



## England stars grateful to be back on table

**Author:** Paul Stimpson

**Posted On:** July 15, 2020

England's elite players have returned to training in a strictly controlled environment.

Liam Pitchford, Paul Drinkhall, Sam Walker and Tom Jarvis have been back in action at the National Badminton Centre in Milton Keynes, where Table Tennis England is also based.

The players are working only in pairs, with several protocols in place to ensure their health and wellbeing and that of others.

The protocols include daily health questionnaires and temperature checks on arrival at the venue, wearing masks at all times around the venue except in the training room, individuals playing only at one end of the table, using their own balls – as indicated by initials – and cleaning the table at the end of the session.

The sessions are all held within specific UK Sport and Government guidelines on elite athletes returning to training. [Club play will be permitted from July 25](#) under the Government's latest announcement about the easing of lockdown restrictions.

Coach Gavin Evans has been watching sessions on Facetime and giving his feedback on the players' work.

The training costs are supported by the Aspiration Fund, which UK Sport launched to allow sports not currently in receipt of full funding to develop plans to help teams and athletes qualify for the Tokyo Olympics.

The players are pleased to be getting back to work slowly after weeks of lockdown and have adapted well to the protocols in place.

Liam said: "It's a bit of a relief to get back to some form of normality. I'm really happy to be able to do what we love again.

"We have to take care and it's quite hard sometimes when you're in the flow of practice and you have to think

about everything to take care but at the moment that's what we've got to do to be able to get back playing. I'm just happy to be back."

Sam added: "It got to the point of missing it quite a lot, pretty bored at home doing not much, so it's obviously really good to be back. We're lucky we can do any form of training at the minute and just being really careful all the time because health is the priority."

While Liam and Sam have had access to a table during lockdown, Paul and Tom have not, although for Paul there was the major plus of being able to spend more time with his young family.

He said: "I've enjoyed a lot of time with the family, which is good. That wouldn't have happened without this but it was obviously needed and hopefully we can keep going in the right direction and we can start opening more and more and getting more access to training. We're still very limited at the minute.

"We're just taking each day at a time, trying to stay positive, trying to do as much as we can when we can. I'm still trying to make sure that I balance training with family because I know once things do start up again the tournaments will come quite quick, league matches and everything, so I'll be spending a lot of time away."

Tom said any fears of being rusty through lack of table time proved to be unfounded. He said: "It's the longest I've not played in my life and I was coming back thinking I wouldn't be able to hit a ball.

"But you never really lose it, we all got it back after a few days and we'd all been keeping up a lot with the fitness. Everything was ready for us to come back, it was just the small things to work on. To be honest, I wasn't as rusty as I thought."

Simon Mills, Director of Sport at Table Tennis England, said: "It's been a lengthy process to prepare for this moment, carrying out robust risk assessments, identifying the protocols which the players have to abide by – and credit to them for taking all these measures very seriously.

"It has been difficult for the players, as professionals, not to be able to train as they need to, but they are acutely aware that players at all levels – and people in all walks of life – have also been going through difficult times.

"They hope, and all of us at Table Tennis England hope, that this is an important step towards fully opening up the sport at all levels."

[Click here to visit our Ready to Return section](#)

**Downloaded From:**

<https://newsarchive.tabletennisengland.co.uk/news/archived/england-stars-grateful-to-be-back-on-table/>