



England's elite put youth squads through their paces

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The England squads have been pulling together across the age groups to make the most of training opportunities at home.

The elite England players, including the men's and women's No 1s Liam Pitchford and Tin-Tin Ho, have led online fitness programmes and Q&A sessions with the members of the England Youth, Aspire and Hopes squads.

It has been a chance to pass on their experience and inspire the next generation to continue working to be the best they can be.

Olympians Pitchford, Paul Drinkhall and Sam Walker have all led physical training sessions on Zoom, while Liam has also led an on-table practice for those who have robots and Sam led on-table work based around service.

Tom Jarvis has also been involved with a physical session, while Tin-Tin has been particularly active with physical and flexibility training.

All the athletes also took part in Q&A webinars with the young players, including a girls-only session led by Tin-Tin.

The chance to work with the top players who they aim to one day emulate has been a big boost to the young squad members during a difficult few months.

Felix Thomis, who is a member of the England Junior Squad, said: "We've been doing really intense training sessions with coaches and with the senior players. It's been good, I've really enjoyed it.

"Being in lockdown doesn't affect the sessions you can do – what you put in is what you get out.

"They push you to the limit – Sam Walker set up a really good session on skipping and double skipping and it

really killed me by the end of the session, but I'm going to use it when we get into the actual season.

"It's good that the senior players are helping us to improve. It shows they are not just focused on themselves during this hard time and we are all working as a community."

Megan Jones, part of the Aspire squad, said: "It's good to see how fit the top players are and how they incorporate fitness in their sessions.

"We've done leg circuits and core circuits and various different exercises. They've been hard work but it's been good and I've enjoyed them.

"Tin-Tin's physical was one of the hardest, we did lots of different exercises of high intensity and she was good at motivating us."

The elite players have also enjoyed playing their part in the youngsters' development. Sam Walker said: "It's good to give something back – when I was young, a lot of people helped me, so it's only right. It's something we want to do but don't always have the time.

"During the lockdown we have had that time and it's been nice to help out and to see the kids wanting to do things and to improve. It's been fun."

There are 53 youngsters in the three England age-group squads and as well as sessions with the elite athletes, they have been working on training programmes set by the coaches, and taking part in regular meetings by Zoom to analyse and get feedback on their work.

Programme Manager Matt Stanforth said: "Whilst this period of lockdown has been frustrating in many ways, it has also presented a number of opportunities, with the most significant being the chance of our senior players to lead a variety and number of session with our youth squads which has been incredibly inspirational and encouraging for our young players.

"These online sessions have given an opportunity for our elite players to share their experience and learnings from their own personal performance journeys, as well as leading some active sessions to show the level of intensity and determination that is needed.

"The work they have done has been brilliant and has had positive impact on the players as a whole."

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