

Douglas tips England for Commonwealth medals

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Posted On: June 11, 2014



Desmond Douglas watches the Cadet Six Nations action. Picture courtesy of Alan Man

Desmond Douglas is backing England to be in the medals shake-up at the Commonwealth Games.

The 11-time national singles champion believes the sport is in a good place at present, despite losing UK Sport funding after the London Olympics.

And he believes the men's squad in particular are benefitting from increased competition and can build on recent successes such as winning promotion to the top division at the recent World Team Championships in Japan.

"We should be proud of what they are achieving with our small budget," said Douglas.

"Paul (Drinkhall) had a big operation and losing to Pitch (Liam Pitchford) in the national final in some ways was good because it showed the level he was getting back to after his op.

"Winning the Spanish Open shows he is almost back to his best, and he's gone up in the world rankings.

"You've had Pitch in the European final (the ETTU Cup), Daniel Reed chipping in and young Sam Walker, it's good. I'm pleased for these guys, it gives a base to English table tennis.

"The other good thing is they're playing good foreign players regularly with their clubs, which helps them improve.

"When we get to the Commonwealths, playing in Scotland should help – it's not really a foreign country, they should perform well. I expect them to be up there competing for medals.

"In the girls, young Tin-Tin is getting better all the time but I think we need one or two other girls to come through and push the older ones."

Douglas was speaking at the recent Cadet Six Nations at Lilleshall, and he was impressed by what he saw from England's youngsters at the event, where the boys finished third and the girls fifth.

"They haven't been out of their depth, they're holding their own even though the budget is cut – to me, that's good," he said.

"The boys, I'm quite happy with what I've seen. The girls need a bit of work, they've got to learn from this, go back on to the practice tables and try to perform.

"But I'm pleased with the way all the guys are handling themselves. It's not easy to perform at this level, there's pressure."

But Douglas sounded a note of caution over whether the conveyor belt of English talent will continue to produce players capable of competing on the international stage.

"When I heard the budget was going to be cut after the Olympics, I thought it might be a setback for us, but we just got on with it," he said.

“At the top, things are looking better than they were – we are delivering some of the goods but not all of them.

“The lower levels, it’s going to be hard if the budget is not there. That’s where we might see the problems, at regional level, that’s where it’s going to decide whether future players come through. We’ll have to wait and see.”

By Paul Stimpson (June 11th, 2014)

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