

THE *WINNING* *EDGE*

The official coaching magazine of Table Tennis England

Edition One | Summer 2015



Speak Less for Success
Encourage a change of approach

Training Exercises
Forehand/Backhand Development/Progression

Dealing with Defeat
How to take the positives

WELCOME

Welcome to the first edition of the 'The Winning Edge'.

I would like to start by thanking all the coaches who took part in the survey to choose the magazine title. We hope this magazine will become a regular feature in the table tennis coaching world. The aim is to provide a high quality quarterly magazine for all our table tennis coaches, potential coaches and clubs, which will inform coaches and clubs of national priorities and provide information essential to holistic coach development. On the whole, magazine content will be steered by the coaches themselves, so that the knowledge and development is owned primarily by coaches.

Table Tennis England has been through a complete restructure recently. Staff are committed to doing their utmost to address some of the current coach and coaching issues, ever mindful of the requirements of all levels and abilities of coaches and players. We are hoping the magazine is warmly received and feedback is welcomed through the survey at the back or through email. The first edition of the magazine has a generalised coach development theme, however it is down to you as the coaches to influence the content of future editions.

Table Tennis England hope you enjoy the read.

Thank you from Miriam and the Coaching and Performance Department.



Simon Mills
*The Coaching and
Performance Department*

“
The Winning Edge is an exciting opportunity for the coaches in our sport to learn from each other, share ideas and ultimately help our players improve and achieve in table tennis. I am very keen for this pilot to expand and be a regular feature in your inbox so provide your feedback and play a role in developing a resource for you and your coaching at all levels of the sport. ”
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NEWS UPDATE



Meet the team

Find out who's who

Head of Coaching and Performance – Simon Mills.
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All course bookings, licence renewals and queries should be initially directed to Sandra, by email or phone. The website contains all information and application forms for licensing and courses. The website address is <http://tabletennisengland.co.uk/coaching/>.

All other questions and queries regarding the coach education pathway, feedback or suggestions should be directed to Miriam Beales.

Database

Due to some technical issues, unfortunately the coaching database release has been postponed until further notice. We apologise for this inconvenience.

Annual Coach Licence

Renewal date: 1st August 2015

What is required for renewal?

A valid Safeguarding Certificate
(valid for 3 years)

A valid First Aid Certificate
(valid for 3 years)

A valid Table Tennis England DBS check
(valid for 3 years)

A CPD course (valid for 1 year)

Price: £24

The coach licence process is currently being reviewed. More information on the review will be published in the coming months.

Contact Details

Please can all coaches ensure that the Table Tennis England Coaching Department are informed of any change in their contact details, whether this is your email, home or club address. This is of paramount importance if you would like to receive the 'The Winning Edge' magazine or any organisational updates regarding coaching courses or coaching matters. We urge all coaches to check their spam/junk mailbox just in case emails are getting lost in there.



Coaching Courses

All UKCC Courses and Internal CPD will be advertised on the coaching website pages including information on the upcoming round of courses. Table Tennis England will do its utmost to advertise external CPD courses where possible. Please see the provisional outline of UKCC courses for next season on the website by mid-June; the actual dates will be published on the website when they have been confirmed.

If there is not a course in your area, please feel free to register your interest by emailing Sandra, as we may be able put more courses on through demand.

Communication

In future the Coaching Department are going to use email as the predominant method of communication, so please ensure you check your emails regularly to make sure that you do not miss any vital information. If you do not have an email address we will do our utmost to keep you informed of any changes.

HEAD TO



Paul Drinkhall (PLAYER)

How would you describe the role of your coach? It's about supporting the player, passing on knowledge and about working together as a team to get the best out of training but also out of a match.

How important is the athlete-coach relationship? I've done well in tournaments without a coach - for example the Russian Open I got to the final. However a coach can help with all sorts of different things. If you're struggling and having a bad day, a coach can pump you up and give you the tactics and motivation, or whatever is needed.

