



THE 3 B'S - EARLY TALENT ID FRAMEWORK IN TABLE TENNIS



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TALENT IDENTIFICATION

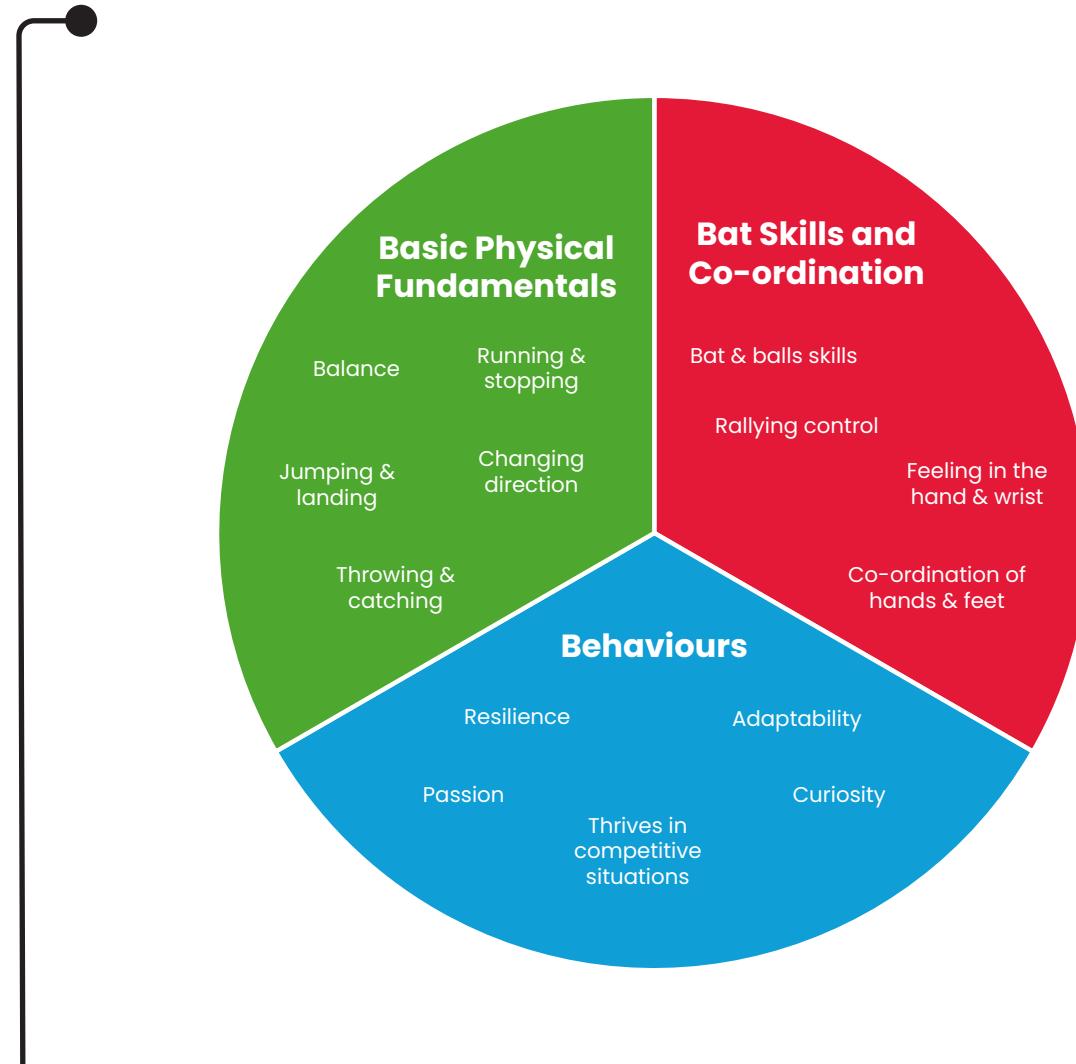
What is Talent ID?

The process of recognising players that have the potential to progress and play at a higher level.

What does 'potential' look like in table tennis?

