

## **Paper to National Council on Performance – Comments by Don Parker**

I have now been a member of the TTE Board for just over six months and during that time, I have been welcomed and worked closely with the TTE Performance Team. I have spent all my working life in the elite performance environment with initially the England table tennis team, then the Olympics with Team GB and finally the Commonwealth Games with Team England. Over the last forty years, it has been my privilege to observe first class performance teams across many sports, win medals at the highest levels.

My initial impression is that Simon Mills has brought together a dedicated, well balanced and talented Performance Team who have the necessary skills to develop our players to their full potential. This Performance Team work extremely well together, make collective decisions and are willing to look outside the sport. Communications by the Performance Team has been applauded by our members in recent months. The two excellent appointments to the Performance Team, during my time as a Board member, have been made in an open and transparent way. I have been allowed and indeed encouraged to check and challenge decisions to which they have responded very positively. Technical Director Alan Cooke has overseen the development of an excellent performance pathway that is continually being refined and improved.

Peter Charters Performance paper has recently been circulated and the Board has recently discussed the significant work done by MAG looking at this topic. Peter's experience in ranking and selection issues is unparalleled. He has provided National Council with a very insightful overview of the TTE performance programme, identifying strengths and weaknesses. Not surprisingly, I fully support the need for strong England teams. The paper is very timely, as it coincides with an in-depth meeting with the Performance Team and the Members Advisory Group (MAG). I have been actively involved in that co-operative process and have contributed to the subsequent report.

Following a 2-hour discussion with the Performance Team, MAG has produced a paper with its suggestions. These have been agreed with the Performance Team and subsequently by the Board at its December meeting. The Board also agreed that the next steps should be an Action Plan prepared by the Performance Team explaining how the recommendations will be implemented. The Action Plan will in turn provide the basis for developing a series of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) so that the implementation of the Action Plan can be monitored by all.

So that National Councillors can see for themselves what is in the MAG paper it has been distributed to National Councillors ahead of the meeting. However, I would ask that you do not circulate the MAG paper more widely until it is published on the TTE website later this month.

Many of the comments raised by Peter in his paper are not surprisingly key suggestions in the MAG report and are already being addressed by the Performance Team. These include:

- self-funding
- the importance of strengthening domestic competition
- building stronger links with clubs
- ensuring consistency in the development of young players by engaging with coaches
- increase in the number of quality hours on the table each week for our elite youngsters
- ensuring a high level of participation in training squads by the best young players.

The MAG report also covers some wider issues, which again are being addressed by the Performance Team, focusing particularly on communications including:

- greater transparency over the performance pathway
- strengthening personal mentoring alongside proactive engagement with parents
- ensuring clear feedback from training sessions to the squad coaches
- making information regularly available
- broadening the base of players and coaches
- using new technology to facilitate communication and engagement

One issue that is in Peter's paper that does not feature in the MAG report is the important area of ranking and selection policies. Peter questions the ITTF ranking override for juniors and cadets on the TTE ranking list. I believe the Performance Team will continue to consider this as part of their ongoing development of the programme. As Peter rightly notes, the appeals process against non-selection has led to the development of more evidence-based, quantifiable criteria for selection. This has inevitably led to a reduction in the subjective element available to coaches and selectors. Again the Performance Team continue to evaluate the balance between subjective and objective criteria and I will also ensure that this discussion carries on.

It is most appropriate that both the MAG report and Peter's paper cover the importance of the forthcoming competition review. This review is for table tennis players of all ages and levels however, for the performance element, it is so important that we have 'joined up' thinking across our tournaments, calendar and ranking committees, so that our players and coaches can plan for maximum improvement. The performance team should play an enormous part in this process.

The MAG Report and the associated Action Plan will be formally published in due course. No doubt these will be subject to discussion within the table tennis community, particularly by coaches, clubs and our top young players and their parents. That discussion will be welcome and seen as part of the on-going process of building strong England teams. As one of the wise men of table tennis, Peter's paper is a very welcome contribution to that discussion. It is my recommendation that with the guidance of the MAG report and the Peter Charter's paper, the Performance Team should be supported by all our table tennis family.

Don Parker  
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