

A.E.T.T.U.

ASSOCIATION OF
ENGLISH
TABLE TENNIS
UMPIRES

Issue 2

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FROM THE CHAIRMAN

It was pleasing to see many of you at our 1st A.G.M. held in Coventry at the end of July, at which the Constitution was ratified and officers elected for the year. There was also a lengthy discussion regarding the suggested items for our meeting with ETTA Ltd. although a date for the meeting has yet to be fixed. Membership now stands at 60 which I believe contains over 90% of active umpires, with the possibility of more to come. I get a feeling that since our formation some things have changed for the better, but there is still some way to go before umpires are fully appreciated. I was at Stoke recently where there were two events at the same time, the D.S.E. Disabled Championships and the ETTA Grand Prix. The D.S.E. event with 37 competitors and 13 umpires and the ETTA Grand Prix with approximately 300 competitors and 1 umpire! It appears that the umpires will support events where they are appreciated.

Those of you who received the ETTA Ltd. Management Report will have noticed the item stating that the total number of English I.U's was 164. This of course include those who have died, those who have retired and many of who are currently inactive. This point was made by our Vice - chairman at the National Council Meeting.

With the new season now upon us I look forward to seeing many of you 'on the circuit' and hope you can find time to talk about the Association and its affairs. I also hope that you will find time to renew your membership for the year (£5.00 only to the Treasurer, Steve Welch).

Best wishes to you all, have a good season.

George Tyler Chairman.

FROM THE SECRETARY'S DESK

Most members will have received details of our AGM and also copies of our Chairman's Report and my own. I am currently checking the membership register and ensure anyone overlooked will shortly receive his or her copy. My activities have been curtailed by ill health, a Grand Prix to organise and run, and also travel to Jesolo in Italy with Derek Baseley to umpire at the European Disabled Championships. Interesting cost comparison in that Derek was able to fly direct from Gatwick for some £90.00 whereas I could not get a direct flight locally and had to fly via Milan at a cost of £192.00. I am still not 100% fit and was irreverently dropped as a doubles partner by Stan Clarke my team captain, none other than Stan the Man himself for recent cup match.

Our AGM was very successful, 19 members making the journey to Coventry and the interest of members reflected in the large number of apologies received email, phone and mail. We adopted our proposed constitution with only a couple of very minor changes and this put us on an official footing. One minor hiccup occurring when we only discovered at very short notice that our venue would not be available as we had been led to understand. We bought starting time forward and I did try to inform as many

members as possible but inevitably I missed some causing a few late arrivals. We agreed an agenda items for our meeting with the ETTA Management Committee and this be a lengthy one it will take time to discuss this in detail. The ETTA have responded with proposed dates for this meeting and we will be writing she to accept one or more of the dates given. Selection is already high on agenda and has been given importance following the distribution of the NL Newsletter listing the 5 squads for use in European events. This will h come as a surprise to many members as nominations were not asked for the NURC Selection Committee could not have made the final selection. Clearly ETTU requests need to be complied with if ETTA umpires are to be given the opportunity to umpire at such events but what should give members cause for concern are the manner of the selections and the failure of the NURC to seek nominations. Whilst not everyone's cup of tea, certainly not mine, important is that no one was given the opportunity to express an interest of being selected and all ETTA qualified I.U.'s, apart from the ten nominated, were effectively barred from any opportunity to be involved in this area of work. Concern in respect of selection is a hot potato and much dissatisfaction especially with the current selection methods. One has to ask if these squads do go, already has, will this be counted as an overseas trip, I make no reference who has been selected, as our concern has to be not those selected , but method of selection. In this particular case it comes down to secrecy of selection by unknown parties.

I received an interesting communication from one of our members concerning training etc. and this will hopefully be aired in our Newsletter. Use and misuse of umpires at Grand Prix also bought a communication, this being another of concern to ETTA umpires. At Stoke we had 1 umpire and he had to leave at 7pm. on the Sunday leaving us with no qualified umpires for the remaining Q/F's, S/F's and Finals of the 2 major events. Things are not going to change overnight and we have to make it clear to the ETTA Chairman that our aim is sensible discussion at bringing long term benefit to both the ETTA and members, our members expect a sensible response to the many areas of concern we have listed. We will be seeking not confrontation but positive dialogue and willingness by the ETTA to listen and respond sensibly.

I am still seeking to make contact with similar associations abroad as these do exist but to date my effort has not borne fruit any contact details passed to me will be followed up.

We will shortly be looking into greater detail into producing our own badge for resale to members at cost price and this will enable those travelling to overseas events to reciprocate when given similar tokens by players and umpires from other countries.

