

**Select Committee on Competition report to National Council**  
**29<sup>th</sup> June 2024**

Competition Committee  
Alan Ransome - Chairman  
Karen Tonge  
Jon Bayliss  
Lois Peake

Dear Councillors,

National Championship

I am pleased to be able to report that the arrangements this year for the National Under 10 – Under 13 Championships that took place at Aldersley in Wolverhampton on 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> June was a big improvement on last year, mainly due to the decision that was taken by the Competition Department to increase the number of participants in each of the events which resulted in a lot more play on the tables that were available and a good competition for our younger age players

The second National Championship that has taken place since our last meeting was the National Junior and Cadet Championships at Nottingham University on 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> May. This tournament continued with the restricted numbers and I know that there was significant disappointment amongst players who were ranked in the top 30 players but did not have the opportunity to play, partially due to the eligibility rules and that the competitions were limited to a maximum of 32 players in each singles event. This resulted in some of the doubles events only having a handful of entries which was less than satisfactory. Consideration should be given to following the decision to expand the Under 13 Championships to be able to develop to the National Cadet and Junior events in the same way. These competitions are to be split next year in any case, between Under 17 and Under 15 at one time and Under 19 and Under 21 at the other. The point here is that the number should not be limited in this way to create such a small entry.

Table Tennis England Control of the Competition's in England

The committee at its meeting has expressed concern about the situation regarding the governing body control of table tennis competitions in England. For most of the last century the arrangements that have been implemented by ETTA/TTE meant that the competitions have been well controlled in this country.

In addition to this the competition regulations delegate some control of competitions within their jurisdiction to the County Associations.

Recent developments are causing concern because it appears that the control of competitions is being diluted and this can be detrimental to the Association and the sport if it continues and expands.

The ITTF have always taken great care to ensure that they are controlling the competitions programme internationally. There have been challenges to this and they were overcome by

Adham Shahara when he was President of the ITTF and Adham was able to develop a competition programme around the globe which kept the ITTF in charge and this has been maintained with the more recently elected Presidents.

There are three examples that are moving against TTE control that have developed in recent weeks.

1) The Association has cancelled the good standing arrangements and this means that the VETTS Society and many other organisations are no longer recognised in this way. I was part of the negotiations team back in 1988 when the VETTS were in their early days and following a difficult negotiation due to John Preen's objections we managed to reach a good standing agreement which basically was to permit VETTS to go ahead with their tournaments, but to liaise with the ETTA and Calendar Working Party to agree the dates etc and other relevant matters.

This has worked very well for over 40 years until TTE decided to cancel good standing and tried to impose new conditions on the VETTS with regard to affiliation and fees which the VETTS have firmly rejected. Currently the VETTS have decided to go their own way and are, therefore, a big organisation with over 1000 members and is effectively outside the Association deciding their own direction without TTE having any input or apparent control.

There are also other good organisations which are in good standing such as University's and the BUCS tournament which attracts a very large entry. Presumably they are also no longer in good standing with TTE. There are many other examples such as government organisations who organise their own tournaments such as the military forces, Inland Revenue etc.

2) There has been a series of competitions in Herefordshire that have been organised by Simon Morgan who has been able to attract substantial sponsorship. These tournaments have been very popular, however there seems to be a difference between Simon Morgan and the Competition Department and as a result of this Simon has now broken away from TTE and is running his own events.

Simon is now operating his tournaments on the basis of an exclusion which is given to affiliated clubs to organise competitions for their own members. This was introduced to allow players who participate in the local clubs on a regular basis to play tournaments in the club without needing to go through all the procedures and meeting all the costs. It seems to have worked very well over a number of years. What Simon has done has decided to allow all of the players from all over the country to join his club for a £1 and, therefore, to run the tournament without any controls, and this was clearly never intended. Now this loophole, in our view, needs to be reviewed.

3) The 365 company, led by Steve Pound, have started to organise their own tournaments which are intended to attract, in particular, players mainly from Leagues who are continuing to use the 365 League system. 365 are calling it the Honeybee series. The first of these events is scheduled for the Bridge Leisure Centre in Horsham, Sussex on the 27<sup>th</sup> October, then 15<sup>th</sup> December and 20<sup>th</sup> April 2025.

With the 365 issue I do need to declare an interest because 365 are a competitor of Tees Sport and, therefore, this limits my participation in this. Any discussion with regard to this at Council should be handled by Karen Tonge on behalf of the Committee.

County Associations have always been required to approve competitions within their territory, however, if TTE lose control of this the control of the Counties would also be lost.

The Committee understand that current legislation may make it difficult to control other organisations running events, however if TTE work on the basis it is preferable for the sport to be in control of table tennis activities in this country and that the policy of this should be to work, as far as possible, with these people to ensure that they are operating inside the operation and guidance of the TTE Board.