Spotting when a young player has the potential to progress in the sport is a challenging task, however, there are a few common factors to consider, that are discussed within this framework. These include:

- **Basic physical fundamentals (B1)** – it is essential that players have a strong foundation to support the development of table tennis specific skills.
- **Bat skills and co-ordination (B2)** – basic skills that involve a bat and ball, and how players can coordinate various parts of their body when performing table tennis skills are important.
- **Behaviours (B3)** – physical and technical skills are often not enough to progress in a sport, a player also needs to possess certain behaviours that could accelerate their progression. Although these can be developed over time, initial signs of these behaviours can be important to those spotting talent.



AIM OF THE FRAMEWORK

The aim of the 3 B's is to assist anyone who is delivering table tennis sessions to young players (in approx. the 5-8 age bracket) who are relatively new to the sport (e.g., have only been involved in the sport for a relatively short period of time, such as a few months). This may include coaches delivering sessions to U8's in club or school environments.

Please note, since this framework is positioned to spot talent in the early playing days, we do not expect every young person to be able to perfectly execute and deliver all of the activities and behaviours listed in the 3 Bs. Equally, if a young person possesses all of the areas listed, it does not necessarily guarantee they will have a successful future in the sport. The framework is to be used as a guide to help indicate whether a young person has the appropriate skills and characteristics to continue their table tennis journey into a talent development environment, such as a club pathway. It should not be used to discount players from progressing into a club but gives an indication on which players may have the right formula to make quick progressions, and an opportunity to observe players performing skills that are key for table tennis.

When/How to Use

The information in this framework could be used in a number of ways, including:

- At the end of introductory programmes such as TT Kidz (and used as a way to informally 'assess' player progression)
- During talent ID/player recruitment events/sessions

Please note, it will not be possible to deliver ALL of the activities in one session, you may wish to select a few of the activities across B1 and B2 for a single session or deliver the full content across 2-4 sessions.

Structure

Explanations of areas listed in the framework are outlined, including:

- Activities – users may wish to adapt possible activities depending on the age of the player and ability level.
- Observations – observations include details on what 'good' looks like and could indicate that a player has the appropriate skills to transition to a talent development environment.

Videos are used to help explain the tasks, with examples of young players undertaking them.

B1 – BASIC PHYSICAL FUNDAMENTALS

● BALANCE

Balance is essential in table tennis to provide a strong base of support to build further skills from. A player's base of support will shift during play, and players will often find themselves having to regain balance during rallies.

Possible Activities/observations



Top Balance

ACTIVITY: Start by looking at static balance. Give players a bean bag and ask them to balance it on their head. Ask players to perform a number of moves whilst maintaining balance of the bean bag. These include: a squat, a superman pose, balancing on one leg (in running position), writing their name with their foot, and picking up objects on the floor. Challenge players further by asking them to close their eyes.



Bean Bag Steal

ACTIVITY: Ask players to place the bean bag on their head and find a space in the room (or a specified area). Select one player to be the 'thief', or a coach/parent/helper could also be in this role. As players move around the room, the thief is tasked with stealing the bag from someone's head, once the player has lost their bag, they are out.

OBSERVATION: Player is able to maintain a good base of support by keeping the bean bag on their head, maintaining concentration, and fighting to keep balance when they are struggling to do so



OBSERVATION: Players who are good at this task will successfully dodge the thief whilst keeping balance of the bean bag on their head (they understand how important it is to keep the head and neck still whilst moving). They will remain focused and look to continue moving into a new space to avoid the thief.



● JUMPING & LANDING

Since table tennis is a sport that requires players to execute explosive movements, the ability to jump and land correctly are key skills, as quicker landing to jumping movements will result in more powerful movements.



Diamond Jump

ACTIVITY: Using different coloured cones/ spots, create a diamond shape. Ask the player to stand in the middle of the cones, and using both legs, jump over each cone (and back to the middle each time) in a circular motion. After trying this out with both feet, ask the player to balance on one leg, and undertake the same task.

OBSERVATION: Player can get through all the cones without having to start again, or they are able to adjust their position well if they are wobbling. They may also be keeping their foot straight and using their arms to successfully balance.



● THROWING & CATCHING

Throwing and catching skills are key in table tennis as they demonstrate the coordination of hand and eye as well as the ability to react. The ability to react and anticipate balls at high speed is an essential skill in elite table tennis.



