

Sam is upbeat as 'Expert' project ends in failure

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Posted On: February 05, 2015

Sam Priestley says he intends to keep playing table tennis despite failing in his bid to break into the top 250 players in the country on the back of a year's intensive training.

Sam and coach Ben Larcombe embarked on the Expert in a Year project in January 2014, aiming to turn Sam from a social player into one capable of pushing into the upper echelons of the rankings.

A daily regime of training and practice, backed up by tournament play later in the year, saw Sam go through an estimated 504 hours of intensive work during the project, which ended last month. The video below shows a composite of every day of the project.

There were some high points along the way – including winning his first match on his tournament debut in Band 6 of the Bristol Grand Prix in November – but ultimately a tilt at the top 250 proved too big a challenge.

Despite that, 25-year-old Sam believes he has learned a huge amount from the experience.

"I didn't make the target we were going for but what we learned on the way was probably better than reaching the target anyway," he said.

"I went in incredibly naïve. But along the way I ended up learning so much, not just about table tennis but about hard work and what it takes to excel at things.

"You get to a point where you feel you're not learning any more and it's quite tough and demoralising – but you can get through it.

"Before in my life, I would maybe have given up but I knew I couldn't do that because I had six months to go, three months to go and so on. Despite the demoralising stuff, the improvement happened.

"The amount of respect I've got for people in the top 100 now is huge. Mastery is a lot harder than I thought it would be, but it's really possible and achievable if you put the work in."

[Sam has written a blog about his experience – click here to read it](#)

A figure widely accepted for the amount of hours' practice needed to become an expert is 10,000, putting Sam's hours into perspective.

Ben, a sports scientist as well as a coach, said: "Above all, we've learned that improvement in table tennis is very tough.

"There are no shortcuts, but improvement is achievable. If you put the hours in and work on the right things you will get better."

Sam, who has joined the ISH Dragons & Grasshoppers team in the Central London League, added: "If you've got the motivation and keep going, you will end up improving.

"That sort of lesson has a lot of applications in other things in life. It's not 'put the work in and it might happen', it's 'put the work in and you will get results'.

"I'm going to keep playing. I've had a year of losing quite a lot and I want to have a year of getting some wins and confidence under my belt."

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