What attributes do you believe make an effective coach in training and competition? I think that varies from player to player. Obviously there are team events but essentially table tennis is an individual sport and it's about finding what each player needs: whether that's motivation or to be relaxed and calm. It's all down to personal preference. For me, I just want to know my coach is 100% behind me, that he's buzzing and up for it.

In what ways can a coach get the best out of the athlete inside and outside training? Being open minded. As I said, different athletes have different needs. You're trying to get your knowledge to a player whether that's a youngster trying to find their way or adding to an established player's approach. For me, some games I read well, and sometimes you just get it all wrong. That's where your coach can make a difference.

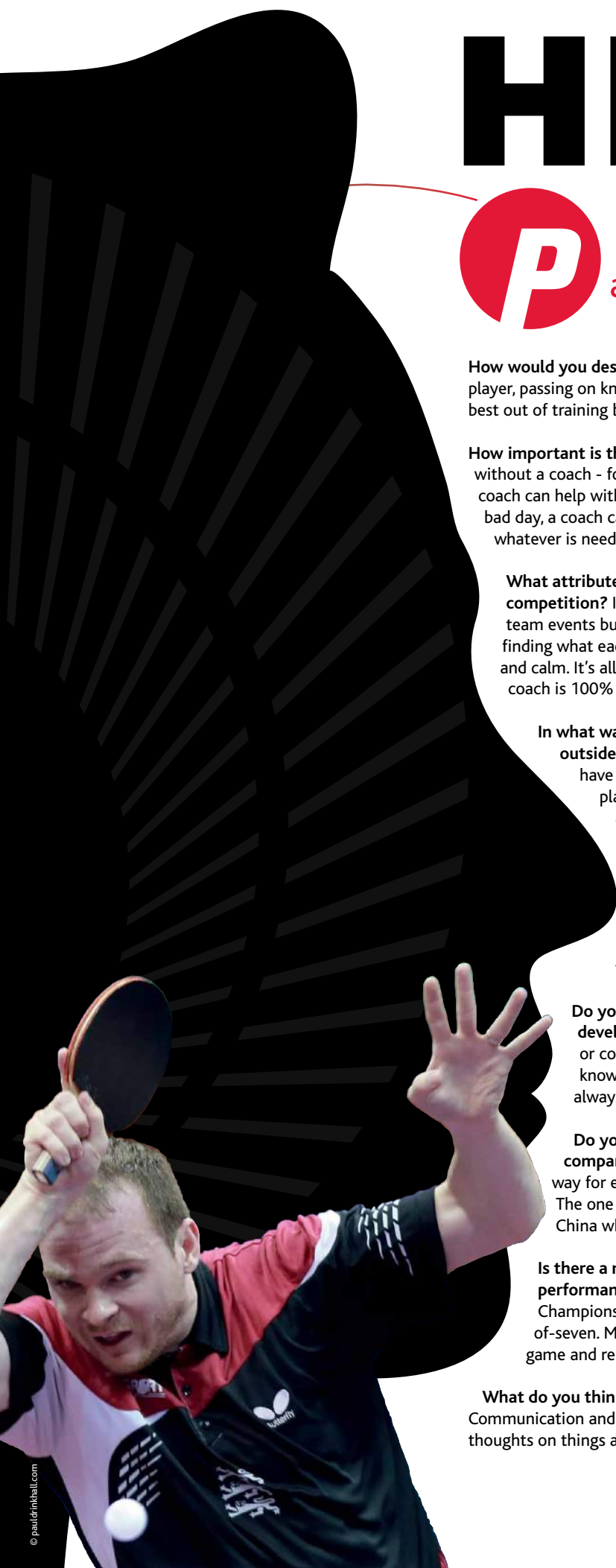
Have you ever fallen out with your coach? It happens in high-pressure moments but then afterwards you sit down and talk about it. Invariably you've been thinking the same thing but not properly communicating or understanding.

