



National Cup coaching decision will create better players

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No coaches in corners at the Under-12 National Cup will help to produce more resilient young England players who have a better chance of success on the international stage.

That is the reasoning behind the decision to trial the policy at this season's Under-12 National Cup, initiated by the Table Tennis England performance coaches.

The competitors' coaches will be permitted to attend the event – at which the top 10 players in the rankings face each other on a round-robin basis – and to work with their players between matches, but they will not be in the corner during the matches.

It means that, while they are on the table, players will learn to adapt their tactics, solve problems and think on their feet, all essential skills for top-class international players.

The decision followed discussions between the vastly experienced performance coaching team, including Alan Cooke, Gavin Evans, Marcus Gustafson and Kelly Sibley.

Matt Stanforth, the Programme Manager of the young England squads, said: "From our experience of working internationally, in the majority of national teams, you don't see one coach per player and you often see players having to play without a coach.

"You see a lot of players who at a young age are having to stand on their own feet and be able to deliver performances, whereas in this country we see more of a reliance on people being in the corner all the time.

"We're trying to develop independence, problem solving and bouncing back from defeats. This will help prepare them for high-level table tennis and the strength in depth of players in the country – and the standard of English table tennis – will be better for that.

"It's not about hindering the players, it's about trying to help them in the long term. All the coaches in the national programme are behind this.

"Our leading young players have a high level of competition across a season including 2-star, 4-star, County Championships, Junior British League, National Championships and other club competitions. In the vast majority of these events, players will have support from a coach or supporter in the corner.

"This one event per year, where they have a guaranteed number of matches, will give a fantastic learning and development opportunity to better prepare them for the demands of international tournaments or higher standards in the sport."

Table Tennis England Technical Director Alan Cooke added: "It's part of the process of building all the things we believe you are going to require as a young player growing up on the international stage.

"These are performance players, which is why we have looked at this competition. Coaches will be able to work with the players and help them between matches but this is about them being brave enough to make their own decisions while they are on the table.

"If you're going to be successful in this sport, I'm 100% sure you have to have these skills, and the sooner the players get that exposure, the better it will be for them."

If the policy is successful, it could be extended to the Cadet and Junior National Cups in future seasons.

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