An interesting point arising from our trip to Italy, a large number of Italian umpires were used, many could not speak English and at the Umpire Seminar and the Umpire briefing an interpreter had to be used. As we do with events in England, Italian umpires also acted in various capacities and according to the Italian umpire I spoke to, who was acting as a sort of trouble shooter, every home based umpire working at this event had the daily allowance of 15 Euros in addition to having been paid to travel to Jesolo. I was unable to confirm this but if it is true then it is no surprise

Ken Armson

THE USE, MISUSE AND NON USE OF UMPIRES (ON THE GRAND PRIX CIRCUIT)

Most umpires will have at sometime officiated on the Grand Prix circuit and will therefore be familiar with the established procedures that differ from that found on the normal tournament scene.

The essential difference in the former is in the number of umpires targeted for duty. Whereas most open tournaments attempt to approach the rule of thumb figure of 1.5 umpire per table, for Grand Prix events this ratio is more likely to range from about 0.23 to 0.33; At Stoke in June this was something like 0.1. although I believe the organisers had budgeted for 8 umpires.

There is also some inconsistency in recruitment; for some the NURC include events on their twice yearly circulation lists sent to all umpires. Other events seem to be left to their own devices, a casual remark over lunch at a tournament or occasionally a telephone call.

It is an open secret that the predominating factor is finance. Umpires are an expensive item, or so it is alleged. For 2005/06 the ETTA has planned a total of 16 events if you include the 6 satellite events. These range from Northern Ireland and Newcastle down to South Wales and Cornwall.

It would appear in terms of entries the Grand Prix format is pretty successful. Next season the Prize fund for the ordinary Events will be £1015.00 whilst for the 2 Super Events will be £2015.00. Next season will also see the introduction of Junior Boys and Girls Events.

From my own limited experience of these Events it would appear the referee uses what few umpires he has at his disposal for the most part as table managers or as umpires in situations where he anticipates there could a problem. As the programme proceeds to the latter stages the unpires ave to do what they do best, that is take control of matches.

This raises a number of questions, is the limited use of umpires over two days cost effective? Why should it be necessary to have umpires take control for the latter stages if they were not thought essential from the start? Is the appearance of blue jackets a purely cosmetic exercise? Surely a wrong decision can be just as disastrous in a group match as in a final. To suddenly enforce the Laws and Regulations places both players and umpires in a difficult position.

Finally, does the NURC have an opinion on these questions? Have they in fact had any input?

YOUVE JUST GOTTA LAUGH - Hospital Horror

A man is lying in bed in hospital with an oxygen mask over his mouth , a young student nurse appears to sponge his hands and feet. "Nurse", he mumbles from behind the mask, "Are my testicles black"? Embarrassed, the young student replies " I don't know I'm only here to wash your hands and feet". He struggles again to ask "nurse are my testicles black ?" Finally she pulls back the covers, raises his gown, and does a full examination and confirms "there is nothing wrong with them." Finally the man pulls of the mask and replies "that was very nice but, I asked ARE MY TEST RESULTS BACK?"

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REMINDER

Please do not forget to produce a magazine of any kind articles are required to put in it; So do not forget any snippets or stories you have funny or serious please share them with everyone. Let me have them.

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Letter sent to Ken Armson after the AGM and Bob Montgomery has allowed us to publish it in the magazine and it will hopefully generate some comments.

Dear Ken,

For some time now I have felt there is a better and fairer way of obtaining the National Umpires Qualification and with the abolition of the tournament umpire grade I think it is now time to consider revising the way qualification is obtained. Some time ago I raised the subject with Colin Clemett and Richard Scruton. The reply I got from them was we can't do that, we have always done it this way. Does that mean whatever the suggestion made it cannot be altered because it has always been done that way.

You may think, well where does training fit in here. Well I think if an umpire has ambitions to reach the higher grades they should have the opportunity to call upon their fellow umpires to perhaps glean from them what these qualifications entail. For instance in obscure circumstances how would you deal with something that is not actually mentioned in the rules or regulations but can be sorted out by using them to explain the incident. Perhaps one of international umpires could act as a mentor to a candidate. I would like to see referees assessing candidates and perhaps passing on points that they may think useful and helpful. This would give candidates encouragement and confidence to attempt qualification. Finally I think that the experience of the candidate should be taken into consideration. Their willingness to attend tournaments, the way they conduct themselves and the types of tournaments they officiate at. The referees can also help here.

As an example of how the system can be unfair is. Recently the Home Internationals at Hillsborough and the Cadet International at Canterbury tournaments. A umpire was asked to officiate. These events should be umpired by National or International umpires and when he said he was not qualified to officiate he was told "You are now". It seems that you can be good enough to umpire at these events but not necessarily good enough to gain the required qualification.

