

SELECT COMMITTEE ON DISABILITIES for National Council

First Report 12th May 2021

Current Background

Table Tennis is a sport that has been enjoyed by disabled people for many years. The Home Nations are responsible for grassroots of Para Table Tennis while British Para Table Tennis organises the World Class Performance programme for Elite athletes and those on the pathway.

The coronavirus pandemic has resulted in an unprecedented increase in inactivity for disabled people. 2.7% more disabled people were classed as inactive between November 2019 and November 2020 than the previous 12-month period. Disabled people were especially affected during the first lockdown period, seeing a 10.3% increase in inactivity (compared to 7.1% of non-disabled people) headline findings of a new YouGov poll commissioned by Activity Alliance, the leading voice for disabled people in sport and activity as it launched its 3 -year strategy in May 2021.

As a starting point the Select Committee decided to look at table tennis in England at the grassroots.

To focus on Disability at grassroots level within TTE; including at Club level.

TASK ONE

Members of the committee put themselves in the position of an adult with a disability wanting to play TT; a parent with a child with a disability; or a young person looking for a new sport.

- ***Searching for somewhere for them to play in a 30 mile radius of where they lived.***
- ***How would they go about doing this? Did they know TTE has a register of Ability Clubs?***
- ***Can you find any evidence of this on TTE web site?***
- ***What does Ability Club mean to you? What would you expect from the name?***
- ***What would you want to know as a player or parent before going to a club.***
- ***What disabilities would qualify a player to be a Para TT Athlete.***

1. As a parent with a child with a disability Results:-

Followed process many IT minded parents would do - Google is your Friend and that jumped out was <https://tabletennisengland.co.uk/clubs/clubs-guidance/premierclub-ability/>

This said that the name of Table Tennis England's disability offering was Premier Club Ability – the page was read and it suggested that the register of Premier Ability Clubs was in an attachment on the page – we could not find it despite using the search facility.

What does Ability Club mean to you? What would you expect from the name?

Representatives of the committee then conducted a test regarding what Ability Club meant to them (some already knew what it was) A member asked someone who does not know anything about

Table Tennis or really sport for that matter. I said "I had been looking at the Table Tennis England website and found

Ability Club - I asked what that suggested to them.?" The response - high end performance. This branding appears to give a mixed message to parents.

What would you want to know as a player or parent before going to a club

As the parent of a child going to a club for the first time I do not think I would be asking anything different unless the child needed special facilities on the first visit. We would be expecting the usual questions to be answered - safeguarding, friendliness, peer groups, access, changing facilities etc..

Having found the Premier Club Ability page and the attached Classification document we would refer to that to know what disabilities would qualify a player to be a Para TT Athlete

BIG Question - where is the list of Premier Ability Clubs? No attachment from the page and no link as far as we could see

One representative also asked their Club Chairman if they were still an Ability Club, as we certainly used to be and currently have a disabled player.

The answer was that he did not know, he has not heard from TTE for a longtime regarding Ability Club.

2, What does ABILITY Club mean to me?

The club should accept any standard they have, whether this is due to experience or physical / mental capability. Various coaching methods should be adaptable to cope with these standards. The venues should also be accessible to all who want to attend.

What disabilities would Qualify a player to be a Para TT athlete?

There are many physical conditions that qualify a player for Para TT as well as psychological, but I would be guided by the classification chart on the TTE website and ask advice from the BPTT coaching team in Sheffield as the player improved.

What would I want to know as a parent or player before going to a club?

- As a parent I would want to know where the venue is, what access is there to the venue especially if a wheelchair user is involved.
- What experience the members / coaches have and are they welcoming to disabled athletes.
- What is the cost?
- Times of the sessions for beginners, more experienced players?
- What do they need to wear to play?
- Do they need a TT bat and ball to play?

Do I know where to find out about ability clubs on the TTE website?

The only evidence I can find is that TTE says that Premier clubs trained to become Ability clubs with further disability training in the Leagues and county section under clubs. It also says that you can find the local Premier club Ability on an attachment at the bottom of the section. When going to the bottom of the section it is not there.

Looking for somewhere to play within 30 miles?

If I was new to the sport I may look on the website for Table Tennis clubs in the city or ask the local league to provide details of local table tennis clubs. Although they may not identify Ability clubs.

I may also look on the TTE website in the Find a place to play section on the default page. Here you can put in the distance from your house and identify clubs or premier clubs. This site does not give details of accessibility etc.

3 A child with learning disabilities to play table tennis

Another representative decided to challenge their husband to find out information.

He kindly spent about an hour trying to research local facilities available for a child with learning disabilities to play table tennis. We felt that this would give a realistic picture from the point of view of someone with little background in table tennis and no knowledge of the TTE website.

