

A.E.T.T.U.

**ASSOCIATION OF
ENGLISH
TABLE TENNIS
UMPIRES**

Issue 4

May 2006

FROM THE CHAIRMAN

As outlined by the secretary in his report the Association was successful in having the issue of recognition placed on the agenda of the next National Council meeting. We must now keep up the pressure and I would urge members to write again to County Committees asking them to discuss the issue and to request that they mandate their National Councillor to vote for recognition at the next National Council meeting at the end of July. If all members do this it will give more thrust to our case.

With the resignation of Mike Johns as deputy chairman of the ETTA and the impending elevation of temporary Deputy Chairman, Peter Bradley to the permanent position at the A.G.M in July, Keith Ponting is set to resume his previous position as Vice Chairman, Competitions, Welcome back Keith! Keith has always been strong on volunteers and very appreciative of umpires.

There were some interesting proposals for rule changes this year and the Association made its views on them made to NURC via Mike Payne. It will be interesting to see which will become law. The one that I found most amusing was the one regarding changing ends at 5 in the 5th game if requested by one player or one pair! What do you think?

With the seasons events almost over, only the U10/U11/U12 Championships, the National Team Finals and the odd Grand Prix to go, I would like to thank all members for their support and look forward to seeing you at the A.G.M in the late summer

George
Tyler
Chairman

FROM THE SECRETARY'S DESK

After a minor setback our request for recognition will now be fully debated at the National Council meeting in July and hopefully result with a satisfactory conclusion, Barry Granger did a magnificent job for the Association in raising our request at the April National Council and successfully obtained the support of National Councillors for this to go on the next agenda. There is still a long way to go and I cannot stress too strongly the need for members to write to their National Councillor or get their league write requesting he/she vote in favour of our request. There are those who are openly hostile to the formation of our Association and much of this is down to misunderstanding of why the Association came into being and a mistaken belief that we see ourselves as wanting to replace or take over the role of the NURC when nothing could be further from the truth. The NURC is an important subcommittee and as such has a role to play within the ETTA. Its Chairman, Andy Seward and committee member John Mackey recently had to deal with a very difficult situation concerning an umpire and dealt with this unusual problem very successfully and with great sensitivity. At the recent International Wheelchair Open held in Liverpool we were approached by a player and asked if English umpires would like to attend a TETRA event being held in Germany and I naturally replied that English umpires would welcome such an opportunity. To my amazement I received a

direct invitation for three English umpires along with the accommodation information etc. This was something clearly nothing to do with us and quite correctly I passed this on to Colin Clemett. I mention these two situations, as these are rightly the provinces of the NURC, we clearly recognise this and do not wish to interfere with or be involved in the internal running of the ETTA or the work of the NURC.

There is a footballers Association and a football referees Association both of which are recognised by the FA and no doubt these exist in other sports and will be recognised and exist because their members consider an Association of their own to be good for them and will enhance their sport. If it is good enough for the FA then it should also be likewise with the ETTA and they also had at one time, presumably still do have a Players' Association, The current buzzword is 2012 and being six years away some of you will not be involved, I don't expect to even be around let alone be umpiring. However, for those who will be and those who become qualified will the same criteria still be operative i.e. 50% of umpires coming from the host country?

This seems very doubtful as by 2012 the ITTF will have sufficient Blue Badge umpires and will no doubt want to change the current system for one of Blue Badge qualification only. I learned recently from the horses mouth, so to speak, that the target figure for BB umpires is 300 and when this figure is reached further qualification will be presumable only be permissible to fill vacancies. There does not at present appear to be an Association quota and this is currently to our detriment as we lag behind many lesser countries because our umpires have fewer opportunities to qualify. This is not the fault of the NURC or English umpires the problem being lack of opportunity to be assessed at events held in their own country and so reduce the need to obtain all their assessments abroad and having to and having to compete for overseas allocation to an event where assessors will be present. I don't profess to know the answer to this problem but feel certain the NURC will be actively seeking a way forward for if left unresolved we will be in danger of becoming an umpiring backwater at international level. One thing you can be certain of is that the ITTF will not be concerned if their selection criteria causes problems for affiliated Associations as they demonstrated when they selected the umpires for the recent World Team Championships.