Side Catch

ACTIVITY: This activity involves a series of progressions where the object thrown changes and can be adapted based on the equipment available. Start with an object such as a scarf (see video) and ask a player/adult to throw the scarf to either side of a player standing opposite them, which they must retrieve with their table tennis hand. After a few go's, this activity can progress by throwing two scarfs to the left and right of the player that must be retrieved simultaneously.

ADVANCE the activity by:

- A player/helper holds two tennis balls out to their side (with straight arms) – they can choose when to drop either ball, and the player is tasked with catching the ball after only one bounce with their table tennis hand. This activity can be further advanced by asking the player to retrieve the ball, run around the person, and retrieve a second dropped ball

OBSERVATION: Player is able to retrieve the object with their playing hand, stays low, and are dynamic with their feet as they move to the object. They react quickly to the stimulus by taking short sidestep movements (not crossing over their legs). Player stays low and takes their head to the ball and doesn't constantly look down to co-ordinate their feet. Player isn't just reaching to the stimulus, but able to move their feet in the right direction.





Beat the Ball

ACTIVITY: Get approx. 5 players in a line – they are tasked with throwing a ball/bean bag to each other. Another player should stand at the start of the line (opposite the person who first throws the ball) and are tasked with sidestepping to the end of the line (and possibly back if the player is completing the task too easily). They are tasked with ‘beating the ball’ and getting back to the starting point quicker than the ball. As demonstrated in the video, this task can also be completed with players in a circle instead of a line.

OBSERVATION: Player that are quick on their feet and can sidestep with speed should either be close to or consistently beating the ball. The players throwing the ball to one another shouldn’t panic and stay calm and thrive under the pressure scenario! This task also helps us to understand how well a player can operate as a team.



Volcano

ACTIVITY: An adult/helper should stand in the middle and ask players to gather round them in a circle (evenly spaced out). Using around 4-5 bean bags, the person in the middle should randomly throw beanbags to players (not making it obvious when they are about to throw to them) and ask the player to catch the bag and throw it back into the middle of the circle. If the player does not catch the bean bag, they should go down on one knee until they catch it and can stand up again. Advance the activity by:

- Asking players to clap before catching the bean bag. If they fail to clap or they think the bean bag is being thrown to them when it isn’t and they react, they are also out.

OBSERVATION: Player can react to the bag thrown at them and successfully catch it – those with particularly good reaction/anticipation skills will be able to execute the clap before catching the beanbag.



● RUNNING & STOPPING

Table tennis involves significant anaerobic activity that involves a lot of starting and stopping during rallies, with players required to alter their speed very quickly within a small area. Therefore, the ability to stop and start quickly are essential skills.



Changing Gears

ACTIVITY: This activity looks at players' ability to change their speed and stop quickly. Make sure there is enough free space in the hall for this activity, and it is safe to undertake. Tell players that you will be asking them to alter their speed and that there are 4 'gears' (make a reference to a car if this helps players to understand). Ask players to either jog or sidestep around the hall in all directions at a steady pace and inform them of what gear they need to change to (between 1 & 4 – 1 being the slowest and 4 the quickest). This may take a bit of time for players to get used to, as they adjust to selecting the speed of their gears. To encourage players to keep their heads up (as they would when playing table tennis), tell them when you hold up a cone, they have to completely stop. To progress the activity:

- Ask players to do the same task balancing a bean bag on their head and see how they react to having to keep the bag balanced whilst on the move and stopping quickly.

OBSERVATION: Player is able to use the strength in their legs to speed up and slow down as appropriate and adjust their weight, using their core to stay balanced during each change. They are able to keep their head balanced and stop without losing the beanbag from their head.

When first attempting this task, younger children tend to only use gears 1 and 4, often struggling to find an interim.

● CHANGING DIRECTION

Table tennis is a sport that involves significant change of direction, constantly moving both laterally and forward and backwards. Players must quickly anticipate where the ball is going and adjust their positioning accordingly. Therefore, being agile and having the ability to change direction at speed is an essential skill.



