

**HOW CAN WE RETAIN MORE  
FEMALE PLAYERS IN THE  
18 -30 GROUP & CREATE  
LONG LASTING POSITIVE  
EXPERIENCES?**



# HOUSEKEEPING

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- Stay on mute if not talking
- Discussion points – raise hand
- Questions – add to the chat box (to discuss at the end)



# OVERVIEW OF THE PROJECT

The overarching aim of this research was to explore female player experience (from the social to high-performance level) in the English system within the **18-30 age bracket**. Focus areas included:

- What assists female players in the 18-30 age group to have long-lasting positive experiences in the sport?
- What factors lead to female players in the 18-30 age group to drop out from the sport or have negative experiences?
- What competitions do female players in the 18-30 age group enjoy and want to play in?

## 2 parts to the research:

**Survey** – 122 female players

**Focus Groups** – 3 female player groups and 2 coach groups



# TODAY'S SESSION

- **Provide overview of key findings**
  - What helps engagement?
  - What hinders engagement?
- Help you to **reflect and consider what you can do in your role** to keep more females playing and have positive experiences in the sport



## Poll

**What is your current role?**

**Do you work with female players in the 18-30 age group?**

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# SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS



# WHY DO FEMALE PLAYERS PLAY TABLE TENNIS?

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**Discussion** - what are the main motives for females in the 18-30 age group to play table tennis?

THE SOCIAL SIDE OF THE SPORT

FRIENDSHIPS AND TEAMMATES

POSITIVE COACH RELATIONSHIPS

GIVING BACK TO THE SPORT IN OTHER WAYS

ENJOYMENT OF THE SPORT AND CHALLENGING SELF

TO PLAY FOR ENGLAND/BE A HIGH-PERFORMING PLAYER

PHYSICAL AND MENTAL WELLBEING BENEFITS

ENVIRONMENTS WHERE TABLE TENNIS FITS ALONGSIDE WORK & EDUCATION COMMITMENTS

**THE TOP REASONS FEMALE PLAYERS PLAY  
TABLE TENNIS ARE ALL **INTRINSIC****

# FEMALE PLAYERS ARE RELATIONSHIP DRIVEN... IT IS THE SOCIAL SIDE OF THE GAME THEY VALUE THE MOST

**49%** start playing because of family connections

Female players in the 18-30 age group are **twice** as likely to still be actively playing if they have family who play.

- Social factors consistently emerged as one of the top reasons behind why players engaged in the sport
- When female players in this group have positive relationships, they thrive, and their connection to the sport strengthens.
- When female players are working towards something as squad, they felt a sense of unity and increased motivation to excel.
- Key factor behind why players reengage.
- Team competitions are favoured over individual.

“

It's so much more than table tennis for them. The socialising is huge. coach

”



“

I suppose that's the one reason I like the team county tournaments where you go as a team from the county. social player

”

# GETTING INVOLVED IN AREAS OUTSIDE OF PLAYING STRENGTHENS FEMALE PLAYERS CONNECTION TO THE SPORT... AND LENGTHENS THEIR PLAYING CAREERS

- Female players spoke about getting involved in other activities whilst they were still playing that helped to increase their connectivity to the sport.
- This included activities such as being on a university club committee, helping to organise events, volunteering at their local club in the kitchen for example, and coaching.
- Players told us about how helping out in other areas of the sport helped them realise how much they loved table tennis.
- The survey showed us that **when players stop playing table tennis, the majority lose their connection to the sport**, and don't engage in any other areas.

“

**I got involved in the committee positions and helping to organise the sessions and to organise other opportunities in making the club better and I suppose that then made me play more and find the enjoyment again and I'm really enjoying it. It's more like that, really... It made me realise why I like the sport so much. **Elite player****

”

**ONLY 5 OUT OF 47 PLAYERS THAT NO LONGER PLAY ARE OR HAVE BEEN INVOLVED IN OTHER AREAS OF THE SPORT**

**When female players in this age group stop playing, they are losing connection with the sport.**



# WHAT AGE DO FEMALE PLAYERS STOP PLAYING?



**Poll** - what do you think the average age is that female players between 18-30 stop playing table tennis? (Across all levels)