Our 2nd AGM will take place in July the venue probably again being Coventry and I hope as many members as possible will attend and take part in elections and debate. Nominations sre invited for all position and I hope these will be forthcoming as we should never make the mistake of getting into a rut and competition for posts keeps people on their toes. Ideally we would prefer a location with a table tennis centre to have a week-end event involving our meeting, our own tournament and wives/partners for better socialising. If we can find such a venue and get a good turnout we should be able to get a reasonable deal with an hotel in the area and give our champion/s the opportunity to buy drinks all round. John Mackey is our current singles champion but opportunities to challenge him are limited.

Is the TT season now too long and drawn out? I ask the question having recently spoken with a referee/organiser who commented on the ever increasing table tennis demand and the

toll this takes on private life. With the events listed through out May, June and even July this problem applies equally to umpires. Ray Lavin has dealt sensibly with this problem by having a cut off date for both table tennis and cricket. He is a table tennis umpire September to March and a cricket umpire April to August and does not allow either sport to overlap. Soon we will have a full 12 month calendar and no free time. Many members express views at events etc and Geoff Taylor would like these for our Newsletter so why not put pen to paper and let him have something for the next issue. Our current star writer is Derek Sherratt and I feel certain other have a view to make be it briefer in article form. Derek always tries to make a point and other members must have points they would like to air for discussion.

We are currently finalising production of a lapel badge and when the price per badge is determined they will be offered to members. The intention is to buy 1000 or more to get the price down and hopefully the cash outlay will be speedily refunded by member bulk purchases. These will be a must have item for umpires when working abroad.

A renewal of membership (£5.00) is due shortly to be paid or given to Steve Welch. We hope to reach our target of 60 members early next season.

Ken Armson

"CRISIS? WHAT "CRISIS?"

The title is of course Jim Callaghan famously being misquoted during the *winter of discontent*.

What he actually said is "chaos? What chaos?"

These words spring to mind when one starts to examine the parlous state of table tennis umpiring in this green and pleasant land.

Interesting though, if one examines the dictionary definitions. Crisis **time of danger or great difficulty**; chaos **utter confusion**.

The attempt by the Association of English Table Tennis Umpires to achieve recognition by the governing body of the game (sorry sport) in England perhaps crystallises one of the problems faced by umpires in this country.

Get a slot from the calendar working party.
Sort out a venue.
Appoint an organiser/referee.
Oh! - see if you can get some umpires.

The fact is that a steady decline in umpiring numbers is causing a crisis or chaos; make your own choice for the best word to describe the current situation.

The root of the problem has its origins towards the end of the last century. Since the World Championships in Manchester there has been precious little incentive for umpires to hone their talent at the top end of the quality tree. To do this one has to travel, a subject which I will return to later. There has also been a singular lack of duty of care shown towards technical officials; a term used for all major International Tournaments but which for obscure reason is not embraced by the English Table Tennis Association.

Since 1997 or possibly a year later for the World Vets, we have staged two English Open Tournaments. The first at Potters was for umpires an unmitigated disaster. Witnesses will testify that we came within an inch of a walkout and only an impassioned speech from Alan Ransome saved the day. That day made the formation of an association of umpires inevitable. A couple of years later at Chatham a bizarre umpires selection policy put another nail in the status quo. The Commonwealth Games was eventually voted a success but that was initially beset by problems relating to umpire selection.

The international 'blue badge' procedures had to be kick started by a group of umpires taking virtual unilateral action to achieve their objects. The irony of this is that selection for many of the blue ribboned overseas events is now clouding a process already shrouded in a degree of mystery.

Add to this the well documented problems of umpire welfare and one can appreciate that whilst the umpires do not regard themselves as latter-day Tolpuddle martyrs a degree of resentment or even hostility is understandable. The reservoir of good will that has existed for many years amongst umpires is quickly evaporating.

The Association seek to address these problems in a spirit of co-operation with all bodies within table tennis. If it is necessary to make waves then the members will decide how best this can be done using the democratic processes built into the constitution.

It is estimated that the current numbers of members, about sixty in total, represent around 95% of all active umpires on the table tennis circuit in England, and it can be shown that they make a valuable contribution, not only through their umpiring activities, but in all aspects of table tennis.

