



## Training base revamp marks start of Paralympic journey

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The British Para Table Tennis Team's newly designed training facility at the English Institute of Sport in Sheffield was officially opened today by the British Paralympic Association's Director of Sport, Penny Briscoe OBE.

With the 2020 Paralympic Games less than two years away, 2019 marks the start of the athletes' journey to Tokyo and the team's training hall has undergone a transformation designed to inspire the athletes as they begin the process of qualification for 2020 this year.

Using images of previous Paralympic medal winners and past results dating back to the first Games in 1960, the team now has an identity that connects everyone with what it represents and highlights the evolution of Para table tennis.

Bringing together the values that are important to the athletes and staff, the new-look training hall aims to maintain the athletes' levels of commitment and pride in representing their country and provide the motivation to work hard every time they come into the hall for an opportunity to compete in the Paralympic Games in 2020 and the chance to add their names to the distinguished honours board.

"Table tennis is a sport that demands hours in the training hall at the highest level," said BPTT Performance Director Gorazd Vecko. "Our athletes train six hours a day on the table and so it is important that we create an environment that helps them to focus and inspires them to give 100% to every training session.

"We have a very talented squad of athletes who understand that the success they want will only be achieved through hard work and we will be doing everything we can over the next 18 months to help them produce the best possible results at the Paralympic Games in Tokyo."



The Great Britain squad in the hall (picture by Andy Chubb)

With a 15-strong Performance Squad and a number of promising Pathway Squad players including Commonwealth bronze medallist Josh Stacey, the team will be hoping to qualify as many athletes as possible to compete in Tokyo after taking a squad of 13 to Rio in 2016.

Will Bayley (men's class 7) and Rob Davies (men's class 1) will be bidding to defend the titles they won in Rio while Ross Wilson (men's class 8) will be hoping to add the Paralympic title to the World and Commonwealth crowns he won in 2018.

The 2019 season begins with the Lignano Master Open in Italy in March and the athletes' major target this year is the European Championships in Sweden in September. The qualification period for Tokyo finishes on March 31, 2020 and the athletes will be looking to achieve the necessary world ranking in their class to secure their chance to be selected by ParalympicsGB for Tokyo.

"It takes hours and hours of dedicated training to put yourself in contention for selection to the Paralympic Games," said Briscoe, who will be Chef de Mission for ParalympicsGB in Tokyo, "so it's absolutely crucial to be in the right environment and surrounded by the very best support.

"It's fantastic to be here today with athletes and staff and to both acknowledge the impressive track record of this sport and to look ahead to the next Games in just under 600 days, where I hope many of the athletes here today will have the opportunity to shine."

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