of course, noticed the hunt for junior trophies in the cause of being able to boast to the members otherwise starved of "good news". In the process undoubtedly talented players are being held back, as they should be playing mostly against seniors, as Bengtsson, Waldner and many others did when as young or younger.

To achieve real world class you need to take on the best in that range. You don't get better on aeroplanes travelling to junior tournaments which you have largely outgrown. As Brian has already said, one cannot blame the youngsters, but one feels less kind about the ones who have planned their careers so far, the assembled experts of the ETTA.

## **Comments upon previous reports**

### **Re Roy Norton's letter in FTT13**

I refer to Roy Norton's letter ( FTT13). He lists parts of your own devastating criticism of the present ETTA management and chair. This includes " .. positions given to his friends.... the ETTA Magazine has gone backwards.., have never heard a good word about the (ETTA) national coaching staff... "

After all that, he writes that Murdoch and Yule (how did he arrive on the scene ?)" are doing a GOOD job in difficult circumstances. " How did he arrive at two such opposite conclusions ? If this is "a good job" I would hate to be around for a bad one!

You have quite rightly identified chairman and management as our biggest problem. Like many of us, I was impressed by the Election Manifesto, which seemed to see things so clearly, notably the bloated committee structure, the poor marketing efforts, resulting from disappointing national teams, which deprived us of our main chance of television and national newspaper space. Apart from the enrolment of a few friends in the top posts, nothing changed and that is why the title "Dr Do-little" has stuck.

A handful of defenders of the regime have surfaced and in a democracy they have every right to express their praise. However, they also have the responsibility to tell us the origin of their satisfaction and list the achievements and qualities which have made them so happy about our sport and chairman. To be taken seriously, not to be seen as crawlers and toadies, they need to answer what FTT has covered and revealed..

One would like to know how those who have given us our dismal national teams remain in their well-paid Jobs, how they manage to get such poor results with juniors of real quality. Dr Do-little should explain why he watches all this without taking any action at all. When Brian Halliday raised this, the main response seemed to be to try to get his County to sack him as their National Councillor. So much for " freedom of speech ".. One could go on and on, but HOW could anyone describe all this as " doing a good job"?

Puzzled

### **SHOULD THE ETTA VICE-CHAIRMAN (SELECTION) KNOW THE PLAYERS?**

**In FTT20**, 'Still Puzzled' stated of Peter Charters "He is an experienced man who has returned to the Selection Department after a long absence" – being that he is now the ETTA Vice-Chairman in charge of Selection.

I was astonished at the last ETTA Annual General Meeting, when Mr Charters stood up and stated that he did not know what had become of two girls who had attended the National Academy at Holme Pierrepont.

Holme Pierrepont is the Centre held up as the ultimate Coaching Experience of the Alan Ransome chairmanship, yet the person in charge of International Selection admits he is unaware of what became of two of our elite girls.

Many people around the country know what happened to these players so surely Mr Charters should make it a priority to enquire. It should not be too difficult Mr Charters as one of the players (he mentioned) is the daughter of the ETTA Coaching Manager.

Keep up the good work.

## **TOURNAMENT FORMATS IN FTT20**

**Hi**

I wish to comment upon Dave Kelly's comments upon tournament formats, and state that his conclusions are flawed.

His problem of getting his son into tournaments is because of the number of players wishing to play and the size of the venues.

His suggestion of groups of 8 overlooks the fact that it requires 28 matches to be played in each group. His calculation of 2 hrs 20 minutes omits the fact that 4 tables would be required for that time.

So an entry of 64 players would require 16 tables for 4 hrs 40 minutes and that is just to play the groups in ONE event.

Sorry Mr Kelly but your suggestion could only be used if two events were held during the day. Unless you can find a venue suitable for far more tables at an economical price.

Graham

**Hello**

Dave Kelly has proposed a tournament format intended to give players more play in the tournaments. If a player wants to play more games, then he has to WIN his games. After all, it is a tournament.

If he wants a set number of games, then he can get that in matches or playing at his local club – at a large cost saving. Or go and play at the local sports centre and encourage the sports centre to supply more facilities.

However my point in writing was really to say that his son should accept defeat gracefully at the tournaments and then watch the remaining play; learn from the playing methods of the winners who are still competing in the tournament. One can learn a lot from watching the better players, listen and discuss tactics with them, and buy them a drink (mine's a pint).

Thanks,  
Preston Pete

**Dear Howard**

I really enjoy your newsletters – we need a bit of controversy now and again! I totally agree about the need to foster the girls' game. We're trying hard in the Dorset area but it's damnably difficult to keep girls interested when local competition is so thin and journey times and cost for tournaments are so high. As an aside, we're getting great support from our RDO – at least that bit of the ETTA is working!

Thanks and best wishes      Ralph Weeks

**Hello Howard,**

Just received FTT20.congratulations on the very good articles regarding English Table Tennis. Keep up the good work.

Best regards      Barry Meisel

**Val Murdoch:**

At last has answered some of the questions posed in FTT, notably Brian Halliday, as to how she managed to land her ITTF post and the excellent perks that go with this. All this was done via a letter to National Council. Interested readers may ask for a copy via the ETTA offices in Hastings. Val gives her qualifications as secretary of a local league and collection of subs in the Veterans Society. Laudable work, but there are plenty of women who have done rather more in the sport. The main question: why it was the chairman's wife rather than better qualified women in the sport who got the job remains unanswered. Similarly, one continues to ask why other women in the ETTA were not put forward and asked to apply, indeed why they were not even notified that this opportunity existed. The job includes free travel and accommodation at World Championships.

Val points out that the travel is paid for by a sporting quango via the British taxpayer (not the ETTA - which we have not heard suggested anyway) and the accommodation by the ITTF.

The job is concerned with advancing the women's game. Perhaps this applies only abroad. We have no record of any specific support of the women's game in England by Val other than playing in women's veterans tournaments. As FTT has pointed out, our junior girls seem to be getting a particular raw deal at the moment. We have not seen the support for them (in FTT) echoed by Val. We are, of course, sorry that she should be getting all this generally adverse publicity, but should she, the chairman's wife, have taken the job for which frankly, there are better candidates, who are members of the ETTA and who deserved the same opportunity.

Puzzled