



## Chairman's Message – September 2016

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I can recall that over a year ago we were in a Board meeting discussing how our long-term aim and ambition was to have the nation talking about table tennis. We wanted to make the sport accessible to all ages and standards – and create an environment where all ages and standards wanted to play.

There were many strands to making our dream a reality – and we knew it would not happen overnight. We needed to make the sport accessible, not only in the traditional club environment, but also in the workplace, schools, universities, sports centres and outdoor leisure facilities. Our Loop initiative has gone a fair way to helping this.

We also needed to build on the existing grassroots club structure, which is the hard-core base of our membership. And we are helping this with new facilities grants and many more initiatives in the pipelines.

We also knew that elite performances by elite athletes on the greatest sporting arenas in the world inspire a new generation of players. And our wonderful trio of dedicated players – Paul Drinkhall, Liam Pitchford and Sam Walker – more than delivered to the nation and to the table tennis community in England with their recent performance at the Olympics.

It is no secret that the road to Rio has not been an easy one as table tennis is not one of the sports which has been externally funded at an elite level. However, our three Leopards achieved more than was expected of them. Coming so close to our bronze medal in the World Team Championships, we have again demonstrated that we belong with the top nations in the world. The increased world rankings of our leading players also demonstrate that we have arrived on the world stage.

I also want to pay tribute to the quality of the characters and personalities of our players. They conduct themselves professionally on and off the table, are respectful to their opponents – win or lose, are supportive to each other, and act always with dignity. They are three wonderful young men and any sport would be fortunate to have them as role models. I am delighted and proud that we can point to them as ambassadors for our sport and as examples to our next generation of players.

Congratulations Paul, Liam and Sam. We are all very proud of you.

I was fortunate enough to be in Rio and experienced at first hand the respect being shown to us, not only on the table, but as an association whose voice is being heard in the international arena.

One of the most memorable experiences during my stay in Rio was the honour bestowed on me to host the hospitality lunch for the International Table Tennis Family. The British Olympic Association supported the invite of our special guests and national association colleagues to visit the British House supported by the BOA, British a Government and the Mayor of London.

We were all immensely impressed with the unprecedented environment and the exceptional welcome given to us. I was delighted to be given the opportunity to express our sincere thanks to the Olympic Association for all their support both before and during the Games

People are beginning to notice table tennis in England.

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Inspirational is often an over-used phrase in sport. However, it is totally applicable when it comes to describing our wonderful, talented and dedicated young men and women who will be competing for Team GB in the Paralympics in the next few weeks.

The training and dedicated they put into their sport is second to none. They also conduct themselves with professionalism and the power and strength of their characters and personalities shine through.

Good luck to you all.

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