Do you feel it is important for your coach to be constantly developing and learning like a player? Definitely. Neither athletes or coaches should feel like they know everything. Even if your knowledge is huge or you're a great tactician of the game, you can always be better.

Do you think coaching styles in Europe and Asia are different compared to the UK? I don't see there's a German way or a Swedish way for example, I think all players are different so coaches need to be. The one nation where there is a style of play and therefore coaching is China where it's all very fast.

Is there a moment where a coach made a large impact on your performance? It was when I was seeded No.1 in the European Youth Championships. It was the second round and I was 3-0 down in a best-of-seven. My coach, usually full of tactical advice, just told me to play my game and relax. I won 4-3 and went on to win the tournament.

What do you think is the most important element of coaching? Communication and understanding are the most important things. Ask a player's thoughts on things and work out the best way to work together.



O HEAD



Nick Jarvis (COACH)

How would you describe your role as a coach? Someone that players can turn to and rely on. The coach is the rock as it were but you're also trying to give the player ownership as it's going to be them that has to win the match.

How important is the coach-athlete relationship? That's key but so is the relationship between the coaches. We need to have a similar understanding and the players need to know that we are doing everything we possibly can to make them the best they can be even if that means making decisions they might not approve of.

What attributes do you believe make an effective coach in training and competition? That depends on the stage of a career. For a younger player you're working more on the technical side of things, how to cope with pressure or overcome nerves. As they get older the psychological side of things becomes more important.

In what ways can a coach get the best out of the athlete inside and outside training? I don't think there are any great secrets - you just have to find out how they tick. So some players have to train more, some need to feel good about themselves and some need to be taxed.

Have you ever fallen out with a player? It happens and it's difficult but, as long as everyone knows we're all working for the same reason, there's usually rationale for it. Coaches have to understand where a player is coming from.

Do you feel it is important for you as a coach to be constantly developing and learning? We're all constantly doing that. Over the years we've been on various courses but you're also feeding off other coaches and other sports all the time. You have to keep on top of all the coaching or equipment trends in the world.

Do you think coaching styles change in Europe and Asia compared to the UK? China definitely have a structure where they play extremely fast and get closer to the table which is incredibly hard to do. Paul does that but I think in every nation it's about keeping a player's natural flair.

Is there a moment where you feel you've made a big impact on Paul or another athlete on their performance? I think most coaches wouldn't want to talk about that as it's the player that pulls off the win. But it's great playing a role in working with a 13-year-old to becoming a top senior. And sure there are moments where you introduce a tactic that is key to a match.

What do you think is the most important element of coaching? Once they're up to a certain standard, it's about communicating and making sure that the player is properly prepared. The technical changes are easy to do, the psychological ones less so.



WE

SPEAK LESS FOR SUCCESS

In this extract from Ben Oakley's book, *Podium*, we look at examples from four different sports which encourage a change of approach.



A number of recent talent development books, including Malcolm Gladwell's *Outliers* and Matthew Syed's *Bounce*, have emphasised the importance of quality and quantity of practice in the development of champions.

After all, it is the coaches who create the practices and build in the rich feedback loops that Syed describes: 'Great coaches are able to design practice so that feedback is embedded in the drill, leading to automatic readjustment, which in turn improves the quality of the feedback, generating further improvements, and so on.'

In some sports, this approach starts from an early stage on the talent pathway, simply because of the distance between coach and athlete during training sessions. In what are popularly known as the 'sitting sports', canoeing, cycling, equestrian, rowing and sailing, coaches have to become adept not only at summarising their feedback and delivering it in concise packages at a suitable time, but also in encouraging a self-learning mindset from the start.



He taught me how to assess what I was doing. He encouraged me so that when I made a mistake on the course I could fix it myself.



Michael Johnson's coach Clyde Hart introduced feedback into Johnson's training sessions in a very simple way. A beeper sounding every few seconds was wired into trackside speakers to give the runner pace feedback in every session he did for 15 years. Like a metronome in music, it helped him judge his rhythm and speed, enabling him to judge his form instantly at key checkpoints and refine his technique and tactics.

