



Five stars get help from SportsAid

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Posted On: June 27, 2017

Five young stars of table tennis have been awarded financial support under Sport England's Backing the Best programme.

England Youth Squad players Amirul Hussain, Jamie Liu, Josh Weatherby and Jasmin Wong, plus para player Felicity Pickard, are the athletes named as beneficiaries today.

Backing The Best, managed by SportsAid for Sport England, aims to support athletes who would face difficulties progressing through their sport's talent development system without financial help.

The table tennis contingent are among more than 90 up-and-coming stars from a number of sports who are benefiting from the scheme's second year.

Liu, 13, and from Reading, was one of a number of the athletes to attend a workshop recently at which they received expert insight and guidance from double Olympic champion Rebecca Adlington, Rugby World Cup winner Maggie Alphonsi and Team GB canoe slalom legend Richard Hounslow.

Alphonsi, who is a member of the Backing The Best awards panel, retired from rugby after England's World Cup triumph in 2014 and now works, among other roles, as a mentor in both sport and business.

She said:

I've had 25 years' experience of being a top athlete and won the Women's Rugby World Cup, but there were many challenges along the way.

There's been ups and downs, and I think it's important if I can give that knowledge to the next generation of athletes coming through.

Hopefully they'll learn from my experiences and I can support them on their journey towards the top.

Phil Smith, Sport England's Director of Sport, highlighted the difference Backing The Best is making with the costs young athletes are facing:

In an ideal world, talent and effort alone would determine who gets to the top in sport. The reality is, being a talented athlete can be expensive. In the talent system, athletes and their families now have to find an average of over £6,000 a year.

This is out of the reach of many, and puts others at risk of dropping out, and not fulfilling their potential.

Thanks to National Lottery players, we've been able to help another 94 young athletes through Backing The Best so we can take some of those financial barriers away. We want these potential stars of the future to be able to concentrate on what matters most, their sport.

Simon Mills, Table Tennis England's Head of Talent & Performance, said:

We are very grateful to SE for enabling this support for athletes who would otherwise find it even more difficult to continue to work towards achieving what they are capable of.

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