Recognition of the Association in itself will not resolve the problems highlighted here but its rejection can only add to the crisis or chaos

Derek Sherrat

ITTF Proposed rule changes

AETTU asked Mike Payne to seek opinions on the ITTF rule change proposals and pass them on to the NURC. Only the rules looked at were concerned with umpires.

Proposal 3 Proposed by the Finnish Table Tennis Association.

2.6 THE SERVICE

2.6.4 From the start of service until it is struck, the ball shall be above the level of the playing surface and behind the server's end line, and it shall not be hidden from the receiver by the server or his doubles partner and or by anything they carry.

Reason:- *The word "and" is misleading,*

Reply:- Agree that and or is better wording.

Proposal 4 Proposed by the Finnish Table Tennis Association.

2.13 THE ORDER OF SERVICE, RECEIVING AND ENDS.

2.13.7 The player or pair starting at one end in a game shall start at the other end in the next game of the match and in the last possible game of a match the players or pairs shall change ends, **if either player or pair wants to**, when first one player or pair scores 5 points.

Reason:- *In a match of 7 games players have changed ends already 6 times. In the deciding game it takes only 3 or 4 minutes when either player/pair has scored 5 points and it seems unnecessary to change ends again. In major competitions there is seldom any difference between the ends and there is no real reason to change ends during the short game. If there is a difference between the ends or for any other reason, the change would still take place by simply one player walking to the other end.*

Reply:- Against. This brings a decision making process by players into an already tense match. The extreme is when one pair want to change and the other pair do not. What then. Whether to the casual observer there is no difference between ends, to the player there will be. These reasons will be usually unconnected with facts. Could be seen as unfair if one pair 'forced' a change and thus could be seen as gaining an advantage.

Proposal 5 Proposed by the USA Table Tennis Association.

2.6 THE SERVICE

2.6.1 Service shall start with the ball resting freely on the **flat** open palm of the server's stationary freehand.

Reason:- *There is no record of the word flat being deleted from the rule. Today most of the players are cupping their palm. To them it is open, again how open is open and what is acceptable. Umpires are faced with more arguments with the absence of the word flat.*

Reply:- Agree. Flat was there in 2002. It is easier to define and operate.

Proposal 6 Proposed by the USA Table Tennis Association.

2.6 THE SERVICE

2.6.4 From the start of the service until it is struck, the ball shall be above the level of the playing surface and behind the server's end line, and it shall not be hidden from the receiver,

the umpire or the assistant umpire by any part of the body or clothing of the server or his doubles partner.

2.6.5 As soon as the ball has been projected, the server's free arm shall be removed from the space between the ball and the net.

Reason:- *The focal point of the space between the net and the ball or the body is extremely hard for the umpire to judge. The position of the free arm is also very questionable. If both the umpire and the assistant umpire will see the ball, the opponent and the spectators will see the ball. The service rule as it is now is impossible to apply: it has endless interpretations, and creates conflicts between players/coaches and the umpires.*

Reply:- Agree. This brings into prominence the old problem of a good service at one end and an argument at the other. The wording is precise.

Proposal 7 Proposed by the rules committee.

2.9 A LET

2.9.1 The rally shall be a let

2.9.1.5 If the receiver is in a wheelchair due to a physical disability and **in service** the ball, **provided the service is otherwise correct,**

2.9.1.5.1 leaves the receivers half after touching it in the direction of the net.

Reason:- *This addition clarifies that the let against players in a wheelchair refer to the service only.*

Reply:- Agree.

Proposal 14 Proposed by the Umpires and Referees Committee

3.3.4 INTERVALS

3.4.4.2.3 The request for a time-out, which may be made only when the ball is out of play, shall be indicated by making a "T" sign with the hands, **which can be made only between rallies.**

Reason:- *This is in line with the guide lines in the Handbook for Match Officials, and the intention is to avoid having players asking for a time-out immediately after the statutory two minutes practice period, and the intervals between games.*

Reply:- Agree.