The failure rate of candidates is very high so wouldn't it be ETTA's advantage to get a higher pass rate. You go into the exam cold, you do not know what questions you will be required to answer and with a choice of 5 possible answers all of which depending your interpretation could possibly fit the bill. You then go through a daunting interview after which you are thanked for your attendance and told thank you for your attendance we will let you know the result. On getting the result that you have failed which leaves you in the dark as to where you did fail. Perhaps a dummy test paper could be taken and an explanation given to any incorrect answers given, after all we all learn by our mistakes. I know we are not allowed to use reference books but some sort of tuition could be given.

I don't know if this is part of your remit or whether I have explained too well but I think some sort of review of the system is overdue. I myself am of an age where these things are out of reach, but if we can set the wheels in motion towards getting this at least considered perhaps I haven't wasted my time.

Bob Montgomery.

ASSOCIATION CHALLENGE MATCH

The headlines on the front of the July Table Tennis News reads "Gavin Evans wins three titles in Kings Lynn". There was no mention of a bigger event - the David Edwards v John Mackay Challenge match, also in Kings Lynn.

It began with a talk in the bar and then became a challenge of skill, not of umpiring skill, but of playing skill. Umpires who can play, what next!! The match was to be staged the U10/U11/U12 National Championships being held in Kings Lynn.

Many umpires were interested in the outcome having heard reports of the prowess of both players. Would the fleet-footed dynamic attack of David or the immovable, rock-like defence of John win the day? There was a buzz of excitement from the colleagues as David warmed up, while John relaxed in his corner. Umpire for the event was Peter May, who very quickly established his authority by presenting a yellow card to John who lost his temper after having taken and then lost an early lead. David won the first game with some fierce hitting. In the second game John, following his coach's instructions, remained immovable and played consistently to David's backhand to level the match. He continued to present a rock-like defence which was only occasionally pierced by his opponent's forehand loop and took the next two games to run out a comfortable winner and become the first 'Association Challenge' holder. Any member now has the right to challenge John for his title - any offers.

THE ROAD TO CHINA

(As told by John Mackey)

'Jia You, Jia You' (pronounced Jya Yo, and means 'add oil') come the resounding shouts of encouragement from 12,000 excited Chinese as they urge on their stars to what invariably becomes certain victory. The screams of encouragement are punctuated by hooters and banging sticks creating an atmosphere reminiscent of an F.A Cup Final. Never before, while umpiring a match, have I experienced a tingle up the spine so this was a first for me. The atmosphere generated by the Chinese crowds was something exceptional.

The first day of the Championships culminated with the Opening Ceremony at the Oriental Pearl Television Tower, the tallest such structure in Asia. The Chinese are renowned for their attention to detail and the ceremony was no exception. It was a mixture of song, dance and acrobatics. It had all the elements of spectacular, breathtaking, beauty and cuteness. All ages were represented in the performances but the highlight for many spectators was the small children dressed in table tennis bat and ball costumes with cute smiley faces on them. Following the ceremony there was an official reception in a plush hotel and to get there we had to walk approximately 500 yards. The way to the hotel was lined on side by a double row of young boys and girls waving pom-poms in beat to music. The children had been there for several hours practicing and waiting for us. It certainly was a moving experience. This was a perfect ending to the first day.

The umpires at the event were predominantly Chinese with a large contingent of National Umpires.. Having been to only three foreign tournaments previously I was not expecting to see any familiar faces. However I was pleased to see a few umpires I had met before and soon settled into a small group of umpires for socialising. **I was even known on occasion to buy a round of drinks for them.** However, I don't want any of you believing that I have now set a precedent. I have reverted to my usual place at the back of the queue at the bar!!

Umpiring with two Chinese National Umpires on the first day was certainly an experience. They appeared to be very nervous. I am not sure if it was because they were working with me or whether it was just the occasion. It brought home to me the high standards we have in this country. I think we should jealously guard our high standards and never seek to increase umpire numbers at the expense of quality.

The highlight of the Championships for me from an umpiring perspective was being selected as assistant umpire for the Men's Singles and Men's Doubles semi finals. I was somewhat disappointed to not be the umpire in either match but I am only too aware that my international experience is not extensive.

Many AUT courses for the Blue Badge have not gone ahead as planned in recent months but this was one the ITTF presumably couldn't cancel. I was rather that I was assessed in my first match on the first day. No time to get settled in but fortunately all went well and I gained my fourth 'meets expectations' evaluation. Just the oral interview to get through before finally gaining

qualification. The oral interview is designed to demonstrate that an umpire is able to communicate effectively in English. Now I know this may come as a surprise to some of but the interviewer was of the opinion that my command of the English language was fairly good. The relief at having completed the Blue Badge process was immense and as there are already 28 in the world I am presuming I am number 29. England have two more umpires only a 'cough' away from qualifying so this country will soon have four in total..

