

Table Tennis Supports People with Parkinson's

Theme: physical wellbeing, long term health conditions

Defining the Issue

Parkinson's disease is a progressive neurological condition effecting around 145,000 people in the UK, with symptoms including tremors, slow movement, and stiff, inflexible muscles. In 2020, researchers at Fukuoka University in Japan found that playing table tennis may help alleviate motor symptoms of Parkinson's disease. The benefits of table tennis for people with Parkinson's are being advocated and experienced by a growing group of players, this is the story of *People with Parkinson's*.

Background Information

Andrew was diagnosed with early onset Parkinson's disease in 2010 at the age of 44. Having played table tennis for many years, Andrew was keen to continue his participation despite his diagnosis.

Andrew's longstanding commitment to table tennis has resulted in him becoming a UK ambassador for PingPongParkinson, a not-for-profit organisation based in New York, who aim to create a global sports movement that is inclusive and supportive of people with a Parkinson's diagnosis.

Andrew's Story

Andrew created Parkinson's Table Tennis UK (PDTTUK), with the aim to create a team to compete at the ITTF Parkinson World Table Tennis Championships (PWTTC), held in Berlin in September 2021. In preparation for the World Championships, Andrew together with volunteers from PDTTUK collaborated with Table Tennis England, St Neots TTC and 'Mind to Muscle' to host the UK's first

PingPongParkinson National Championship at St Neots TTC in August 2021. The event saw 24 players from across the country compete, with many of the players meeting for the first time. Andrew came away from the event with a silver medal and also managed to offer support from fundraising to any medal winners at the event to attend the PWTTC in Berlin 3 weeks later. Four medal winners were supported, three of which attended the German Open in Nordhorn 10 days before the World Championships. Success continued in Nordhorn, with every player winning a medal.



In September 2021, a team of 14 people with Parkinson's represented the UK at the PWTTTC in Berlin, including 7 English representatives. The UK team made their mark on the world stage, coming away with 2 Gold medals, 1 Silver medal and 5 Bronze medals.

As well as medal success, Andrew makes note of the incredible atmosphere at the event, which made the occasion feel even more special;

"The opening ceremony was fantastic, being an ITTF official tournament and just as impressive as any Paralympic event. There was such an amazing buzz and comradery throughout the whole tournament, despite the competitive element. Everyone there just wanted to play table tennis, whatever the result."

Since returning from Berlin, Andrew has been working towards hosting a PingPongParkinson National Championship event in 2022 and is holding informal weekly table tennis sessions for people with Parkinson's at Britannia Table Tennis Club in Ipswich.

Jan's Story

Jan started playing table tennis as a child, after being introduced to the sport through her parents, progressing to play in her local league as a teenager. At the age of 29, Jan stopped playing table tennis and squash took over as her main sport. Another 25 years past before Jan picked up a table tennis bat again.



In 2012 Jan was diagnosed with Parkinson's disease. She wasn't taking part in any regular sport or physical activity, and in 2015 decided that she needed to be more active for her physical and mental wellbeing – so she decided to dust off her old table tennis bat. After visiting her old club in Essex and getting some coaching sessions under her belt, she was back to her old playing standard in a matter of weeks.

Since returning to table tennis, Jan now plays twice a week in league matches and plays to a higher standard than she ever has. Jan also qualified as a Level One table tennis coach herself, helping others to improve their game and become the best player they could be.

In summer 2021 Jan saw an advertisement for a table tennis session for people with Parkinson's in Ipswich. After attending Jan then competed in the PingPongParkinson UK National Championships in August 2021, followed by representing England at the ITTF Parkinson World Table Tennis Championships. Jan came away with a Gold, Silver and Bronze medal and the title of Ladies World Champion.

"Parkinson's has taken many things away from me, but finally I had through Parkinson's fulfilled my lifelong personal objective of becoming a great TT player, the best of the best"

Jan hopes to continue playing and improving for as long as possible, as well as looking into becoming a Women and Girls Ambassador and completing her Level 2 coaching qualification.

"When I'm playing I'm Jan the table tennis player, not Jan the person with Parkinson's"

Gary's Story

Gary was diagnosed with Parkinson's disease after his hand froze during a finance exam. After his condition deteriorated to a point where he could not function properly, Gary was selected for neurological surgery which now allows him some semblance of life.

Just as Gary was regaining confidence, the COVID-19 pandemic hit, during which he realised his social circle had diminished since his diagnosis. This led to Gary suffering with depression, which he now manages with medication and meditation tools. During the pandemic, Gary saw an advertisement for a table tennis session for people with Parkinson's at a local club. Having played table tennis when he was younger, Gary was eager to get back into the sport, hoping to get more social interaction and to improve his health, which had deteriorated to a point where he struggled with general daily activities.



Gary aims to play table tennis at least once a week, depending on his Parkinson's as he can suffer with extreme fatigue.

He plays at Parkinson's sessions at clubs in Colchester and Ipswich and competed at the inaugural PingPongParkinson National Championships in August 2021, winning one category and coming runner up in another. He describes his attendance at the event as;

"... a very emotional and uplifting experience. When I walked through the door, I saw competitors wanting to win their games and not people with Parkinson's. They had left their condition at the door and for that one day all they had on their mind was to play table tennis to the best of their ability"

Gary finds that playing table tennis helps to reduce his fatigue symptoms and he enjoys socialising with others – particularly when playing doubles - and playing to a reasonable standard whilst managing his mobility and dexterity limitations. Gary is looking forward to playing at the next National Championships event and hopes to represent the UK at the next ITTF World Parkinson's Championships in September 2022, to be held in Croatia.

