



## Jack's ready to seize his Rio chance

**Author:** Paul Stimpson

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For many players in the table tennis world, there is one ultimate goal that they all strive for throughout their careers – to represent their nation at the Olympic Games.

It's a feat that only a select few achieve during their playing days, and one man who has joined that elite group is Jack Hunter-Spivey, the Great Britain No 1 in the Para Table Tennis rankings.

There is no doubt that Jack is immensely proud of his achievements, and is delighted to be representing Great Britain at the 2016 Paralympic Games in Rio.

"It's a massive honour for me. It's one of the greatest achievements for any Paralympian," he said.

"I'm so proud of my achievements and to be doing this is beyond my wildest dreams. I dreamt about this as a kid and it's the pinnacle of any sportsperson's career so it is an amazing feeling.

"When I started I always had a vision of playing in the Paralympic Games, I always wanted to be the best player in the world and to be a professional table tennis player. Back then there weren't many Paralympic table tennis players that were professional but I always had that goal in my mind and even now I'm striving to be the player I wanted to be when I was younger."

Jack first started playing table tennis at the age of 10, and from that moment on he has always strived to become one of the game's top players. With him now officially confirmed as being part of the team GB squad for the Paralympic games, he admits that it will be a team effort in Rio.

"Obviously I'm the one winning the matches and the medals, but I have a massive team around me," he said. "I train at the Institution of Sport in Sheffield and I have three coaches, two physios, a nutritionist, a psychologist and a strength and conditioning coach, so it is massively a team effort.

"I only play singles internationally at the moment because I don't have a team partner so my aspirations solely are for me to achieve everything, but I can't stress enough how much the team around me and the Great Britain

set-up has a massive influence on the way I perform, so I think it is a team effort. But my aspirations and goals are for me personally.”

Despite playing the game for a number of years now, it has taken Jack a huge amount of hard work and dedication to get to this point in his career, and he reflects on how the journey to Rio all started for him.

“I started playing table tennis when I was 10 at youth club in Widnes,” he said. “When I’d heard that the 2012 Paralympic Games would be in London I joined my local club based at the Stobart Stadium and it just progressed from there really.

“The first person I saw was a player called Tony Edge. He was a Paralympian back in the 70s and he’s in a wheelchair too. Back then I could walk a little bit and was very stubborn to use a wheelchair, I really struggled with my disability.

“He was telling me he could beat me and I said ‘no you can’t, you’re in a wheelchair’, and he beat me 11-0. That opened my eyes up to see that I could use a wheelchair and was a massive turning point in accepting my disability.”

From that moment on, Jack has been using a wheelchair during matches, and the change has allowed him to develop and improve his game, something which became apparent two years later.

“I went to my first Great Britain development camp when I was 12 and they monitored me and it took me six years in the development team to work my way up to the main Great Britain squad,” he remembers.

“I took it up professionally after I tried going to college for a few weeks and I couldn’t do it with training so I decided to quit college and turn professional. It was a big gamble but luckily it’s working out so far.”

Even as a professional athlete, one of the biggest issues in the sporting world is the parity between able bodied athletes and those with disabilities. Jack tells us from his point of view how Paralympians are treated compared to able bodied athletes, and whether or not their achievements are recognised as much.

“This is an issue not just within table tennis, but across sport. I think after the London 2012 Paralympics disabled sport was pushed into the limelight a lot more, and since then we have progressed a lot more.

“Maybe we’re not seen in the same light as able bodied athletes, but I don’t think it’s out of ignorance, I think it’s just that people don’t realise the efforts that we go through.

“I think it’s definitely getting better, we could be recognised more for our achievements but as always it is a lot better than it was and they’re bridging the gap a lot more so I definitely think it’s a work in progress”.

As for the future, Jack has set himself a number of goals he wants to achieve before his playing days are over, including Paralympic glory in Rio.

He said: “I’ve always strived to be Paralympic champion, I’ve always strived to be world No 1 and try to be the best player that I possibly can be, and that’s what I’m working every day to be.

“I think my main aim is to win everything that I can win and be the best athlete I can. I think for me I’m a bit of a perfectionist so that’ll be a little difficult to get to a stage where I feel I can’t improve any more, which is a good thing I suppose.

“So my long-term aim in table tennis is to be the best in the world and if I finish my career with that I’ll be very, very happy.”

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