

Message from the Chair at the Senior Nationals

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Posted On: February 28, 2014



Message from ETTA Chair, Sandra Deaton, at the Nationals Championships

It is over 20 years since I first came to the English Senior National Championships – in the intervening years, I have attended many of these prestigious events as a member of the management team, a National Councillor, an organiser, a regional representative – and also, as the proud parent of a several-times National Champion.

I am therefore delighted and honoured that one of my first official duties as the newly-appointed Chairman of the ETTA is to welcome our players, coaches, friends, relatives, volunteers, spectators, officials and organisers to our leading domestic event of the season – the Senior National Championships 2013/14.

It is a pleasure to return again to the City of Sheffield and enjoy the wonderful facilities here at Ponds Forge.

The past year

The past 12 months have been a journey of change for table tennis; we have had to make some difficult decisions but they have been necessary ones. In July last year, a new Board, of which I was a member, was elected to the ETTA, under the then Chairmanship of Andy Seward. We arrived at a time when the whole structure of table tennis and how it was organised in this country was being reviewed and questioned by our major funders, Sport England. They required change if they were to continue investing in our sport.

We needed to restructure our own internal organisation and also re-examine the way table tennis was delivered to all participants, including beginners, social players, club members, up to our elite international athletes. Many of those changes are now underway. Our own governance and decision-making responsibility has changed. We also have a new CEO in place in Sara Sutcliffe who is committed to make English table tennis a sport of the 21st century.

We will be relocating to a new head office in Milton Keynes, which will eventually provide not only office and administrative facilities, but a playing arena, training facilities and accommodation.

We have aligned the working of the ETTA into four new departments, and appointed a new team of specialists to manage these. They will drive the direction of Coaching and Performance; Development; Operations; and

Marketing and Communications.

We have also made changes in the field with the creation of four new geographical areas which will replace the existing nine regions in terms of the staff base for their work at grass-roots level with development, participation and coaching.

We will make better use of our resources with bigger teams co-ordinating and offering support across a wider area. This will complement and support the work that our many volunteers already do on the ground on a day-to-day basis. You are sometimes our unsung heroes, but know that your contribution is valued, recognised and acknowledged.

Another exciting development is the establishment of four new Talent Development Centres linked to some of our leading clubs. This partnership between the ETTA and the clubs – with investment on both sides – will provide top-class coaching and playing facilities to identify and nurture the talent of the future.

But first to the talent of today.

I am delighted to see so many participants here, including some of our international athletes. This gives us the opportunity to see many of our top players in competition for our National titles as they also prepare for selection for the Commonwealth Games and other international events.

I am also pleased to see a good number of participants from across the country. We have more than 160 of England's finest table tennis players competing in this 55th national tournament to decide who will be National Champions in 11 separate events, including the singles; doubles; under 21s and veterans' competitions.

Thanks

Our thanks go to everyone in Sheffield who has given table tennis so much support, particularly Sheffield City Council with its long history of supporting table tennis, and The Right Worshipful the Lord Mayor of Sheffield, Councillor Vickie Priestley, and the Lord Mayor's Consort, Mr Lloyd Priestley, who we look forward to welcoming on Sunday.

Our thanks also to Ponds Forge International Sports Centre and the staff who make a large 'behind the scenes' contribution to the smooth running of operations. Also thanks to Sheffield and District Table Tennis League for their assistance with volunteer recruitment and event promotion.

Our English National Championships would not take place without the work, dedication and commitment of ETTA staff and our excellent volunteers; my thanks go to you all and in particular Referee Brian Jackson, Tournament Manager Stuart Sherlock, Organiser Graham Rogerson and Deputy Organiser Jim Kenny. And special thanks to our ETTA Events staff, in particular Diccon Gray and Vanda Jones for their work at this event and the many others over the years. They have been with the ETTA for 25 and 26 years respectively and will be leaving us shortly.

We extend our grateful thanks to Tees Sport and Butterfly – official equipment supplier to the ETTA national championships. We appreciate their long standing support and their commitment to English table tennis which is demonstrated in many ways.

And there is, of course, another group of people without whom there would be no event. You, the players. We wish you all a good tournament, play well, play fair, be sporting in competition and be proud of your performance.

Andy Seward

I cannot let this occasion pass without paying tribute to the excellent work and the vision of my predecessor as Chairman, Andy Seward. Since he took over as Chairman last summer, he worked tirelessly to drive through change and innovation to make table tennis a sport fit for the future. Sadly, Andy passed away on January 15, 2014 and did not live long enough to hear that Sport England has awarded table tennis a further tranche of funding to secure our future for the next few years. I am here today as the new Chairman of the ETTA to continue that work.

Sandra Deaton
Chairman, ETTA
(February 28, 2014)

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