Cone Wars

ACTIVITY: Scatter cones at random points in a space in the hall (at least 1 cone for every player taking part). The lead coach/adult is the 'conductor' (as outlined in the video) and asks the players to follow their rhythm – the conductor taps their feet on the cones, using the arms, to create a rhythmic sound. Players replicate this movement. When the conductor shouts change, the players must run to another cone and continue with the same tapping movement (other movements such as sidestepping can also be done). After a few go's, the conductor starts to take a cone away after each change, and players must stay alert and move to the first available cone they can get to. To make this activity more challenging, the conductor can add in conditions, such as if they shout 'change', it means stay as they are, but another word such as 'move', means move to another cone.

OBSERVATION: Players should be avoiding looking at their feet when they are tapping the cone, and instead, be keeping their heads up and be alert to the availability of cones around them (just as a player would not look at their feet in table tennis!). Players stay alert and react quickly when asked to change cones, they may be planning ahead regarding which cone they are going to move to.



The Weave

ACTIVITY: Set up approximately 6 cones or spots on the floor in a circle pattern. Ask two players to come into the circle and stand opposite each other. Ask them to sidestep in and out of the cones in the same direction, in a weaving pattern. Either a player or someone on the outside of the circle can shout change, and the players must switch the direction they are sidestepping. This is a tag style game where the aim is to catch the other player.

OBSERVATION: Player uses strength in their legs to weave in and out of the cones, a good sidestep is one that is not too dominated on the lead leg. When they hear change, they are able to stay low, and shift their balance to start travelling in the opposite direction. Since this is a competition between two people, the player should show they are focused and motivated to catch the other player.



B2 – BAT SKILLS & CO-ORDINATION

● BAT & BALL SKILLS

Some of the considerations around bat and ball skills include:

Can the young person hold the bat appropriately after being told how to do so?

- Is the young person able to control bounces of the ball on the bat whilst on the move?
- Is the young person able to balance the ball on the bat whilst on the move?
- Is the young person able to make small adjustments in their position when the ball moves around?

A consideration for young players in the sport is the size of the bat handle. A smaller handle is often a better weight for very young players and can impact how successful players are at these activities.



Round the World

ACTIVITY: Start with a bat and ball activity that is static. This activity looks at the player's ability to balance and bounce a ball on the bat, whilst moving the bat in a circular motion (above the head, to the right, below belly button, and to the left). Start by asking the players to have 'sticky feet' where they cannot adjust their foot position, and then let the players move their feet to support balance.

OBSERVATION: Player is able to maintain a good base of support and adjust body and bat position to keep the ball on the bat. A player who is good at this task should be able to complete a number of rounds 'around the world'.





Back-to-Back

ACTIVITY: Start by getting players into pairs and label them 1 & 2. Instruct players to sit on the floor with their legs out straight with their backs touching. When the coach/helper shouts out either 1 or 2, that player has to get up and run round the other player as fast as they can and sit back down. This can be made competitive by seeing who the slowest pair are, who will be out. There are multiple variations of this activity – start without the bat in the hand, and then progress to skills that include bat and ball, these include:

- Running around partner
- Crawling around partner
- Hopping around partner
- Sidestepping around partner
- Balancing a ball on the bat around partner
- Bouncing a ball on the bat around partner
- Bouncing a ball on the floor around partner

This can be made for fun for players if the coach tells a 'story' and drops the numbers 1 or 2 into conversation, meaning players have to stay alert and listen out for their number.

OBSERVATION: Player is agile and quick to respond to their number. For the bat and ball progressions, they are able to maintain control of the ball as they stand up, when on the move, and when they sit back down (players avoid holding the ball on the bat and instead are able to balance it the whole way). This involves using good core strength, and ability to control multiple body movements at once.



Floor TT

ACTIVITY: Start by asking players to sit on the floor with their legs out in front of them (with a bit of space between them). Task the players with bouncing the ball onto the floor with their bats, starting in the middle, moving to the right, coming back to the middle, and then moving to the left. Following this task, ask players to remain on the floor, but this time get into pairs, and put their feet together. Task players with the following:

- Roll the ball to each other on the floor (using the wrist to brush over the ball)
- Play a controlled rally to each other on the floor
- Add a cup in the middle as a target for players to hit the ball into (1 point for hitting the cup, and 2 for getting it in)



OBSERVATION: Player is able to control movement of the ball and rotate their waist slightly as they move from the BH to the FH side. Players with a high skill level may be able to use both sides of the racket to control the bounces of the ball. On the pair's tasks, player should demonstrate an ability to control the ball in the rally and show awareness of how to adapt their stroke to hit the ball into the cup.



