

Select Committee on Competitions Report to National Council

28th June 2025

The Select Committee on Competitions members:

Alan Ransome – Chairman

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Loss of Control

We reported to the last two meetings of Council that we have identified that the loss of good standing has produced a significant number of competitions in England that are now outside the remit of Table Tennis England.

This problem has expanded further, as we not only have the VETTS Society and BUCS, the university organisation, operating outside the Association, as previously reported Matchplay Sports in particular are hiring club facilities and running tournaments with prize money. Simon Morgan is still operational from Herefordshire and 365 is also outside the Association.

It is not just the competitions that are running outside the Association but there are also difficulties because there are now three separate ranking lists which are being published by different organisations, so the Association is losing control of this which has been in operation for many decades.

The VETTS Society has always run their own ranking for 50+ age groups, but now they are operating their own Over 40 rankings, completely separate from Table Tennis England, which is clearly not a good move as it does distance many of the very large Over 40 membership of our Association, who now have even more loyalty to the VETTS than Table Tennis England.

Another problem is that the calendar is also divided in that Table Tennis England are not including some of these outside events in the national calendar, which means the organisers are having to publish their own calendars, which again is unhelpful. We remain even more concerned about this and would like to see actions taken to see all of this returned to the way it was managed since our inauguration almost 100 years ago when all events were in some way regulated and controlled and under the auspices of Table Tennis England.

We were promoting Table Tennis United, it now is more like Table Tennis Disunited.

Improved Opportunities for Junior Girls To Have A More Effective Competition Programme

The Competitions Select Committee have been working with a number of senior people within Table Tennis England to revise some of the regulations for the Youth and Junior club competitions to give the up and coming junior and cadet girls an improved competition programme on a cost effective basis.

Our proposal, which was first proposed in the early part of last year, was to remove the restriction on girls outside the top 5 ranked play from being able to play in what was then the National Junior League and National Cadet League, and these have been renamed the Junior

British Club League and Cadet British Club League. This would mean that cadets, for example, would have the benefits of the Junior British League, now called the Youth British Club League, and have the low cost opportunity to play in their national JBCL and CBCL, which are on a regional or local basis and is a mixed competition playing against boys and girls for 4 days per year in each competition at a relatively minor cost.

In addition, it appears as a result of our proposal that the British Club League Committee itself is proposing a trial for Cadet BCL to be played on a regional basis, and the opportunity for cadets to be able to play in all three competitions and juniors to play in two gives them a stronger competition programme, which is likely to assist with their improvement and progression.

We have discussed this with a number of senior coaches who have a great deal of experience in this work and they believe, as we do, that this would make a significant difference to the future prospects of the England women's teams and help them to regain their status on the world stage.

The British Club League Committee have had our proposal in front of them for more than 12 months and have only recently been discussing it with the Boards Competition Advisory Committee. They have decided to go with what they see as a compromise which allows the junior players to play 5 matches in the new Youth BCL before becoming ineligible to play in the lower competitions.

However, they have also added the possibility of boys to do this as well as girls.

This makes matters worse rather than better because it does not allow the possibility of the Cadet girls, who are not given this privilege in the Cadet BCL, to take advantage of this and allows the boys from the Youth BCL, who are far too strong for the Junior BCL to play in this lower competition, therefore, this will have a negative effect on this, which will mean many matches will become uncompetitive because of the difference in standard, which will spoil the enjoyment and attractiveness. This competition has been running very well for several years, however, this could change for some players because of this.

The British Club League Committee also seems to think that they need the boys to be treated the same as girls and that the principal in Table Tennis United that gives women and girls priority should not apply in this particular case. The British Club League Committee do not understand that the Youth BCL is a completely different type of competition from the Junior BCL league because the Youth BCL is a separate boys and girls competition which does not fit in at all with the Junior BCL, which is mixed where boys play in the same team as girls.

As this is all happening this week, 3 or 4 days before the closing date on the 30th June 2025 of the Youth BCL. It looks as if it is too late to do anything now for the coming season, hopefully, further consideration can be given to all of this going forward. As it stands, unfortunately we have lost 2 years of opportunities to give these up and coming Cadet girls an extra boost which is really needed.

Jonathan Bayliss, one of our Committee members has produced a paper and this is attached as an Appendix.