**Discussion** - Does the age of drop out vary depending on the level of the player?

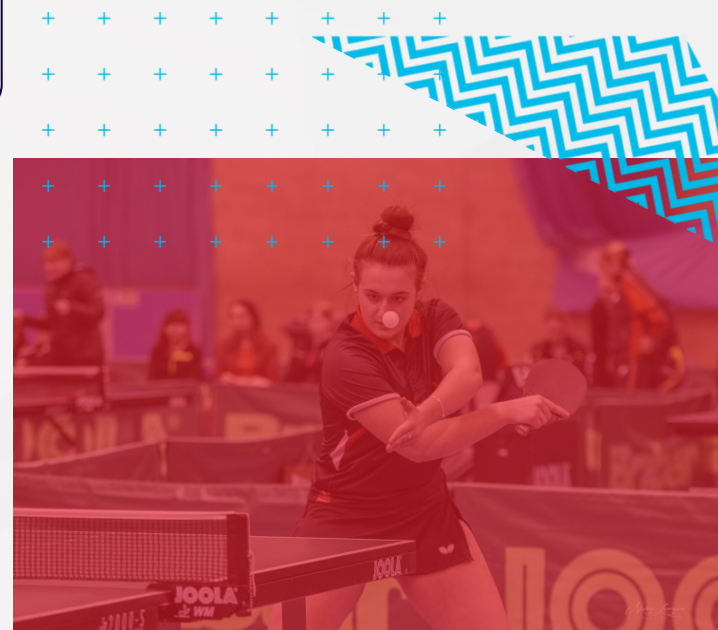
Yes...the more elite a player becomes, the earlier they drop out from the sport.

**Why is this?** A common theme that is seen across many sports, as talented athletes try to navigate the challenging junior to senior transition. In combination with multiple life transitions, there is the requirement for additional support, that is less essential at a more social sport level.

Let's unpick exactly why so few females play into their twenties...

# 19.5yrs

The average age that female players (all levels) dropped out from the sport



## **WHAT LEADS FEMALE PLAYERS AGED 18-30 TO STOP PLAYING OR HAVE NEGATIVE EXPERIENCES?**

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**EDUCATION AND WORK COMMITMENTS ARE A BARRIER**

**LOSS OF INTEREST IN THE SPORT**

**LIMITED FEMALE BAME REPRESENTATION**

**MALE DOMINATED CULTURE & ENVIRONMENTS**

**UNCLEAR ABOUT OPPORTUNITIES AS A SENIOR PLAYER & LACK OF GUIDANCE**

**DROP IN TRAINING AND COMPETITION OPPORTUNITIES AFTER THE JUNIOR LEVEL**

**TABLE TENNIS CLOTHING FOR WOMEN IS NOT APPEALING**

**OPPORTUNITIES AT THE U21 LEVEL ARE LIMITED**

**LIMITED UNIVERSITY PATHWAYS & OPPORTUNITIES**

**POOR RELATIONSHIPS WITH COACHES**

**LACK OF PROFESSIONAL OPPORTUNITIES**

**FEMALE PLAYERS DON'T FEEL VALUED**

**LIMITED ACCESS TO ADULT ONLY AND FEMALE ONLY SESSIONS**

# WHEN LEAVING THE JUNIOR LEVEL...FEMALE PLAYERS EXPERIENCE A DROP IN OPPORTUNITIES & LACK GUIDANCE

## Post-junior female training environments are limited

- Training opportunities dropped significantly
- Females want to play with people of a **similar age and with other females**
- Social level players are put off by all-male environments
- Training and competing against junior players is demotivating and leads to drop out
- Females want more support to bridge the gap (knowledge and more age groups)

## Females in the 18-30 group don't feel valued

Female players are put off engaging in the sport because they don't feel that their role in the sport is valued. Players suggested:

- Feeling like the men's game is consistently prioritised.
- There isn't much effort to keep women in this age group involved in the sport.
- Players described feeling not respected by their male counterparts, hearing derogatory comments, and generally feeling quite uncomfortable.

“

**I would consider playing again, but it's just trying to find a club where I am...they're either super competitive or quite far out. I don't want to go on a Saturday morning to play table tennis with 10-year-olds, and it's designed for kids. social player**

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# EDUCATIONAL COMMITMENTS ARE ONE OF THE BIGGEST BARRIERS TO FEMALE ENGAGEMENT IN THE 18-30 GROUP

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The opportunity to combine education with table tennis commitments (at all levels) is important for several reasons...