Playing the Drums

ACTIVITY: This activity is called 'playing the drums' and is all about the player being able to control the pace and rhythm of the ball. To start with, ask the player to stand by the table, and task them with bouncing the ball upwards on the table (with their FH side), and attempt to change the rhythm of the ball, with some higher and some lower bounces (watch video for guidance). Advance this by asking players to:

- Use both sides of the bat (BH and FH)
- Bounce the ball on the table (like a basketball dribble) and then attempt to catch the ball on the back of the bat

Finally, ask players to now incorporate movement (a small sidestep), by hitting the ball from side to side, using both sides of the bat to control the ball.

OBSERVATION: Player is able to maintain control of the ball on the table and make small adjustments when required. They may be aware of making different contact points on the bat to speed up and slow down the ball. Players that can use both sides of the racket when 'playing the drums' show a natural understanding of how to shift from the BH to FH side, and they may also start trying to be creative and use spin.

● RALLY CONTROL

Some of the considerations around rally control include:

- Is the young person able to hold a short rally with an adult (it can be difficult when playing against a child of the same age)?
- Does the young person have an ability to control the ball onto the table without overhitting it?
- Can the young person vary the speed they hit the ball?
- Can the young person anticipate a change of direction by moving their feet first?



Width Ways

ACTIVITY: Task players with playing a basic push to push rally across the table (width ways). This is a good exercise for younger players as the full-sized table may be too big at this point. A competent feeder could do this activity with two players on the same side of the table taking it in turns. Advance the task by asking players to move the ball around the half of the table, using both their BH and FH. To advance this activity further (if the player is capable of doing so):

- Play a backhand-to-backhand pushing rally on the half table and ask the player to choose a ball to roll over and move to a topspin rally

OBSERVATION: Player is able to maintain control of the rally and is focused on keeping the ball on the table. Ask players to set their own targets and observe their behaviours trying to reach this goal – player should show determination and concentration. Player's elbow should stay low, and they should be able to keep the ball relatively low, staying on the balls of their feet and adjusting their position to get behind the ball.

For the latter part of the activity, player is able to use the wrist to brush up and over the ball to counter the backspin. A natural ability to use the wrist is an essential ingredient for top players.





Tempo & Switch

ACTIVITY: This activity is slightly **more advanced** and is better suited when a competent feeder is available. On the full-sized table, play either a BH to BH or FH to FH rally. To test the player:

- Tempo – first, ask them to play the rally at slow, medium, and fast pace, switching between the paces if the player is able to sustain a rally.
- Switch – second, go back to a normal FH to FH or BH to BH rally, every now and again, the feeder should switch a ball out of position into the other half to observe how the player reacts to this ball.

Please note, it is important for a player to be aware of which speed they are breaking down. Usually, medium is the optimum starting speed, depending on how advanced the player is.

OBSERVATION: Player is able to hold a rally without overhitting the ball and is able to maintain the rally at differing speeds. Player may be able to naturally adjust and move their feet during the rally. When the ball is switched, they try to move their feet and anticipate the change of direction, rather than just reaching with their hand. Anticipation is a huge aspect of table tennis, and demonstration of natural anticipation can be a marker of potential. It must be noted that this activity is suited to players who have been playing for a few months.



● FEELING IN HAND & WRIST

Having 'good' feeling in the hand and wrist are essential components for any top table tennis player, since a major part of the sport is centred on imparting spin on the ball, with the best players able to demonstrate creativity in this area. Some of the considerations around feeling in the hand and wrist include:

- Is the young person able to naturally produce a brushing motion over the ball using a partially closed bat angle?
- Is the young person able to use the wrist to generate spin?

