

**National Council Paper from Peter Charters, National Councillor for Berkshire. & Hon. Life Member.**

Dear National Councillors,

This is a paper requesting your support to submit the following proposals to the Board of Table Tennis England through The Board's Talent & Performance Sub Committee.

**Summary:**

I believe that the current English ranking lists are distorted and, as a result inaccurate because of a system which gives an 'override' to players who have certain positions on the international lists. This may work for our very top senior players but not for our juniors and cadets as some can earn ranking points by attending overseas events and registering minor wins.

Because TTE's system chooses to give preference to international results, this damages our sport in several ways:

1. Our ranking/seeding lists are factually inaccurate.
2. Selection can be distorted because of it.
3. It disincentivise our young players and their parents, from participating in domestic tournaments.
4. It therefore downgrades our domestic competitions.
5. It can be demoralising to those talented, committed young players who do not have the opportunity to compete abroad on a regular basis.

These are my proposals: -

1. To reverse the Performance/Selection decision that the ITTF ranking list, rather than the TTE ranking list, be used as the guide to England selections.
2. That TTE ranking lists are produced independently of Selection Department influence.
3. That the ITTF override is only used within the TTE Ranking programme for the top one hundred senior men and women on the ITTF/WTT list and not at all for juniors and cadets.
4. That changes are made to policies within the TTE Ranking and Performance departments that discourage higher ranked English junior and cadet players from competing in tournaments on the TTE competition circuit.

**RATIONALE**

1. The ITTF and therefore the WTT and ETTU ranking lists are not fit for the purpose of selecting English teams. The systems used involve winning points depending on how far the player reaches in the tournament. These individual wins or losses may then be transferred to the TTE lists via the Equivalency Chart but the ITTF ranking remains the same. So why not use the TTE list for selection and why use the ITTF override for ranking?

2. It becomes apparent that TTE Selection is having a major influence on TTE ranking policy. If it is to be trusted by the membership, it must be a factual record of results obtained.

3. The ITTF override is a system now used in England whereby the order of English players on the ITTF/WTT ranking list is replicated on the TTE list. This of course was introduced to make sure that Liam, Paul, Sam and Tin Tin remained as the top three men and one woman on the English lists. All of these are in the top 100 of the ITTF lists. However, the ITTF ranking system does not work for seniors outside the top hundred and not at all for juniors and cadets. For example, the number five Englishman behind Tom Jarvis who is at 177, is Matthew Daish, ranked 537 in the world but 50 in England. However, I do object to TTE's arbitrary acceptance of international ranking positions to justify selections. Matthew **had** to be selected to be England's sole male representative to the European U/21 Championships because he was our highest ETTU ranked player in this category and

they dictated who could play for England in this event. The international bodies and their ranking systems have not got it right in terms of the relative, even approximate, standard of players. For juniors and cadets, an ITTF override is worse, as shown by the recent TTE ranking lists. The standout example is the junior boys where the December list when published, showed that the top four had fewer ranking points than the number five. Twenty-four hours later, on the TTE Website this was changed and number four went to number thirteen and five, who had more ranking points than any of the top three, was moved to four. On the latest list (February) the number thirteen is back at four and the four down to five. **Is there an answer to the situation which might arise where the junior number five for example, plays and beats any of the first four players on the Junior Boys list, which for him is an expected win because he has more ranking points than them? Although were he to lose, it would be an unexpected loss to players above him on the ranking list and he would lose ranking points. The numbers one, two, three and four would have been the top seeds. In the new February list, the boy who was placed four but then moved to thirteen, has now been moved back to four but the number five still has more ranking points than each of those above him. There are similar examples in the Cadet Ranking lists. If, as I am told, all the international wins and losses for English juniors and cadets are included in the TTE ranking system via the Equivalence system anyway, why use the ITTF override at all?**

The problems created using an ITTF override with seniors is not showing so clearly now because we have three men and one woman clearly well ahead of the rest in terms of the time taken to build up the larger body of results.