The traditions and culture of other sports can, however, have a strong influence on how coaches behave and run their sessions. Coaches often base their coaching model on

how they themselves were coached and these behaviours are perpetuated, sometimes meaning that practices can become deeply ingrained in the culture of the sport. As a result, there are numerous cases where what coaches habitually do is considered contrary to scientific principles.

For example, coaches in elite adult judo have been described in a recent paper in the *Journal of Sport Sciences* as highly autocratic, showing low levels of social support and using their behaviour as part of a 'toughening up' process for their athletes. Although the athletes did not like this coaching behaviour, they acknowledged it to be highly effective, illustrating that the culture of the sport strongly influences what coaches do. This research suggests that the culture of judo squad coaching is largely based on approaches in which communication and influence is likely to be mainly from coach to athlete.

Similarly, a traditional approach to soccer coaching has been described by a number of studies in Premier League football clubs. This is characterised by a highly directed, autocratic and prescriptive approach to instruction with limited player independence.

For example, when the proportion of time spent on different tasks during practices in Premier League soccer was measured, some interesting results showed up. Instruction (60%) was by far the most common activity, proportionally followed by lots of praise (15%), with observation (13%) occupying less time and even less used by the coach for asking questions (3%). The remaining 9% of time was largely taken up by the coach managing and hustling along the session.

By contrast, another study of top-level football coaches in Norway indicated that they employed silent observation more than twice as much as their English counterparts (37%).

A questioning style of coaching has been promoted by sports coach UK in generic continuing personal development (CPD) workshops for more than 20 years, but it seems that the message may still not be getting across. With 60% of the time being used for instruction, including



© Alan Tan

feedback, it suggests rather too much information and talk in sessions. Also, although praise is designed to build confidence, the overuse of praise could be regarded as a sign of rather unspecific feedback, which can dilute its motivational effects.

Some coaches will be uncomfortable with an approach with less instruction and feedback because it challenges their feeling of control. The idea of gradually reducing or fading out feedback is to reduce the players' dependency and get them to make their own decisions, just as they need to do in the heat of competition.

Golfer Jack Nicklaus illustrated this point when he said: 'Jack Grout taught me from the start. He said I needed to be responsible for my own swing and understand how I can correct problems on the golf course myself without having to run back to somebody. During the years that I was playing most of my competitive golf, I saw Jack Grout maybe once or twice a year for maybe an hour, but he taught me the fundamentals of the game. He taught me how to assess what I was doing. He encouraged me so that when I made a mistake on the course I could fix it myself, without being put out of the tournament and then dealing with it afterwards.'

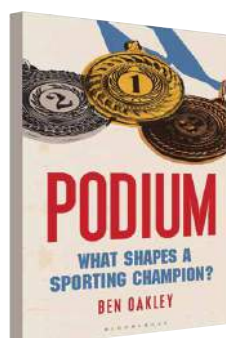
The approach outlined by Nicklaus is common across elite sport. Most champions are good at evaluating their own performance and working things out for themselves. This therefore frames the coach's role as one of trying to embed feedback into most training sessions and creating an environment in which top athletes can thrive. The message for coaches working further down the talent pathway is to adapt their style at the appropriate point so the emerging high performer is encouraged to think

and make decisions for themselves, rather than relying on the coach for direction. In the likely event that a talented player will progress to a high level – and probably another coach who uses this style – the transition will not be so abrupt.

Eventually, the coach might come to feel like a spare part as their athlete becomes more independent. Consider middle distance runner and world 800m record holder David Rudisha. His coach and mentor Father Colm O'Connell has never been abroad to support him at major events – for him, his work is done.

Overall coaches should recognise that their approach must vary according to the developmental stage of the athlete or player. While instruction may be an important part of the mix for young and inexperienced players, the earlier they can be encouraged to think and make decisions for themselves, the sooner they'll become independent, capable performers.