Proposal 15 Proposed by the USA Table Tennis Association

3.3.4 INTERVALS

3.4.4.2.4 On receiving a valid request for a time out the umpire shall suspend play and **he or the assistant umpire (when present), while seated, shall** hold up a white card ; he shall then place the card on the court of the player or pair making the request **with the hand on the side of the player/pair who requested it till the end of the time out**

Reason:- *When the umpire is working alone and is seated on a high chair, it is very awkward for him to come down and go up to remove the card from the tables. The same is happening -when the assistant umpire is sitting behind a table. Most of the time there are no standing up, special cards, to put on the table and no one sees the flat card that is placed on the flat side of the table*

Reply:- Against. A garbled proposition. A view was that the current instructions need some refinement but not this one.

Proposal 16 Proposed by the USA Table Tennis Association.

3.5.2 MISBEHAVIOUR

3.5.2.1 Players and coaches shall refrain from behaviour that may unfairly affect an opponent, offend spectators or bring the game into disrepute, such as abusive language, deliberately breaking the ball or hitting it out of the playing area kicking the table or surrounds, **wiping the hands on the surface of the table**, and disrespect of match officials.

Reason:- *While one player is wiping his hand in his towel every 6 points, the other is wiping his hand on the surface of the table, sometimes at every point and sometimes more than one time between the two points. It looks rather offensive on TV, It disruptive to the continuous play. It delays the game and that in it is against the rules. It creates arguments between the player and the umpire, and there is no specific mention to it in the rules*

Against: Next year there will be another offence to clutter the rule book. The umpire already has the means to stop this action if it affects any aspect of play. Spitting on the floor may be a better candidate for censure in the rules.

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Laughter - The best medicine

A Linguistics professor is teaching her students about grammar in foreign languages. "In English," she says, "A double negative forms a positive. In other languages, such as Russian, a double negative is still a negative. However, there is no language where a double positive is a negative". Just then a voice from the back of the class pipes up, "Yeah, right".

Letter received from John Mackey

I have read with interest the Secretary's letter in issue 2 of the AETTU newsletter, particularly the section dealing with selection. Mention was made in that letter about selection being high on the 'agenda' for the AETTU committee particularly following the announcement of 5 squads for European Champions League (ECL) matches announced in a recent NURC newsletter. It was stated in your report that because the NURC Selection Committee had not invited nominations then that body could not have made the final selections. This was cited as a reason for umpires to have cause for concern about the manner of selections and the failure of the NURC Selection Committee to seek nominations. I feel it is important that members of the AETTU should be aware of the circumstances pertaining to the selection of the squads for the ECL matches. The ETTA received a letter from the European Table Tennis Union (ETTU) on 30th July 2005 asking for 5 squads, with 2 umpires per squad, to officiate at ELC matches during the 2005-2006 season The invitation for nominated squads was received too late for IU's to be circulated and in view of this the five squads were selected without seeking nominations There was a meeting of the NURC held on 6th August and the selection committee in conjunction with the rest of the NURC members made the selections at that meeting. The selection by the full NURC

membership was recorded in the minutes of the 6th August (Item 6.4), so there was question of secrecy I trust this allays the concerns expressed in the report, viz; *7 make no reference as to -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 and selection by unknown parties'.*

I appreciate that many concerns by individuals about the selection process could possibly stem from personal disappointment about not being selected and this is a natural human reaction. I can only attempt to reassure fellow umpires that every effort is made to ensure that the selection process is as equitable as possible, but despite this I know that there will probably always be some occasions when an umpire may feel aggrieved, because no one is infallible, not even NURC members!

John Mackey

Just a gentle nudge to remind you that the AGM will take place at a date in July and the Association Officers and Committee hope that you will be able to attend. This will be the last magazine for this season but in the mean time I hope you will be able to conjure up some articles for the next season's magazine. I hope that you all have a good summer and hope to see you all in the near future.

Geoff Taylor

INSURANCE FOR TABLE TENNIS UMPIRES

I passed my International Umpires Examination (IU) about 18 months ago and in November 2005 I was selected for my first overseas competition along with a fellow umpire to the Portuguese Open Youth Tournament in Tavira, Portugal between the 16th to 18th December 2005. It was while I was making travel arrangements for the tournament that I discovered I would not be covered by insurance from the ETTA. Consequently I was forced to buy my own travel insurance. The Portuguese Open, along with many other tournaments, was approved by the ITTF. It was advertised through the ETTA and the NURC was requested to seek umpires for the tournament. Even though the ETTA, at this stage, recognises umpires as volunteers it has, by default **of selection**, recognised the IU, working outside the area covered by the ETTA, as a representative of the ETTA and as such it should provide **a duty of care and** insurance cover whilst working in that capacity. I consider that insurance cover for the IU working abroad as one area for consideration. I am also concerned about the general subject of insurance of all umpires working at recognised tournaments. What would happen if an umpire tripped over equipment at a tournament and broke a leg requiring the umpire to be absent from work for a few months? Would the referee be legally responsible? (The referee responsible is