4 Star Tournaments

Another concern that we have is where Table Tennis England are with 4 Star tournaments and what was Grand Prix. We know that Table Tennis England decided to discontinue the Grand Prix, which were overall very successful events for a large number of licensed members who were keen to play in Open tournaments of this kind, and quite often the entries were so good that the entries were closed before the actual closing date. Up to now this season, there has only been one 4 Star, which was held in Cleveland, and whilst this tournament ran very well, the entry was low at just over 80 players, and the number of high ranked players was very limited, being 7 entries from the top 50 men in the ranking list and only 3 women out of the top 50. There is a 4 Star in Nottingham that is taking place later this month, and we await a report on this tournament. The entries for Nottingham are higher but that is to be expected in view of the location.

We know that there are some attempts to help 4 Star tournaments in other parts of the country next season, but we do have a concern whether these competitions will go ahead because the cost of running them is so high and the local organisations who are responsible for running them, such as County Associations, cannot afford to have a substantial loss. We believe that the effect of cancelling the Grand Prix needs to be considered by the Association.

National Series

We are pleased to see that some changes have been made to the National Series and that the venues being used are more central for this season, therefore, avoiding long distance travel from one end of the country to the other for some players. The number of days for both boys and girls has been reduced from four to three, which we believe is an improvement, but still the cost of youngsters being requested or required to play in these events is high, in particular for players who have to travel a long distance. As these players and their parents only have a limited budget, it is having a negative effect on other competitions, including some 4 Star junior tournaments.

We believe that further consideration should be given to this to reduce the number of weekends from three to two to allow play for both sexes on both days, so this would help to increase the number of matches played each weekend and reduce the overall costs.

We do understand that the number of matches that the youngsters are having to play in one particular day has been expanded from six to eight players which means that each player would have seven matches per day rather five.

British Club League Premier Division

A decision has been taken by the British Club League Committee to change the home and away system, with the Premier Division to go back to four weekends for the British Premier League Division clubs at single club venues.

There was a split opinion between Premier Division club on this, which was 50/50, but, nevertheless, committee has moved away from the policy that the Board had previously invested in to help clubs who had the ambition to stage home matches in their own location.

The Board, some 5 or 6 years ago, agreed to invest in this and have allocated more than £100,000 to this project on the basis that it would help our better clubs to become stronger, which would not only help the British League but help those clubs to attract more members into the club and, in particular, youngsters from the local area who start playing our sport but later become potential future England players.

The major problem that table tennis has in England is that we are currently with the national teams well behind the strong European countries of Germany, France and Sweden. A key to these countries being as strong as they are is that they have a much stronger club structure than in England and have many good clubs who play home and away matches and develop young players from their local area to progress on to their national squads.

The home and away matches in England have been successful to a degree but not as successful as had been hoped. The clubs themselves have put a lot of time and resources into producing this, but the problem is the Association from a marketing point of view, has not provided the infrastructure or support to stimulate the popularity in the league, and if you compare the marketing programme in Table Tennis England with other team sports in the UK that actually promote their national leagues, the activities from Table Tennis England were minimal.

You could not imagine sport like football and rugby without home matches or cricket with the county home match system. These sports would be lost without the home match. Even sports of a similar size to table tennis benefit enormously from home club matches like basketball and netball but they have vastly superior marketing programme promoting the League that table tennis by comparison is very poor. Strong national leagues in these sports attract lucrative sponsorship where as our National League system with central venues does not have anything like the same attraction to sponsors

It is why all team sports generally need strong clubs and the clubs need home matches, so this seems to have been lost for the time being, but if better marketing promotions can be put together with support for the clubs, then it is worth considering this for the future.

Significant progress has been made with the development of better young players in clubs in England with Gavin Evans' programme for Pathway Development clubs which has upgraded the training in seven clubs or centres in England, which is a big step in the right direction. This programme gathers together youngsters who are already playing the game and have shown significant talent. The clubs that run home matches with strong marketing would benefit from bringing more youngsters to start playing table tennis in the clubs, which in turn would bring wider talent into Gavin's programme and it is the strong club with good coaches that can bring players through to national team

This does not mean that all clubs want to follow this lead, and some teams that play in the Premier League are happy with the four weekends, but the problem in general is it is not much use or value in development terms to the clubs.

This is little help to developing strong clubs in England. The Association should have a programme to really help the ambitious clubs become more like the top clubs on the continent which are so important to the future of table tennis in those countries.

Alan Ransome OBE
Chairman
On behalf of the
National Council Select Committee on Competitions

25th June 2025