

Lauren's starring role in the campaign

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Lauren James is hoping to inspire future generations of female table tennis players as the face of the sport in the This Girl Can campaign.

Pictures of Lauren playing table tennis will feature on advertising at, among other locations, bus shelters and Underground stations, bearing the message *This is My Spin Class*.

The first adverts were officially unveiled today (July 1st, 2015) – which co-incides with Lauren's 18th birthday!

This Girl Can is a national campaign, developed by Sport England and delivered in partnership with a wide range of organisations, to address the persistent gender gap which means that more men play sport than women at every age.

This is the first time table tennis has joined the select number of sports involved in the campaign, which launched earlier this year.

Lauren's brush with stardom follows a photoshoot at Rowhedge TTC, where Lauren has been a competitive playing member for about three years in the Colchester & District League. Her father Rik is also a club stalwart.

Lauren said: "John Andrews (Table Tennis England Development Lead) set it up. At first I didn't know it was for This Girl Can, I thought it was just a table tennis photoshoot.

"They had someone doing my hair and make-up and it was a bit surreal and a bit crazy.

"It was a long time playing table tennis! My dad was feeding them to me and I was playing the shots back and the photographer was getting different angles and different shots."

Lauren, who saw her team promoted to Division Three of the Colchester & District League in the season that has just ended, is also a qualified umpire, and was on duty at the World Championships of Ping Pong at Alexandra Palace earlier this year.

She is a fan of the This Girl Can campaign, which champions women's sport and aims to get more women active.

"It's definitely has been a success so far, I think it's really good," she said. "I think there's a lot of girls who think it's not okay to play sport and that it's all about the men. This should help them get into sport.

"I think my friends have been more excited than me waiting to see the billboards. For me, it would be nice to feel like I've inspired people to play, that would be a good feeling."

As well as seeing herself on billboards, Lauren – who works for Colchester United FC – spent her birthday at Bounce, the bar and table tennis venue in London.

Table Tennis England is supporting This Girl Can to address gender inequalities in the sport – currently 89 per cent of our members are male.

Chief Executive Sara Sutcliffe said: "Part of our mission to make table tennis a sport for all, for life, is to break down barriers to participation. We're thrilled Lauren is 'our' face of This Girl Can to help do just that!"

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