These are his findings:-

I searched for the following :-

- Table Tennis in Slough: this brought up Cippenham Table Tennis Club but no mention I could find of encouraging young people with learning disabilities to take part.
- Table Tennis England: - on here I found the 'Where to play' link and then listed clubs within a 30 mile radius of home postcode. As second closest link this listed 'Sports Able' in Maidenhead. This mentions TT sessions on a Friday night but also has a news item saying that Sports Able is closing. I went through the next couple of pages of local club websites but found nothing which mentioned pathways for kids with learning disabilities.
- Table Tennis England – There is a 'Being Inclusive' tab on the website which pictures players with Downs Syndrome but this link just seems to be information for clubs to help them to be more inclusive rather than a resource for parents to find a suitable club.
- Slough Family Information Service: on this website by searching for Sport I brought up a link to 'Bisham Disability Sport Centre' which operates under the umbrella of 'Get Berkshire Active' but this had nothing about offering or signposting to TT clubs where kids with learning disability might be welcomed.
- Special Olympics website lists Table Tennis and has regional contact that covers Bucks and Berks as Chris Jones and a list of accredited clubs but only one on the list offers Table Tennis and that is on IOW. Locally, sports clubs listed on the Special Olympics website are mainly swimming or gymnastics.
- I also checked Downs Syndrome UK website but got nothing relevant there either.

If I was a parent with no particular reason to favour table tennis, I think I would probably give up at that stage and go for a different sport! If my child had a reason to choose table tennis above other sports then I would probably need to email or phone individual clubs to find out what, if anything, they could offer my child.

Background information

What is PremierClub Ability?

PremierClub Ability is a programme for all PremierClubs committed to becoming accessible and open to all disabled people. We will provide free Disability Awareness Training for clubs wishing to achieve a PremierClub Ability status, as well as guidance to support an inclusive environment.

How do I become PremierClub Ability status?

If you are already a PremierClub, and are interested in reaching Ability status, please email [Helen Dennett, Projects Officer](#) We think Helen Dennett left TTE over 3 years ago

What does my club have to do to achieve PremierClub Ability status?

All you have to do is complete our **free** Disability Awareness Training and agree to Table Tennis England's best practises:

- Have at least 1 wheelchair friendly table
- Promote events and news from British Para Table Tennis, as communicated by Table Tennis England
- Provide suitable playing opportunities for players with, and without a disability
- Provide a welcome atmosphere for anyone joining the club and adapt sessions where necessary.
- Provide information for members wishing to progress on to the talent pathway

Problem is that there is nothing showing a list of the Ability Clubs and the Club Finder does not show this list either. Also at the time of writing BPTT did not have access to this list so they cannot contact the Ability Clubs as part of Talent ID pathway

TTE New Training course on-line 2021.

The Select Committee were delighted to see the development of this new training course in February 2021 by TTE which is to be commended.

Table Tennis England has launched a new disability awareness online training module for the sport's workforce and volunteers, and sign-ups are now open.

Disability awareness training in the past has been delivered on a face-to-face course and this option will still be available to clubs in the future but with the rise in

availability and improved access to online learning, the course has been moved online.

The course will provide you with information to support you to feel more confident working with Disabled People in a table tennis setting by making your sessions more accessible and showing you ways of communicating with players, whilst meeting their individual needs.

Everything is table tennis specific and includes sections on coaching, classification, competitions and communication aimed at the following organisations/people:

- *Clubs, leagues and counties*
- *Volunteers within clubs, leagues, counties and regions*
- *Coaches*

The course is being offered free of charge to everyone throughout February and thereafter on an ongoing basis will be free to Premier Clubs and Licensed Coaches, with a small fee for others.

The Select Committee are also delighted that the BPTT Pathway Manager Shaun Marples has now said “ the ability club leads can contact him and he can help them promote the Pathway, Classification, and Eligibility process, and this could be an extra perk to the ‘Ability Club’ scheme. Shaun is also suggesting that perhaps one CPD day in Sheffield at the EIS, per year, observing the Performance, and working with Pathway/Future athletes.

These are good developments to report from the Select Committee as we start a journey of investigation. We have heard that TTE web site will be updated this year so there will be an opportunity for some of our issues to be taken on board hopefully.

Committee

James Kenny (South Yorkshire)

Sue Hayes (Buckinghamshire)

Ken McLeod (Hampshire)

Harry Jutle (Herefordshire)

Shirley Pickering (Leicestershire)

Ross Wilson World/Commonwealth Para Champion

Mike Smith

Mark Mitchell

Karen Tonge MBE (Chair of the Select Committee on Disabilities)

