



## Some of your questions answered

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Welcome to **Around the Table**, our regular look at the work Table Tennis England is doing to promote and support table tennis around the country.

This time, we take a slightly different tack and answer some of the questions raised by our members in our membership surveys. Look out for more questions and answers in a future post.



### Why did we re-brand from ETTA to Table Tennis England?

Although people inside the sport knew the history of the ETTA, those outside did not know what ETTA stood for or what the organisation did – a common reaction from members of the public was ‘aren’t they the Spanish terrorist group?’ This presented problems promoting the organisation and raising the profile of the sport.

Changing to Table Tennis England left no ambiguity – we are responsible for Table Tennis in England. The rebrand also brought us in to line with many other National Governing Bodies of sport, again making it easier for the public to understand what we do. Finally, with Sport England, our primary funder, leaving us under no

illusions that a root and branch reform of the organisation was essential, the rebrand was an illustration of our commitment to carry out that restructuring.

### **Why aren't there more Grand Prix events in my area?**

We have a limited number of eight main Grand Prix events per season, which have to fit within the wider table tennis calendar and avoid clashing with other events. We do our best to take them around the country so that each geographical area, as far as possible, hosts one event.

In addition to the main Grand Prix events, it is possible to apply to host a Satellite Grand Prix, subject to fitting in with the calendar. There are currently three satellite Grands Prix.

### **Why did we change the balls?**

This change was introduced by the International Table Tennis Federation (ITTF) and all national governing bodies around the world, including Table Tennis England, were obliged to follow that decision. The decision was made because the production process for celluloid was becoming less widespread due to safety considerations. It is anticipated that production of celluloid balls will cease altogether in due course.

For that reason, it was important to confirm the use of plastic balls in all our competitions from this season. This ensured consistency for all players and that the sport would be using sustainable supplies of plastic balls rather than increasingly unreliable supplies of celluloid.

### **Why are competitions so expensive?**

The biggest cost to Table Tennis England of staging a competition is usually venue hire, which often encompasses block-booking an entire venue for a full weekend – as you can imagine, this does not come cheap, although we always negotiate the best deals we can.

In addition, we have to fund equipment hire, umpires and officials' expenses, trophies and prize money. These costs have to be covered by the entry fees for the competition. We strive to ensure that the competition breaks even – we do not aim to make a profit but do aim to avoid making a loss.

We make every effort to keep all costs as low as possible in order to keep entry fees low. Nevertheless, some competitions do lose money, because the number of entries received can vary from that expected. These losses are balanced by some tournaments making a surplus. Any additional surpluses are always re-invested in the competitions structure.

### **Why do we spend money on participation such as Ping! and Loop?**

As well as providing opportunities for existing players to take part in competitions, an important part of our remit is to introduce new players into the sport.

Our research shows that, for a variety of reasons, new players do not always wish to play within a 'traditional' club structure and would rather play on a more social footing and at flexible times and venues. Therefore, we aim to provide opportunities when and where those people want them.

Raising the number of participants is important because Sport England funds sports based on the number of people taking part and whether that is showing an upward trend. In order to continue benefitting from investment from Sport England (which is utilised across all areas of our operation), Table Tennis England must continue to grow participation numbers, whether in a competitive or a social setting. The success of Loop and Ping! – alongside other initiatives aimed at more 'traditional' settings – are therefore important to the future of the sport.

Research shows that over time a significant percentage of social participants may seek more competitive opportunities and/or may wish to access coaching. Once Loop becomes more established it is anticipated that it will create a swell in new and returning players into clubs and leagues – so the knock-on effect for the more 'traditional' structure of the sport is also positive.

## **Why don't you show more table tennis competitions on TV?**

We're working on it! The good news is that TV companies are interested in principle. However, the production costs of a day's coverage run into tens of thousands of pounds, meaning that a sponsor is needed to cover the costs. We're confident we will be able to overcome this barrier and get at least some table tennis on TV in the near future.

**Paul Stimpson**

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