



Table tennis bucks trend in Active Lives survey

Author: Paul Stimpson

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Table tennis participation held steady between May 2019 and May 2020, despite the effects of the coronavirus pandemic towards the end of that period, according to the latest Active Lives survey by Sport England.

Figures for the 12 months between May 2019 and May 2020 show that 428,500 people aged 16 and over played table tennis at least twice a month – up from 425,000 in the previous 12-month period reported in Active Lives 2018–19.

Statistically, that is rated as ‘no change’. Since the Active Lives survey began in 2015–16, table tennis is the only racket sport to show that status, with badminton, squash and tennis all rated as having had a ‘significant decrease’ in participation since then.

Only four sports and physical activities out of 80 in the survey reported a ‘significant increase’ on last year’s figures, with Sport England stating that the first two months of the lockdown from mid-March to mid-May had a big impact.

Though activity levels were growing before the start of the national lockdown and were on course to reach record highs, during the first two months of lockdown there were 3 million fewer active adults, compared with the same period a year ago.

Not surprisingly, more people turned to home-based fitness, running and cycling during that period and Sport England reported a general determination to keep active.

However, the survey also found that groups who have long found it hardest to be active – for example, the over-70s, adults with a disability or long-term health condition and people from Black, Asian and other minority ethnic groups – also faced major challenges during lockdown without the support of organised sport and access to facilities.

More recent data shows the numbers returning to activities as a result of leisure facilities reopening and the safe return of grassroots sport and activity.

Greg Yarnall, Head of Development & Volunteering at Table Tennis England, said: "It's positive that table tennis is holding steady when so many sports have seen declines.

"This highlights that the sport remained relatively accessible during lockdown with people able to play at home or outdoors, and I know a lot of clubs were trying to encourage this as much as possible to keep their members engaged and active.

"Clubs have also worked very hard to prepare for a return to play in a covid-secure way, making our sport well placed to help people back into physical activity in the period after this report – although we recognise there are still many challenges in a lot of areas and are doing all we can to help and support people through this period."

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