This was one of the most topical areas discussed throughout the focus groups, with players and coaches stating:

- Many university environments don't offer table tennis specific support (e.g., coaching).
- There are not enough opportunities for females across universities to train and compete.
- Formal partnerships that once existed between universities no longer do.
- Few universities have good facilities, links to clubs, opportunities for different types of players, female only sessions, coaching opportunities

**Players of all levels experienced a 'gradual drop out' through university.**

**Higher Education is an untapped resource.**



**Maybe Table Tennis England needs to put more effort into trying to support and develop more environments where they can do both. So not just at one or two universities, but universities all over the country. Try and build a bit of a community. survey**



# **STRONG COACH-ATHLETE RELATIONSHIPS ARE ESSENTIAL FOR FEMALE PLAYERS... WHEN THEY ARE POOR, THIS CAN LEAD TO DROP OUT**

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## **Poor coach relationships**

Female players spoke about how important their relationship was with their coach. When players:

- moved away from their home clubs and lost their relationship with their coach.
- felt their coach was not interested in other aspects of their lives (whole person focus)
- did not feel they had a close relationship with their coach.

This created negative experiences for players.

**Social, regional, and elite players all expressed how important it is to have positive relationships with people in table tennis, that care and support your performance and personal development.**

“

**Like that communication element and that developing relationships and bonds with the players outside of them just turning up for your tournament and actually knowing them as people and being able to foster those relationships. [Elite player](#)**

”

# WHAT COMPETITIVE EVENTS DO FEMALE PLAYERS WANT?

## Reasons players do not enter competitions anymore:

- Too expensive for this population (students and early career)
- Didn't want to play against juniors
- Getting bored of playing the same people
- Limited time because of education work commitments
- Not any events local to them
- Players expressed how local league may not be suitable for this age group
- Many events have lost their appeal

## Players wanted to see:

- More mixed events
- More restricted age group events
- More team-style events
- More events close to and hosted at universities
- More cheap and local events
- More elite female events

**97%** OF PLAYERS SAID

**YES, THEY WANT TO PLAY  
COMPETITIONS AGAIN ONE DAY**

**ONLY 18%** OF PLAYERS THAT PLAY IN EVENTS WERE  
**24 YRS and over, SUGGESTING PLAYERS DROP OFF FROM  
PLAYING EVENTS AS THEY MOVE TOWARDS 30**



# ACTIONS YOU COULD TAKE TO IMPROVE FEMALE PLAYER RETENTION AND EXPERIENCE



# WHAT CAN YOU DO TO IMPROVE FEMALE ENGAGEMENT IN THE 18-30 GROUP?

## 1. SEEK REGULAR FEEDBACK

- Are you monitoring the goals of your female players?
- Do the opportunities you provide meet player needs?

“ **It's taken a very long (overly long) time for someone to actually ask the opinion of females and attempt to change the retention rates.** ”  
Survey

## 3. SUPPORT THE FEMALE PLAYER TRANSITION FROM JUNIOR TO SENIOR

- What can you do to upskill your knowledge to effectively support female player transition to the senior level?
  - Tactical/physical/psychological/competition opportunities
  - Consider how their support might change (e.g., lose TTE support, gain support from university)

## 2. PUT ON FEMALE ONLY ADULT SESSIONS

- Do you offer female only sessions for those over 18?
- How well advertised are these sessions?
- Do you offer sessions to players of different levels? Beginner vs. advanced.
- Do you offer social opportunities?
- Consider female only camps and training days – link with other clubs

“ **I feel when you're older, so when I go back home, there's the junior sessions, but there's not really adult coaching sessions, which I think is needed.** ”  
Regional player





# WHAT CAN YOU DO TO IMPROVE FEMALE ENGAGEMENT IN THE 18-30 GROUP?

## 4. BUILD AWARENESS OF WIDER LIFESTYLE DEMANDS

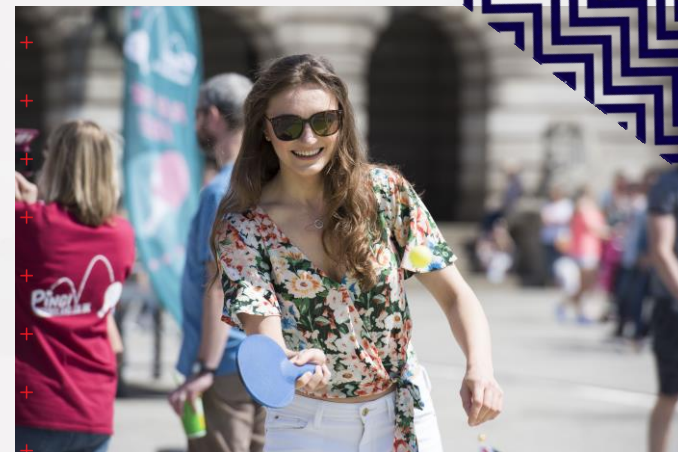
- As a coach, what awareness do you have of wider lifestyle demands of your players?
  - Do you understand university options?
  - Do you know what challenges players might face managing table tennis with education?
  - Do you understand the different transitions players might face?
  - Consider CPD opportunities - the 1<sup>st</sup>4Sport Understanding an Athlete's Lifestyle Level 2 course is ideal for a coach population.

