



Gavin Evans takes coaching reins for Olympic campaign

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Gavin Evans is stepping into the breach as England and GB men's captain and coach following the departure of Marcus Sjöberg.

Evans has been temporarily drafted in on secondment from Grantham College, initially until the end of January – a period which includes the Olympic Team Qualification process – but with an option to continue through to the end of the Tokyo 2020 Olympics.

He remains an employee of the college but his additional role will be funded through the Aspiration Fund, which UK Sport launched last year to allow sports not currently in receipt of full funding to develop plans to help teams and athletes qualify for Tokyo.

Evans will take on the role of British coach for the Olympic qualifying process and, should Team GB qualify, the Games themselves.

All parties have welcomed the appointment, which was made with a busy international schedule in mind – the England squad travels to Japan for the ITTF Team World Cup next month, while the Olympic qualifiers are just over two months away in Portugal in January.

Table Tennis England Director of Sport Simon Mills said: "Gavin is developing a good reputation in his coaching career and has already been working with our performance coaches through the Hopes and Aspire programme and therefore is in step with the principles and philosophies of the programme.

"We're grateful to him for being available at relatively short notice and to Grantham College, who have been very accommodating in enabling this to happen.

"We are keen for English coaches to work with our elite players in the run-up to a home Commonwealth Games in Birmingham in 2022 and we believe this is a positive opportunity for all parties."

Grantham College Vice Principal – Higher Education, Dr Steven Peacock, said: “We wish Gavin and the team every success with this endeavour, and are delighted to have a Grantham College colleague at the heart of Team GB’s Olympic plans.”

Evans is well known to the current squad and is sure to have their respect, given a playing record which saw him become European youth champion (in the Cadet Boys’ Singles) in 2008.

Later the same year, he won team bronze alongside Paul Drinkhall and Liam Pitchford, as well as Darius Knight, at the World Junior Championships. He previously joined Drinkhall and Knight in the squad which won Cadet Boys’ Team gold in the 2005 European Youth Championships.

A serious hip injury ended his playing career before he could really transition into the senior ranks, so he followed a new career path as a coach.

As well as being a former team-mate of Pitchford and Drinkhall, he has been a key influence on the career of Tom Jarvis, who trained with him at Grantham prior to moving to Sweden.

Evans, 26, said: “It’s an amazing opportunity. I’m happy to be asked to do the role and excited to go out into the world and see what we can do.

“I’ll be able to visit the players on an individual basis, to work on little things that can make a big difference in matches, but also to be able to bring them all together when we can for training together and building team spirit.

“The key priorities are first to perform at the Team World Cup and then to qualify for the 2020 Olympics and then hopefully when we qualify it will be a matter of doing some really good training and, as the boys have proved, when they come together and perform then on the day they can beat anyone in the world.”

Pitchford said the squad had welcomed the appointment. He added: “It’s a good move. After Marcus stepped down we all spoke together as a team – we’ve all had individual coaches recently and we felt we needed someone to bring us more together as a team.

“Gavin is one of the up and coming English coaches, he wants us to do well and we obviously all know him well.

“He was a very good player and he stopped a bit earlier than he would have liked through injuries, but he’s been around table tennis since then and knows a lot about it.

“It’s a great opportunity for him and for us to have that team cohesion that we need before the Olympic qualifiers.”

Sjoberg had first been seen on the England bench at the 2018 ITTF Team World Cup in London, though he had worked with the squad members, particularly those based in Sweden, before that. He has left to work on other projects.

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