4. That the policies of Performance, Ranking and Selection are having a damaging effect on the home competition circuit. The tournaments are being poorly attended by the top ranked players; it being made known by Performance, that results at home were insignificant.

The basic problem is that some people want to treat ranking as a precise, exact order of ability, which in table tennis and perhaps I suspect, most other racquet sports, it can never be. The most accurate ranking order in our sport is at the end of an all play all, round robin event. Play the same event with the same players the following day and the final order is almost certain to be different. The number one position is the most likely to be retained.

Ranking is an order of results obtained which are an indicator of standard but not a precise order of ability. It is not possible to say that eight has more ability than nine and even more that thirty-two is a better player than thirty-three. But tournaments and competitions in general need a list for seeding and other similar purposes. That is what ranking, essentially is, a seeding list. Of course, it also provides motivation, inspiration, and recognition to players, but all of this should be understood by those responsible for ranking in English table tennis. Ranking should not be interfered with by Selection which, if done by experts (coaches), would contain an element of opinion and judgement. This lack of understanding by the leader of TTE Performance creates the issue. The unnecessary wish to match up ranking with selection creates the need for his ITTF override. The players that they want to select are then sent to several European tournaments to maybe get a win or two to figure on the ITTF ranking list, which then figures on the TTE list via the override.

Fear of appeals against non-selection is being allowed to dictate TTE ranking policy. Lack of confidence in their ability to select the best players to represent England is resulting in parts of our ranking lists bringing the whole system into question. The Performance Department clearly thought that by introducing the ITTF override into the English ranking system, it would avoid them having to make decisions over player selections; that the ranking list would select the players for them and be used as the answer to appeals. By manipulating the TTE ranking system to avoid successful appeals against non-selection, any such appeals may now be directed at what appears to be an obvious

distortion of the system. Selection needs to be brave and select the best players to do the best job for England; this is usually the highest ranked players but not always.

The unfortunate mess that TTE ranking is in, mainly because of the decision to include an ITTF junior override, needs to be rectified. How can the membership take TTE ranking seriously when so many obvious errors are occurring? Ranking needs to be factual, based fairly and firmly on results. Messing around with it to satisfy the Performance department is a mistake and an unnecessary one.

I believe that this is the only explanation for some of these strange happenings taking place in the English ranking in the past few months; best exhibited by the junior boys list where players have changed positions dramatically in consecutive months. Something strange is happening with the cadets as well; ranking is not about perceived talent.

All these changes in performance strategies have, after eight years, done nothing in terms of the standard of our juniors. One of TTE's responsibilities is to plan for future of England's international senior teams, our flagship sides. At present, the coaches must be allowed to work on creating new strategies to improve the chances of our best young players.

In the early 1980's, I as Chairman of the ETTA Selection Committee, decided to split the committee into two separate panels; one to select England teams the other to organise England ranking. This was because I recognised the different concepts involved. For the first time in this country, we had just introduced a computer into the ranking process and much work was needed to get this process right. Before this time the ranking lists had been produced by the selectors sitting around a table to produce what, in their opinion were enough seeding (ranking) lists required to satisfy the needs of competition organisers.

**Conclusion.**

Several years ago, the TTE Competition Department looked at two possible ways forward for our ranking system: a) a win/loss system where points are awarded on the merits of the win and the ranking points held by the opponent; or b) a replication of the ITTF system where points are awarded depending on how far an individual progressed in an event, regardless of the ranking position of the opponent they played.

The Performance and Competition Departments made no secret at the time that they preferred the ITTF system. However, the table tennis community in England were over-whelming in their support of a), the individual wins/loss system.

The system we now have has an override for seniors so far down the ranking list that this seems to have brought about the ITTF system in another guise. For all players under the age of nineteen, the new ITTF override is of completely no value.

I ask again for the National Councillors support to give our ranking/seeding lists back to our players; return it to factual accuracy and help restore the standing of our domestic events.

Peter Charters