



## Opening a pathway from Ping! to league play

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From beginner, to social player, to competitive player, an Oxford-based table tennis project is the perfect example of how to create a pathway to help newcomers play at whatever level they want.

The Ping! Oxford All-comers Summer Series has recently finished its second year and runs over six weeks, playing a short format which is suitable for new players and returning players.

The competitors play against opponents of similar standard, with the opportunity to move into higher groups as they develop their skills. It means those who are happy just playing socially are catered for, while allowing those who wish to be more competitive to also have that opportunity.

Those who decide they want to take the next step into club membership and local league participation also have the 'launchpad' to do so, as the video below demonstrates.

Anne Borrowdale, from the Oxford & District League, set up the sessions originally for social players and said: "I like the idea of more and more people playing social table tennis, and in order to have a thriving league, you need quite a good pyramid below it and people who are coming into it.

"The sessions drew in quite a lot of people who are really keen on playing and become regular players, and taking it forward."

One of the players in the league said: "It was a good way of coming back into something that is competitive, and I didn't have to make a commitment to start with. I would like to play in the league again."

Another said: "Two years ago, I decided to join my local club. I just fell in love with it – it's the game I should have played my whole life."

Anne added: "Giving it time is important, but having the support of the local committee is important as well. Because they have seen a lot of people coming into table tennis through it, that's encouraged them and I'm very

grateful to the Oxford League committee, who have enabled things to happen.”

Keely Armitt, Head of Mass Participation at Table Tennis England, said: “The programmes we deliver for the ‘mass market’ can sometimes feel quite separate from our other work, often reaching complete novices and people who don’t wish to play more regularly or more competitively. However, with patience and the right type of approach and offering, sometimes these same people can start to develop a habit and an appetite for more.

“The work that Anne Borrowdale has done in Oxford, with the support of the League and the City Council, is a fantastic example of how we can introduce less experienced players into a more competitive and committed setting. It gives them a taster of what else is available to them and is a wonderful way of blending table tennis enthusiasts together.

“Recognising the opportunities that are being created through our Sport England-funded mass market work, and finding different and appropriate ways to capitalise on them, is an important method of encouraging new participants into the sport and helping local clubs and leagues to remain in good shape.”

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