for recruiting umpires for a tournament and presumably has a duty of care). Is the referee covered by insurance? While I was discussing this subject with Ray Lavin he informed me that members of the Cricket Umpires Association are covered by insurance. Is this an area that the AETTU could investigate on behalf of its members? I appreciate that this subject may have been discussed in the past but I believe it is important and is a subject, which the officers of the AETTU should advance on behalf of its members.

Tom Purcell

ABROAD THOUGHTS FROM HOME

"Select Few"

Picture the scene. A rather bare room on the second floor of some 1970's sports centre which might have been designed by Frank Lloyd Wright's brother. A number of round tables are placed at random, each covered in decoratively coloured paper tablecloths. A few trestles similarly covered, face one of the walls. These hold a couple of trays of disturbed sandwiches or what is remaining of them, There are also a number of vacuum type flasks which may or may not contain tepid tea or coffee.

About half a dozen umpires grace the scene together with a man in a tracksuit and a gentleman in a sober black suit.

"Are we the last to eat?" says the tallest of the said umpires, as he eyes one of the egg and cress delicacies. A few grunts emerge in answer.

"Has anyone heard who is going to the Monrovia Open next month?" "According to the lady doing the raffle it is Eric and Ernie," offers a somewhat overweight person in a blue ETTA sweater, "Bill and Ben," is the immediate retort from another blue blazer who had appeared to be asleep. "That figures ," remarks a colleague putting down a rather tattered copy of the "News of the World." "Why do you say that?" asks the man through a mouthful of egg and cress. "Well they seem to go everywhere; anyway I thought they only needed one umpire and I was certainly not notified of the change."

"ITTF rang up with a request for an extra umpire." It is the man in the suit. "So! There wasn't enough time to circulate the details; hence Ben's name was added; In any case the two get on well and they can travel together because they only live 123 miles from each other." "I wouldn't mind so much but I never seem to see Ben at any tournaments" added the man with the newspaper. "That's a bit unfair" said the suit, "You are forgetting that he has been the Assistant Deputy Referee at the Bi Annual Boys Brigade Championships for more years than I care to remember; he has also been quite tied up for the last couple of years with his metal detecting; not to mention his campaign to have synchronised fishing admitted as an Olympic Sport.

"But surely they were also at the Eskimo Championships in May?" "Ah! That was because of this thing the Inuit people

have about beds; you see Bill and Ben are similar in height." "What about the other 14 umpires who applied?" "Well, some were considered either too old, too inexperienced or of course too small". "I still think it is unfair" chimes in a small man with a beard, "It's this North South divide that is causing it". "In a way you are right", replies the man in the suit, "One has to keep the travelling expenses to a minimum you know; Once you get North of Watford ; well it doesn't bear thinking about".

After a short pause the sandwich man, having given up trying to extract some coffee continues with a somewhat lowered voice "It was rumoured Debbie Thingy was going as well". "Not after that unfortunate incident with the bathrobe" says the man in the tracksuit. "But the charges were dropped", exclaimed a studious looking umpire, hitherto silent. "How do you know all this?" says the sandwich man to the tracksuit. "I have an aunt who lives in Bexhill on Sea, and her window cleaner, who does some coaching at her club, insisted the story was true."

"I thought there was supposed to be a democratically elected selection committee overseeing all this," says one of the younger umpires who might be nearer 50 than 40. "And pigs might fly" offers the studious type. As a scribe once said, "you can fool some of the people in any event if the ITTF stipulate that the umpires nominated should be liberal democrat, have ginger hair and enjoy country dancing what else can you do?."

At this point a lady in overalls enters carrying a tea urn . "If there is someone here named Cedric, he is wanted on table 8". The above scenario is of course fiction in that it cannot possibly be true. A lady would not normally be expected to carry a tea urn.

Derek Sherrett