## 6. DO THE EVENTS YOU PUT ON SUIT THE NEEDS OF FEMALE 18-30 PLAYERS?

- Consider hosting club events that are:
  - Team/doubles events
  - Restricted (i.e., must be over 18)
  - Value for money
  - Female only or mixed
  - Meet player level
  - Linked with other local clubs

## 5. FOSTER STRONG COACH-ATHLETE RELATIONSHIPS

- As a coach, consider how you foster relationships with players in this age group compared to male players.
  - Do you foster a 'whole person approach'?
  - What areas do you support them in outside of table tennis?
  - Support achievements on and off the table



# WHAT CAN YOU DO TO IMPROVE FEMALE ENGAGEMENT IN THE 18-30 GROUP?

## 7. USE YOUR 18-30 FEMALE PLAYERS TO INSPIRE THE NEXT GENERATION

- Female players want more female role models
  - This generation of players (18-30) are key to inspiring and motivating young up and coming players or beginners in the sport.
  - Bring experienced female players into your clubs to inspire younger players.

## 9. REACH OUT TO LOCAL UNIVERSITIES

- Many female players sit in university environments.
- Link with universities to create competitive and training opportunities for female players.

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**We as a club try and reach out to universities - it's building that bridge. Coach**

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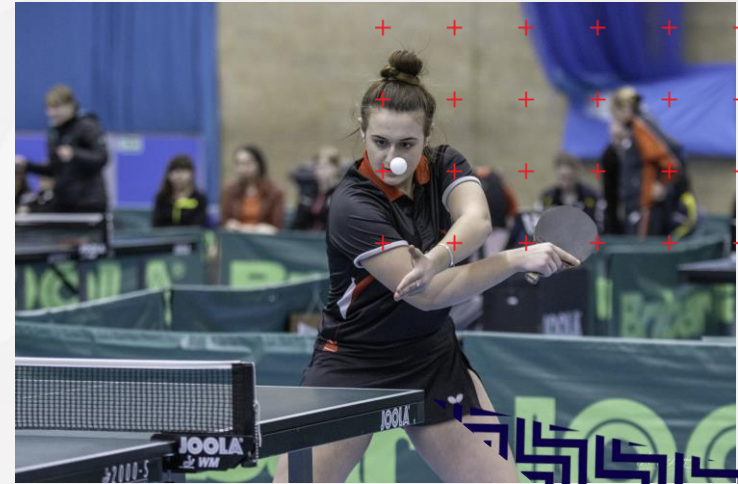
## 8. HELP PLAYERS GET INTO AREAS OUTSIDE OF PLAYING BEFORE THEY LEAVE THE SPORT

- Encourage female players in the 18-30 group to get into coaching/officiating
- Invite these players onto committees
- Establish female 'player reps' in your clubs as a point of contact



# WHAT OTHER RECOMMENDATIONS DID WE MAKE FOR TTE?

- **UPDATE GUIDANCE DOCUMENTS FOR FEMALE PLAYERS**
- **DEVELOP A NETWORK FOR FEMALE PLAYERS**
- **PROMOTE AND BUILD UNIVERSITY PATHWAYS FOR FEMALE PLAYERS**
- **INTRODUCE AND ADAPT COAD EDUCATION**
- **PROVIDE FOR OPPORTUNITIES FOR FEMALES TO FEEDBACK**
- **USE THE EXPERTISE OF THE FEMALE PLAYER BASE**
- **PROVIDE MORE SUPPORT FOR HIGH-LEVEL PLAYERS UNDERTAKING TRANSITIONS**
- **ADAPT THE COMPETITION OFFER**
- **DEVELOP MORE AGE GROUP SQUADS (E.G., U21)**
- **PROMOTE THE STORIES AND ACHIEVEMENTS OF FEMALE PLAYERS BOTH IN AND OUT OF TABLE TENNIS**
- **OFFER MORE COACHING COURSES FOR THE 18-30 FEMALE GROUP**



**WHAT ARE YOUR  
TAKE HOME  
MESSAGES?**

**ANY QUESTIONS?**