Consider starting with isolated activities that the player can do themselves:



1, 2, 3 Bounce

ACTIVITY: This activity looks at a player's ability to brush the ball and generate spin. Ask players to collect 3 balls each and go to the end of the table. Ask players to self-feed by dropping the ball on table. On the first ball, the player should brush over the ball and hit it over the net after 1 bounce. On the second ball, ask the player to brush the ball over the net after 2 bounces. On the third ball, task the player with waiting until the ball bounces 3 times (players can select to do this on the BH or FH).



Creativity

ACTIVITY: This activity looks at exploring how creative a player can be, and how well they can use their wrist to spin the ball. Ask players to go to the end or side of the table and execute the same first task in 'playing the drums', except this time they are focusing on brushing under the ball to create backspin.



OBSERVATION: Players who are good at this task will be able to easily pick up the ball after 3 bounces, even though it is low to the table. It is important that players are not just using their arm, but also demonstrating a slight twist in the body to brush the ball over the table, along with a quick movement in the wrist.



● CO-ORDINATION OF HANDS AND FEET

Table Tennis is a game that involves significant co-ordination of the hands and feet. This is often at high speed, with players required to react to balls quickly by moving both their hands and feet at the same time. Some of the considerations around co-ordination of hands and feet include:

- Can the young person internally co-ordinate themselves by reacting to a stimulus with speed?
- Is the young person able to react to a stimulus by moving both their hands and feet at the same time?

Start with an activity that looks at the player's ability to internally co-ordinate themselves and react with their hands, before bringing the feet in:



Sequencing

ACTIVITY: Using a hoop (either one with coloured balls on it or with 4 x different colours of tape), held by a helper or another child, shout out a colour, and ask the player to use their table tennis playing hand to touch the colour (they can start with two hands if easier). Make this more difficult by shouting 'sequences' of colours (e.g., red, yellow, blue), and ask the player to touch the colours in the sequence shouted. Players should start with their hands on their hips or in the table tennis ready position. Make this competitive by having a player on each side of the hoop and see who can get to the colour(s) the quickest. Ask the player(s) to then try the task with their non-dominant hand.

OBSERVATION: Player is able to react quickly to the colours shouted and doesn't panic. They are able to achieve this using both dominant and non-dominant sides. They remain competitive with their opposing player.



Progress to hand and feet co-ordination tasks **on the table** with the following activity:



Forehand Challenge

ACTIVITY: This activity is **slightly more** advanced. For this task, a feeder should feed balls (using the multi-ball method) into the forehand half of the table to two slightly different positions (one slightly closer to the middle and one slightly wider). The player does not need to hold a bat, instead, ask them to catch and drop the ball (with their bat hand), focusing primarily on their ability to move to and catch each ball. To progress the activity:

- Do the same lateral movement activity, but this time, the player holds a bat and hits the ball. Progress this even further by playing 1 or 2 balls to each position (this may be for more advanced players and may prove difficult, but it is important to make players 'uncomfortable' and see how they react – just doing regular activity on the table will not be sufficient to test a player's skill).

OBSERVATION: Player is able to co-ordinate their feet and hands at the same time, and there is a smooth fluid movement between each ball. Player catches/ hits the ball in front of their body. If they progress to the 1 or 2 balls to each position, observe whether the player is able to anticipate the change in position and attempt to move to ball instead of just reaching with their hand.



B3 – BEHAVIOURS

Physical skills are not the only important attribute when it comes to identifying players with potential. The behaviours that players demonstrate are equally as important and can indicate how well a player could adapt and progress through a talent development programme. The behaviours selected are some of the key behaviours that are part of the Great Britain Table Tennis Player Development Framework.

PASSION

Having passion is about having a strong motivation to achieve a goal in an activity that you love.

What observations could be made that indicate a player is passionate and has a keen interest in the sport:

- Player appears to visibly enjoy playing (smiling!)
- Player is eager to come back for the next session
- Player enjoys tasks and trying to develop their skills (not just focused on wanting to play games)
- Player has a passion to learn and develop without being too worried about perfection



RESILIENCE

Having resilience is about adapting to difficult or challenging situations.

What observations could be made that indicate that a player is showing signs of resilience:

- When a player fails a task, they are motivated to try again
- Player is able to concentrate on the task provided, and does not become easily distracted
- When you make tasks uncomfortable (e.g., player doesn't know where a ball is going), player has a growth mindset and does not give up on the task

If players are struggling with specific tasks, it is beneficial to break the task down into smaller, more manageable tasks.