WE



Podium – What Shapes a Sporting Champion? by Ben Oakley is published by Bloomsbury Sport. ISBN: 978-1-472902-16-0.



TRAINING EXERCISES

Forehand & Backhand Development & Progression



After teaching the initial Forehand and Backhand strokes in the beginner stages, players need to have the ability to combine the strokes together.

The two exercises shown here give two basic footwork drills where players can work on both Forehand and Backhand, firstly in regular footwork drill, and secondly in an irregular footwork drill so the player can also develop their perception skills.

Fundamental to the player's movement is maintaining good dynamic balance throughout, starting with a good ready position, the knees slightly bent, upper body posture forward with the player's body weight distributed evenly between their right and left side and felt more towards the front of the foot. The footwork movement from each shot in these exercises should be a side stepping action. To allow the player to play consecutive shots, players must recover quickly after each shot to give themselves time to repeat it.

As well as trying to maintain good technique, coaches should encourage their players to recover quickly after each stroke and move into position quickly, maintaining good balance and posture throughout. Timing is very important, with players being encouraged to strike the ball at the top of its bounce.



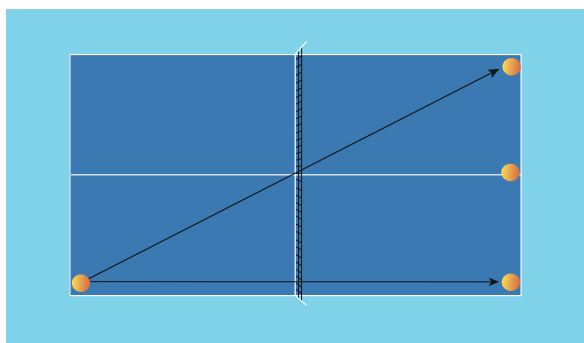
As well as trying to maintain good technique, coaches should encourage their players to recover quickly after each stroke.





Regular Footwork Drill

- Player 'A' – Forehand Block Feed from the Forehand Corner
- Player 'B' – 2 Backhands Wide, then 2 Forehands Wide



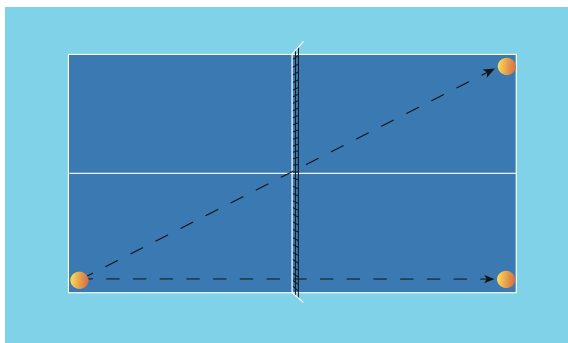
Player 'A' uses the Forehand Block to control the ball to each corner of the table, trying to be as accurate as possible. Players should be encouraged to posture forward, using a short arm action with good feeling from their hand in order to control the ball. Whilst the ball is being played to the same corner each time, Player 'A' should be encouraged to make small adjustments to their position to allow for any variations in ball placement and spin.

Player 'B' will play 2 x Backhand Drives from the Backhand corner first, then using a side stepping movement, moving quickly across to the Forehand Corner to play 2 x Forehand Drives, then moving quickly back to the Backhand and repeating the exercise.

Notes: Players should play the rally at a tempo where technique of both the arm & body action and movement from side to side can be improved. The exercise can be made more difficult by increasing the tempo of the rally, or by playing at wider angles to force Player 'B' to move further.

Irregular Footwork Drill

- Player 'A' – Forehand Block Feed from the Forehand Corner
- Player 'B' – 1 or 2 Backhands Wide, then 1 or 2 Forehands Wide



Player 'A' uses the Forehand Block to control the ball to each corner of the table as with the regular footwork drill. However the blocker now has a choice of whether to play 1 or 2 balls to each corner.

