

Volunteers Key To Table Tennis Success

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Posted On: January 14, 2011



When you arrive at the English Institute of Sport in Sheffield for the 66th Pro Tour English Open Table Tennis Championships, spare a thought for the chap who shows you to your seat. For without the 150 volunteers who carry out these key tasks there would no be event at all..

Their work starts well before the first players and spectators arrive and they will still be there after everyone has gone home.

Their jobs range from umpiring to sorting out the often complex transport arrangements. There will be workers who staff the information desk and stewards who will show you to your seat. A team of results people will also work well into the night to make sure everything is in order for the start next morning.

All of these people will see very little of the action and do it for the love of their sport. But without them this event, voted the best in the world in 2009, would not be here.

For the five days of the event starting on Wednesday 26 January until Sunday 30 January, 255 players from 44 different countries will converge on the city from all parts of the world. Champions China will be sending a particularly strong squad including their men's and women's champions.

As host nation England will have the largest contingent with 29 players with Rotherham's Paul Drinkhall heading our chances of landing a medal. In contrast a single entry has been received from Guatemala.

Referee Stuart Sherlock will have a real headache overseeing 500 matches from qualifying rounds to final, in all 2500 games. All his qualified umpires will have their eyes peeled as 42,000 points are won and lost.

During the five days of competition 500 table tennis balls will be used, 8000 bottles of water and hundreds of bananas will be consumed by players and officials. And of course the players will be aiming for a share of \$172,000 prize money.

The ITTF Pro Tour brings together 16 events at venues on four continents with total prize money in access of \$2.5million.

Jill Hammersley (now Parker) was the last English player to win the women's title which she did twice in 1978/9 and 1979/80. Alison Gordon and partner Jill Grundy took the women's doubles title in 1985/86. Desmond Douglas and Denis Neale won the men's doubles title in 1975/76 and it was Douglas who was the last Englishman to win the singles title in 1983/84.

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By Jim Beckley

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