



Online drive to find future para stars

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In the week that some of its Performance Squad athletes return to the training hall for the first time since March, British Para Table Tennis is launching a new online recruitment initiative to find new players who have the potential to become future Paralympians.

BPTT Future Stars will be promoted through various social media channels, with support from all home nations and key partners, and will remain active with an extra focus around the Paralympic Games in 2021 and the Commonwealth Games in 2022.

In addition to its 16-strong Performance Squad, the British Para Table Tennis team has a successful Pathway programme which, since its inception in 2013, has produced a number of players who have progressed to win medals at major championships including world medallists Fliss Pickard and Tom Matthews, Commonwealth medallist Josh Stacey, European medallist Billy Shilton, European team champion Martin Perry and world and European team medallist Megan Shackleton.

“The Pathway, Development & Futures squads are all in place,” said BPTT Pathway manager Shaun Marples, “and this is a way to try and recruit people online. I am hoping that table tennis clubs and other organisations can get behind it in terms of bringing in new people.

“Once the lockdown period is lifted we will arrange an open day at our team training base in Sheffield to see them play and go through the classification process with them. We can then direct them towards the next step.”

The application process includes a questionnaire designed to assess eligibility for Para table tennis, which is one of the most inclusive Paralympic sports, catering for wheelchair and ambulant athletes from a wide range of physical impairment groups and those with learning difficulties.

The BPTT classification team is made up of two technical and two medical experts and every month they will review each questionnaire to confirm eligibility. Athletes who are eligible will be given guidance as to which class to enter when competing in their first domestic competition. Athletes who aren't deemed eligible at this

stage will still be invited to Sheffield at a later date, when a more thorough observation will take place.

“It is about people who have table tennis experience but also are potentially new to the sport and creating an opportunity for them,” explained Marples. “We are looking for people who are dedicated, love the sport and want to learn more about it. For those who want to find a club we want to be able to signpost them in the right way and we also want to find the future star with the qualities needed to become a professional athlete.

“Table tennis for me is a very unique sport. You can enjoy it both individually and as a team and I think the one thing that we have in British Para Table Tennis is a really strong family structure. We are looking at creating as many opportunities as possible for people to gain life skills and improve as a table tennis player and hopefully go on to become a future Paralympic champion.

“We are constantly working with young athletes through our Pathway programme and in my role we are hoping that this is the next step behind that. Looking at 2028 and beyond we are hoping that Future Stars will help to unearth new talent and recruit athletes who will be part of BPTT and have that journey to those future Paralympic Games.”

[Click here for more information on BPTT Future Stars and how to apply](#)

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