Player 'B' will play 1 or 2 x Backhand Drives from the Backhand corner first, then using a side stepping movement, moving quickly across to the Forehand Corner to play 1 or 2 x Forehand Drives, then moving quickly back to the Backhand and repeating the exercise.

Player 'B' will need to anticipate through the observation of cues from Player 'A's bat angle as to whether 1 or 2 balls are played to each corner. At first this will be harder for the player to judge, so rallies will need to be played slightly slower initially. Once this begins to improve, the tempo of the rally needs to increase to develop quicker decision making.

WE



DEALING WITH DEFEAT

Few of us are like the great Australian athlete Herb Elliott, a man who went undefeated over one mile or 1500 metres. We have to contend with defeat, so how do coaches approach this? Tim Hartley gathered some opinions.

The worlds of sport and poetry don't collide too often, but when they do, chances are Rudyard Kipling's 'If' will be mentioned, or more specifically, a certain two lines.

'If you can meet with Triumph and Disaster
And treat those two impostors just the same'.

And for Level 4 endurance coach Phill Morris, there's a lot of wisdom in those 16 words, because much of the time a coach's role is to help an athlete or team which hasn't triumphed, where things may not have gone right all the time, and where the journey home may be one where the tiredness is made all the worse by the result.

'As an endurance coach, most of the time my athletes won't win. I recently listened to (European and Commonwealth medallist) Tim Hutchings talk about making a career of losing, and I see one of the most

important jobs in coaching being to try to give athletes a good perspective on sport... and life in general.'

Morris says it's not that he doesn't set out to win or to help his athletes succeed, but there needs to be a sensible dose of reality.

'In an athlete's career they will get to stages when they will win and expect to win, but then as they progress up in age or quality they will get beaten... and they will then have to learn how to win at this next level. I teach athletes from the start to try to win, but if you are beaten then respect the opponent and to make sure they deserved to beat you.

'Then you go back and work on what you need to be the winner eventually.'

But often defeat comes when athletes or teams are well matched or even expect (or are expected by others) to win, other times it can be a massive defeat, the type of scoreline which you really don't want to write home about... and again that presents a whole new set of challenges to a coach.

For Morris, the first thing to do is wait. 'If your athlete is ready to win and expects to win and they are beaten, the first thing to do is analyse. I believe the worst time to talk about defeat is straight after a race or game. If you ask an athlete about a race in which they didn't do as well as expected straight after the finish they will usually use some colourful language. After time to reflect and with some input from the coach's view they will often realise that only a small part of the race made the difference and 98% of it could have been good.

'So by making small changes in tactics or concentration etc they will be able to rebuild confidence quite easily.'

Australian hockey coach Barry Dancer, an Olympic champion with his native Kookaburras in 2004 and who has also taken charge of England, has a wealth of experience, and believes 'each situation needs to be dealt with differently'.

Dancer told Coaching Edge: 'The circumstances of a heavy defeat, or a last-gasp defeat or a major disappointment can be very different. Personally, I enjoyed the challenge of this type of situation and always endeavoured for the group to do the same. I considered the situation provided a very good opportunity to develop the unity and competitive character of our group and refocusing and re-energising the group becomes a central part of the process.

'In the process the emotional aspects of loss often need to be addressed in the early stages. The timing of the group's next competition determines the time frame and having another match or competition soon after the disappointment can be a healthy thing.'

Dancer says the manner of the performance that led to the setback is important to examine and focus on, so that the preparation for the next competition is focused on the most appropriate aspects.

For Level 1 rugby coach Lee Phillips, when it comes to his Under -11s side it's all about finding some confidence.

'If the week after a "thrashing" there is another game, then I almost ignore the result from the week before and instead concentrate on something that the players did or do well, to try and build confidence. There's no point in harping on about things they didn't do the week before... that gets you nowhere and will probably set the tone for a repeat performance.'

However, if the next chance he has to work with the team is a training session, the focus changes.

'In those circumstances I try to pick one thing to improve on from the week before and concentrate on that. Trying to correct too much at once just leaves room for confusion and a lack of a clear objective for the session. Always try to leave things on a positive note too by highlighting the things that had been done well.'

