

# How table tennis helped Andrew recover from disease which left him in coma

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Andrew South (courtesy Michael Loveder)

Playing table tennis has been a key part of Andrew South's battle to recover from a serious neurological disease which left him in a coma for two months.

The 33-year-old from Sheffield credits the sport with helping him recover his movement skills and improve his social interaction after a prolonged spell in hospital.

Andrew is battling the effects of Neuroleptic Malignant Syndrome – a potentially life-threatening reaction to neuroleptic drugs – which saw him admitted to the Northern General Hospital in April 2012.

He was introduced to table tennis as part of his rehabilitation in a residential unit between October 2012 and May 2013, and joined Albert Premier TTC in Darnall soon after, where he has been working with Level 3 coach Shaun Alvey.

The therapy has been so successful that Andrew competed at the British Table Tennis Association for people with Disabilities (BTTAD) national championships in March and is ready to join a league in September.

Andrew's father Geoff, who is also his carer, said: "From being completely immobile, he has had to learn to crawl and walk again. Sometimes he was in a wheelchair and scared to move.

"Someone coming out of long-term trauma, they're in a very fragile state. His consultant at the intensive treatment unit in Firs Hill (in Sheffield) got him on the table tennis table there, and he became quite proficient, so we tried to find somewhere for him to play after he left the unit.

"Luckily, we found Albert Premier and it's fantastic. It really helps, it's very therapeutic and Shaun is very good at dealing with people who are disabled. He's very good at being strict, but understanding their needs. It's just right for Andrew."

Andrew himself, who has learning difficulties, added: "It's helped me with my co-ordination and it's helped me interact with people and get skills. I've got better at listening.

"I'm serving better and might be going to some tournaments and I'm joining a league in September."

Shaun Alvey, who runs Inclusive Ping Pong Ltd, which aims to get more people with disabilities into table tennis, said: "Our motto is 'It's not disability, it's about ability' and we believe everyone can achieve something with the right people helping them in the right sport.

"In the time Andrew's been coming to us he's attended the BTTAD Championships in Grantham. Some people didn't think he was ready but I thought it would be good experience for him to meet other people – and he won two matches.

"He regularly attends training sessions, he's always there when he has the opportunity. We're looking at entering him in a league from next season."

For more information on Albert Premier TTC, visit <http://albertttcentre.co.uk/>

**Paul Stimpson (7th May 2014)**

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