



Chairman's Message – March 2018

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Recently we have witnessed some electrifying table tennis on home soil as we took over the iconic Copper Box Arena on London's Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park.

More than 600 individual matches were staged across 11 days of competition, beginning with the ITTF Team World Cup and ending with the PG Mutual National Championships. Thousands of spectators and hundreds of players, from local schoolchildren up to elite athletes, had the chance to experience table tennis at a world-class venue.

Hosting the ITTF Team World Cup was a great moment for Table Tennis England. When we started discussions with the ITTF about hosting the event our aims were threefold:

- Giving the England teams the opportunity to compete in a major international event in front of a home crowd, bearing in mind that the men's team had qualified by right due to winning the bronze medal in Kuala Lumpur in 2016.
- Providing an opportunity to showcase the very best of the world's elite to spectators – existing table tennis fans and new ones – and also attract new volunteers to the sport.
- Providing an opportunity to engage the local community in East London.

We met those aims in style – the women's team competed well and will go to the Commonwealth Games ready to meet the likes of Singapore again. The men, yet again, raised their game for the big stage and brought home a bronze medal.

We sold 7,500 tickets, and gave away 2,500 to local schools who provided a fantastic atmosphere on Thursday and Friday and made the most of the fan engagement tables.

The arena was at 70–80% capacity every day and sold out for the Finals on the Sunday. The atmosphere was electric and a really good show was put on – proving that major events are as much about entertainment as the

sport itself.

And finally, as well as providing 2,500 tickets to local school children we received a grant from the Mayor of London's office to delivery legacy work in East London proving that hosting a major event is one way to kick-start interest in a sport. Read more about it here.....(legacy story and the ITTF letter)

With the date for all National Championships in Europe being set by the ETTU to be the weekend immediately after the Team World Cup, we entered into negotiations with the Copper Box Arena as it made sense to use the same venue and give our domestic championships an international-standard venue.

In the three days between the two events, which the Copper Box gifted us for free to allow us to stage other events, England hosted Norway and Bosnia-Herzegovina in Round 1 European Championship matches, winning both; Corporate Table Tennis hosted a finals event and the East London zonal schools competition was held.

Sometimes opportunities come your way and you need to try something new. After sell-out finals days for the PG Mutual National Championships in 2016 (Hatfield) and 2017 (Nottingham) would we see a similar response to the Copper Box?

Unfortunately, ticket sales were down due to demand for the Team World Cup and possibly the location of London. We lost even more spectators to the wintery weather dominating the country during the event.

Of course, we would have liked a packed stadium and more atmosphere and we will be looking into this during our event debrief.

We negotiated a broadcast deal with the BBC for the Team World Cup and the PG Mutual National Championships through their new Online Sport Live Stream channel and for the first time it is possible to get verifiable broadcast data.

Just under 65,000 unique viewers were registered during the National Championships, despite being up against World Indoor Athletics from Birmingham and the Track Cycling World Cup, both available on the BBC. The BBC has described the viewing stats as excellent and told us that they compare favourably with other events they have shown.

We continually consider the delivery of major events and we know that there is some debate about the location, format and style of the National Championships. We welcome constructive comments and informed debate and all these factors will be considered in the coming months as we plan the upcoming calendar.

Part of our Mission 2025 is to increase the visibility and promotion of table tennis. Hosting events like the ITTF Team World Cup do just that.

The National Championships is the pinnacle event of the domestic calendar. It is right that it should be a showcase event but we need to ensure it meets the needs of both participants and spectators.

If we try something different that should be welcomed, but if it doesn't work then we can and will reconsider.

If we want to move the best of English table tennis from being a sports hall sport to a sports arena sport then we need to be bold, but it will take time. Change and improvement doesn't come about by doing the same as you've always done.

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