#### 4 Star Tournaments

There has been significant comment on social media about the Associations decision to withdraw from running Grand Prix tournaments this season and replace them with Senior 4 Star tournaments. The Grand Prix tournaments in recent years have proved to be very popular, in a number of cases the entries have closed early due to the significant demand. These tournaments are clearly proving popular with the licenced players.

We can understand the Association decision is not to continue with Grand Prix tournaments and to try to replace them with Senior 4 Star events. While we do not have the precise details, our understanding is that the Grand Prix events are running on a significant deficit and were taking a great deal of competition staff time to organise. The benefit of the 4 Star tournament is that if they can run successfully they are returning the responsibility of running these tournaments to County Association and/or Leagues or Clubs who are ready to take on the task. Therefore, helping to promote the activities for local volunteers who have an interest in this aspect of the Associations activities and this is very positive.

The problems is that Open tournaments which were of a National type had declined and because it was very difficult to run them with the costs involved at a break even cost. It means that County Associations and local leagues were running them and losing funds from the organisation which were often small and, therefore, were not viable from this perspective.

Our understanding is that the Association has been offering an underwriting subsidy to affiliated organisations who are interested in running 4 Star tournament mitigating the costs and, hopefully, eliminating the loss. However, there is a level to the subsidy being offered by TTE which means that there is a risk to the local Association in running the events if the loss is higher than the subsidy offered.

At the moment, I understand from our discussions with affiliated organisations who are looking to run these tournaments. The Cambridge 4 Star is going ahead in August but whether this project will be successful or not remains to be seen. What would improve the likelihood of success was the Association prepared to give unlimited underwrite but this could only happen after budgets had been discussed and agreed between an organiser and the Association in order to control this cost.

### 1 Star and 2 Star Tournaments

The Committee is pleased to see that there has been a change in policy from the original Competition Review which allocated one day, per month, per region for 1 Star and 2 Star competitions to be run on a regional basis. The popularity of these competitions which are run in the main by clubs or entrepreneurs operating within clubs has been growing and this has been providing a very good source of regional and local competitions at all levels within England and the decision to allow the competitions subject to the Calendar Working Party approval to run on the dates they request, is a big step in the right direction. In our view this relaxation of the dates will ensure that the tournament competitions programme at these local and regional levels will continue to thrive.

### Junior British League for Girl Players

The Association has established up to now four Pathway Development Centres for 8 to 14 year olds, and as a result of this a new batch of young players is starting on the ladder to improve the England team and England played at international level which is clearly a good policy.

It has been identified that the competition programme for Cadet players needs significant improvement. It is clear that the coaching and training programme has improved significantly over the last 2 years but if we are going to be successful and have international teams that return to the top 10 in Europe then we do need the competition programme to be more effective.

The area of biggest concern in terms of performance is the cadet girls' level where the Selection Committee this year have decided that the players are not at the right standard to send a team to the European Youth Championship in Sweden in July. In addition to that our Under 13 team finished outside the top 20 in the European Competition for that age group. For this age level there needs to be a big improvement in the competition programme to help Gavin Evans and his coaches to improve our position.

One problem that has been identified within the Pathway Development Centre clubs has also been discussed at the Development Advisory Committee is that there has been a block which stops girls who are playing in the Junior British League from continuing to play in the National Junior League and the National Cadet League mixed leagues. This is a block which is unhelpful with the improvement of young girl players. A cadet playing in the NCL and NJL has 8 days of good play in their local area each season and would have 4 days at the central venue for the JBL. As now they have to choose one or the other and for players of this standard this should not be necessary when their standard of play would benefit from playing in both.

The reason that this block was introduced, it was felt that if Junior British League players were to play in the National Junior and Cadet leagues they would be too strong and, therefore, this would spoil the competition, and this is correct. In our view, this only applies to boys. Girls in the JBL who then play in the mixed NCL and NJL would not be too strong, particularly if say the top 15 or 20 ranked girls were excluded.

We really do need a good competition programme for our cadets. There are some good competitions including County Championships and National Cadet Championships and the 4 Star tournaments, but this clearly is not enough. Therefore, to allow the girls from the

National Cadet and National Junior Leagues to play in the Junior British League would appear a sensible move in the right direction.

This has been discussed and has been positively received, the only issue is the timing. Is it possible to allow it for the coming season or will it be delayed until 2025-2026 season?

Cadet British League for 2025-2026

A new Cadet British League would be helpful in terms of solving the problem that Gavin and his team have with a weak competition programme in England. Consideration should be given to the Cadet British League running along the same lines as Junior British League, and this would be helpful to improve both boys and girl's standard and this should be considered for the 2025-2026 season.

**Alan Ransome**  
**Chairman**  
**Select Committee on Competitions**  
**14<sup>th</sup> June 2024**