

Umpire Alex relishes Youth Olympics role

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Alex Mercer (picture courtesy of John Upham)

Alex Mercer got into table tennis umpiring after being 'bribed' with chocolate. Now he is preparing to officiate at the Youth Olympic Games.

The 22-year-old from Grantham will fly out to Nanjing, China, in August as England's representative at the table tennis event.

He earned the call by being part of the International Table Tennis Federation's Young Umpires scheme – which he joined just six years after starting umpiring at tournaments in his home town.

"I played table tennis, but not at a very high level – every time apart from once I got knocked out in the group stages at the one-star events in Grantham," he said.

"Because there are so many matches to at the tournaments, they ask people who have been knocked out to umpire, and they used to give people a chocolate bar for every match they did.

"I was about 15 bars up by the end of the day. That's how I got started – I got bribed, basically!

"But I enjoy doing it, you meet a lot of nice people – parents, players and officials."

Alex, who works at Morrisons, is relishing the chance to travel to the Far East and plans to stay in China and visit Shanghai after the event.

"I'm really excited, I can't wait. The furthest I've been is Spain, so this is going to be a brilliant experience," he said.

"I don't really know what to expect. I go three days early and the officials have got so many hours of training and get kitted out with our uniforms.

"It should be really good on the playing side and I've heard the spectators are very loud in China and very encouraging for everyone.

"The table tennis event lasts seven days and the playing schedule looks pretty crammed."

Alex, who qualified as the youngest English National Umpire in 2010, has previously been a Field of Play official at the London Olympics and Paralympics and is also a Level 2 coach.

Paul Stimpson (15th May 2014)

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