The World Table Tennis Championships in Shanghai, China in May was a tremendous experience and one that will stay with me forever. When I first became a County Umpire in 1996 I was in awe of International Umpires and could not imagine that one day I would become one of their peers. I am sure my path has been made easier by the tremendous support and advice I have received over the years from fellow umpires. I always look forward to the chats over a few beers in the evenings when ideas and experiences are exchanged. I learned so much from those evenings and long may they continue.

AN ENGLISH UMPIRE (AN ENDANGERED SPECIES)

Most readers will be aware of the plight of the red kite and the red squirrel, rarely seen these days in their natural habitat, the English countryside. What many readers will find alarming, even shocking is that they have been joined by another familiar member of the English scene, namely the English umpire.

This once lovable creature dressed in its winter coat of blue was for many years a common sight at either the table tennis table, gesticulating in some incomprehensible manner or sipping tea from a plastic cup, whilst nibbling a plain digestive. Often they could be observed in small groups, males and females, but rarely with young. Very occasionally larger groups would be observed, but this was usually associated with their peculiar feeding habits, a characteristic of their feeding habits, characteristic of their profession or in the annual migration to some obscure tournament located at the seaside.

Recent studies however, have indicated a dramatic fall in their numbers. Figures released recently compare reported sightings in 1994 in the Birmingham area adjacent to the National Indoor Arena with official NURC studies. Even as late as 1997 in the Manchester area the drop in numbers was not considered significant. Academics have suggested that the figures are not representative because of creative accountancy caused by observers including a sub specie known as 'umpire prestigious'. These are non active umpires who appear magically at the mention of the words Open or International.

Experts have been unable to glean any pattern in the decline in so much as the reductions appear to be generally widespread although packs have been recorded in areas as diverse as Merseyside, Lincolnshire, the Midlands and even in the southeast. A good deal of debate has taken place to try and find the cause of this decline. Global warning has been suggested because umpires are quite adept at working in sub zero temperatures. Another suggestion is the erosion of the natural habitat so that

special foods such as sausage rolls, curled up sandwiches and plain quiche are unobtainable. This is palpably untrue. Another popular theory concerns the growth of predators and its effect on the food chain; also there is the law of supply and demand. Some will say why do we need umpires? The players can score themselves. Forget matters of control or discipline. Ignore presentational matters; who cares anyhow, there are no umpires for Ludo, so why does table tennis need them? Tournament Organisers will tell you of the mad scramble to enlist umpires for their next event and even the NURC, faced with bizarre scheduling by the Calendar Working Party, is literally pulling its hair out.

Paradoxically the shortage of umpires should persuade organisers to examine their recruitment packages such as work schedules, meal breaks and travelling allowances etc. Unfortunately, in many instances, this has not happened. Too often it is the case of "get here for 8.30am, we will try to get you to lunch by noon and 12.30pm and then the finals are due to start at 8pm. but we are running late so please bear with us.

This of course is not the whole story. There are events where great concern and consideration is shown for the hard working band of umpires. No evening work, and dinner provided by the management with the best seat in the house for matches. The message is clear. Forget global warming; the answer *is* in front of you. Players, coaches, organisers and administrators take heed: it may be later than you think.

Derek Sherratt

YOUVE JUST GOTTA LAUGH - TWO WISHES

A man walks into a restaurant with a full-grown ostrich behind him, and as he sits, the waitress comes over and asks for their order. The man says, "I'll have a hamburger, fries and a coke," and turns to the ostrich. "What's yours?" "I'll have the same," says the ostrich. A short time later the waitress returns with the order, "That will be £6.40 please" and the man reaches into his pocket and pulls out the exact change for payment. The next day, the man and the ostrich come again and the man says, "I'll have a hamburger, fries and a coke, and the ostrich says, "I'll have the same," Once again the man reaches into his pocket and pays with the exact change. This becomes a routine until late one evening the two enter again.. "The usual"? asks the waitress. "No, this is Friday night so I will have a steak, baked potato and salad," says the man. "Same for me," said the ostrich. A short time later the waitress arrives with the order and says "That will be £12.62." Once again the man pulls the exact change from his pocket and places it on the table. The waitress can't hold back her curiosity any longer. "Excuse me sir. How do you manage to always come up with the exact change out of your pocket every time"? "Well," said the man., several years ago I was cleaning the attic and I found an old lamp. When I rubbed it a genie appeared and offered me two wishes. My first wish was that if I ever had to pay for anything, I would just put my hand in my pocket, and the right amount of money would always be there." "That's brilliant" says the waitress. "Most people would wish for a million pounds or something, but you'll always be rich for as long as you live!" "Thats right! Whether its a pint of milk or a Rolls Royce, the exact money is always there," said the man. The

waitress asks "One other thing sir, what's with the ostrich? The man sighs and answers, "My second wish was for a tall chick with long legs who agrees with everything I say"!