ADAPTABILITY

Adaptability is centred on being able to adjust to new conditions, environments, and tasks accordingly.

What observations could be made that indicate that a player is showing signs of being adaptable:

- Player loves to play creative games that stimulate solution-based thinking and learn finer skills
- Player is able to start finding solutions to problems they are faced with (e.g., start by not being able to do a task and end up being able to successfully undertake it)
- When a task is made more difficult, player is able to tackle the challenge head on and adapt as required



CURIOSITY

Curiosity is about continual learning and discovery of new things. It means that you are inquisitive, open to trying new things and being willing to make mistakes.

What observations could be made that indicate that a player is showing signs of curiosity:

- Player may ask questions and want to understand how they can do a task better
- Player appears open to trying new skills and tasks they have not previously done before
- Player takes the time to watch and closely observe the next level above them, such as an older playing group (if this is available in the environment)

To understand how curious a player is, deliverers could consider asking questions such as 'What are you looking to improve?' 'What skill are you excited about learning next?' 'What do you notice about that [older] player's backhand that is different to yours?"



THRIVES IN COMPETITIVE SITUATIONS

Thriving in competitive situations is about being excited to compete and take part in challenges.

What observations could be made that indicate that a player is showing signs of thriving in competition situations:

- Player is not put off by challenges that involve competing against others and appears to enjoy competitive elements of tasks
- Player remains focused on the task at end and has a desire to win during a team race/competition
- Player isn't just focused on 'winning' at a task, but has their own targets to achieve

Turn some of the activities described in the framework into small competitions amongst pairs, small groups, or the whole group, and observe whether players thrive in that scenario or become nervous to take part.

Please note, confidence to engage in competitive scenarios can sometimes look different between males and females. Females often feel more confident in groups of girls and can be more concerned with achieving perfection over winning a task.



KEY FACTORS TO CONSIDER DURING TALENT IDENTIFICATION



Use any framework as a guide, and not as exclusion criteria

It is not expected that every young player taking part in these activities will be able to perfectly execute them. The framework is to be used as a guide to help indicate whether a young person has the appropriate skills and characteristics to continue their table tennis journey into a talent development environment, such as a club pathway. It should not be used to discount players from progressing into a club but gives an indication on who may have the right formula to make quick progressions, or who should be elevated into a more advanced programme.

There are no exact benchmarks due to the range in growth and maturation

There are no specific benchmarks or 'targets' that should be put on players that would put them in a category above others (e.g., being able to perform an activity within a specific timeframe). Use the observations detailed across each section to use your own judgement. It is important to remember that children grow and mature at vastly different rates, and sometimes a child that is taller and stronger can appear to be more competent at tasks than a less developed child of the same age.

Relative age effect can impact who we 'select' in talent identification

The relative age effect is a phenomenon in which children born in, or close to, a critical age cut-off period may have an advantage when it comes to being selected for sports programmes or identified as having potential. Young people born in the first quartiles of the year (Sep-Nov & Dec-Feb) typically have an advantage over those born in the last two quartiles (Mar-May & Jun-Aug). Sometimes, young aspiring athletes are discounted simply because they have had less development time than their peers born earlier in the academic year. This may be something to be aware of when selecting players into programmes.

Technical aspects are not as important when searching for talent

Looking for good technique in young players is not essential at this stage. There are certain aspects that make 'top players' that you simply cannot teach! Instead, closely consider observations of players across the skills, behaviours, and fundamentals detailed in the framework.

RECOMMENDED EQUIPMENT LIST

Equipment to support activities include:

- Table tennis tables and nets
- Bats
- A box of balls (ideally quite a few to allow for multi-ball activities)
- Bean bags
- Scarfs
- Tennis balls (or similar)
- Hoops (either those with balls attached or with coloured tape)
- Cones/spots
- Cups

Although a slightly older age group than targeted in the 3 B's framework, if you have a player aged 8-11 you would like to recommend for review by the Table Tennis England Performance Team, please submit details [here to the talent ID portal](#)

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Framework designed by Emma Vickers (Head of Pathway Development)