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Endurance coach Morris firmly believes that sometimes athletes can simply have a 'bad day at the office'.

'If your athlete was well prepared, physically and mentally and they just didn't perform then sometimes for you as a coach less is more... don't over analyse.'

And similar to rugby coach Phillips, he likes to rebuild confidence at times like this.

'I remind my athletes of their strengths and I usually set up a training session that I know they will like and succeed at. Also I like to keep the mood light.

'When it comes to keeping things in perspective, I will always remind athletes of former greats – notably Seb Coe who did have a bad day in the 800 metres at the Moscow Olympics (in 1980) despite being the greatest 800 metre runner in the world at the time. Because he was such a great athlete he bounced back to take the 1500m.

'His dad, who was his coach, was less than impressed and very bluntly made his assessment of the race to his son... not an approach many would condone, but sometimes you need the blunt truth in order to move on quickly.'

So... defeat, it happens... it's how you react in sport which often marks you out, and there are many ways to do it as there are athletes and performers, and perhaps different ways within the same team.

'Some will need the proverbial arm around their shoulder, some will need harsh truth, some may need both,' says Morris. 'All athletes are individuals and the coach's art is to find the way to restore confidence... but all the athletes I have coached always look back into their training, and if they have done the work, they usually bounce back very quickly.'

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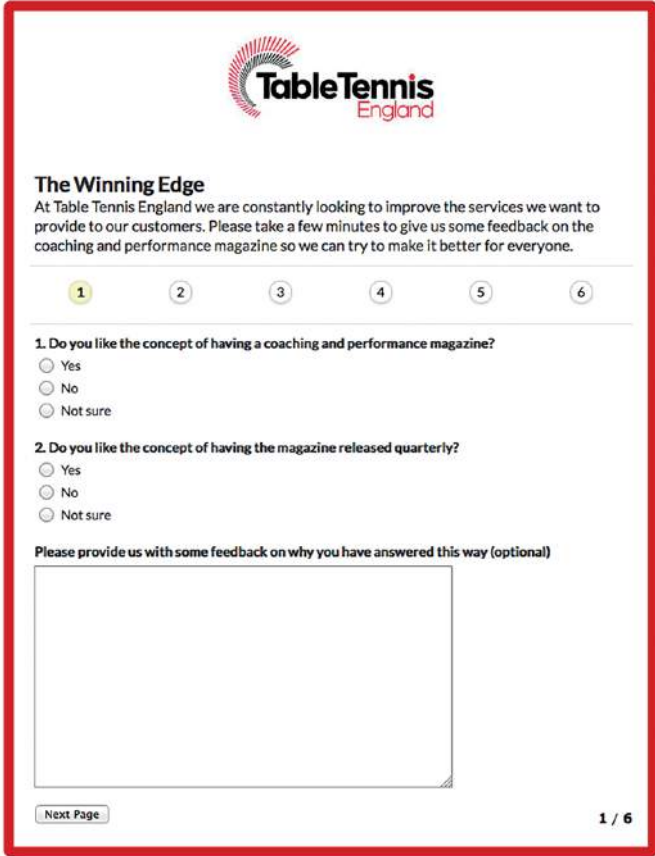
'The circumstances of a heavy defeat, or a last-gasp defeat or a major disappointment can be very different. Personally, I enjoyed the challenge of this type of situation and always endeavoured for the group to do the same.'
Barry Dancer



Table Tennis England would greatly appreciate it if you could take 5 minutes to click on the link below and fill in the short survey. We are hoping the magazine becomes a permanent feature in the Coaching and Performance Department, so we would like to gain some feedback and insight on the magazine. You will also be entered into a prize draw to win a £25 Amazon voucher.

[Click here for survey](#)

Alternatively type into browser: <http://bit.ly/1e57ptl>



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Contact Paul Stimpson on 01908 208869 or paul.stimpson@tabletennisengland.co.uk