



## Young England athletes make most of lockdown

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The coronavirus pandemic has resulted in a shutdown of competitions and training venues across the world and meant players have had to adapt their regimes to help them remain as fit and sharp as possible.

This can be a challenge for experienced players, let alone those in the junior ranks and younger, so Table Tennis England's coaching team is providing as much help and guidance as possible for players in the England Pathway.

The coaches are working with a total of 53 youngsters across the Junior, Aspire and Hopes squads, providing them with training programmes to do at home, tailored according to the equipment they have available.

They include on-table drills where possible, plus physical programmes working on general fitness as well as circuits working on leg, body and core fitness and on speed.

The squad is embracing technology, catching up with the coaches via Zoom and using file-sharing software to share clips of their training, which can then be used for analysis and feedback.

Programme Manager Matt Stanforth said the emphasis was on treating the lockdown as an opportunity to develop as players and as young people.

He said: "The key messages are that this is a situation beyond our control and that everyone around the world is in the same situation, therefore it is important to focus on what we *can* do and take the opportunity to learn and develop skills – on and off the table – while we are on a level playing field with the rest of the world."

The squad programmes include:

### England Junior Squad (led by Head Coach Marcus Gustafson)

- Weekly group video catch-up at which every player updates the group on their week's work, challenges and successes

- Setting tasks for the group and individually, such as fitness challenges (for example, creating a personal strength circuit to challenge each other). Each member of the squad also contributed video of one great rally from a match they played, which were then pasted together, presenting the squad video on social media – [click here to view the video](#)
- Match analysis where players to watch a specific match, and then analyse it together in a group call (where they get an area each to talk about)
- Whole group doing a workout (on or off the table) at the same scheduled time online

The players have also sent in videos each week showing their work at home, plus a diary of activity. The coaches have also engaged with parents to monitor the athletes' mental health and how they are coping with the situation.

### **England Aspire & Hopes squads**

- Zoom calls every 1-2 weeks
- Set up of a progressive physical training programme, including some short instructional clips from England men's coach Gavin Evans on how to complete each exercise
- Setting up on-table (where players have access to a table and someone to practice with) challenges with emphasis on developing and improving serves, with clips from Craig Bryant and Sam Walker to help
- Using an app called Hudl Technique which allows the players to share clips with up and for the team to analyse and feedback where necessary. More than 200 clips from our players have been shared so far, which helps coaches get a real insight into how the players are doing at home
- Each week, the players upload a weekly summary to Google Drive detailing what they have been able to complete that week and also some reflection questions to give their overall review of how their week has gone, including learning will they take into the following week

You can see what some of the players have been doing here:

For all the squads, we are holding regular racket skills challenges, the first set by Paul Drinkhall, with every player sending in video clips of their attempts to complete the most consecutive sets of the challenge.

We will be holding a Q&A session with Liam Pitchford and Paul Drinkhall with the England Junior Squad and Aspire Squad very soon and will also be setting off-table tasks for the players to complete to help them develop some of the other key life skills they will need if they are to potentially become professional players in the future.

Matt Stanforth added: "Everyone is continuing to work incredibly hard to try to continue their development in spite of the challenges and restrictions. We're proud of the players and the resilience, adaptability, creativity and determination they are showing."

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