

**Hello everyone – players,
helpers and parents**

I hope you all had a good Christmas and New Year and are fit and ready for the second half of the season. Your Committee and coaches have been busy planning for the new year and we have some improvements in mind which we hope you will be happy with.

What our club is all about? We started the Club at Townsend seven years ago, aimed mostly at local young people. It grew and grew and began to attract members of all ages from other areas. Success followed. For example many of our young players went on to represent Dorset Juniors, two went on to a specialist Table Tennis College at Grantham and two others have recently undertaken their first ETTA coaching course. About four years ago we discovered Portchester and gradually formed a close link with the school. Portchester is now by far the strongest table tennis school in the county and for the past several years has reached zone and regional finals in the national schools competitions. The Club is recognised by the ETTA as a “Premier Club” and has been awarded the national ‘Clubmark’ badge of recognition for the last 4 years.

But – and this is a very important ‘but’ – we are not just about young players. We have a number of older members who are vital to the club, both as players, committee members and volunteer helpers, and we have always welcomed all ‘family’ members. The adults are a key part of the club and we value their support immensely.

The Club is run totally by volunteers who receive no payment or expenses for their contribution to the Club. Many, such as Denise Litchfield, Carrie Robertson, and

Babs Pickering, are the lifeblood of the club through their work in organising and looking after the administration of the Club. Mr Clayton and his colleagues at Portchester are the other vital part of the team and their work ‘behind the scenes’ makes everything possible! Because of such people the Club’s coaches are able to concentrate on coaching at our two venues, Townsend and Portchester – more about that later in the letter.

Coaching and organisation

The Club meets at Townsend Community Centre on Tuesday evenings and at Portchester School on Wednesdays. We would of course like to open more frequently, but we are limited by the availability of the premises and by the fact that more opening would cost more money and require more people to help with coaching and organising. Unfortunately we don’t at the moment have more money, nor do we have more coaches and volunteers available on other days! For those who don’t know, our coaching team consists of Colin McLean, Mike Smith and myself, supported at times by some of our experienced and talented young players. It is two of these, Michael Robertson and Patrick Hurley, who have recently done the ETTA Level 1 Coaching Course. Colin and Mike in particular are very experienced coaches, having worked with young players and adults over many, many years. We aim to give members as much table time as possible when they attend so that they feel they get value for money. I can assure you that we are more fortunate than other clubs in having so many tables available to us. For those who have not been there, the Townsend venue has up to eight tables if required and good facilities for refreshments. It offers a very friendly welcome and a focus on beginners, improvers and family participation.

Club finances

From time to time in the past we have applied for and received grants to set up and develop the club. However, these are no longer available to us and we have to depend upon our regular income from members to keep going. The tables that we use are owned by the Townsend Community Association and by Portchester School. These are made available to us, along with the use of the premises at Townsend and Portchester, for a total weekly charge of £45.00. Our income has to cover this, as well as providing money for purchase of equipment – bats, balls, nets etc. At the Committee meeting just before Christmas we discussed the fact that, if we carry on as we are, the club would virtually run out of money by the middle of 2010. We have to take serious steps to secure our finances and the Committee agreed the following at its meeting in December:

1. At both venues the session charges will be standardised at £1.50 for juniors and £2.00 for adults. These will apply immediately to all Club players attending for coaching/practice sessions or playing in matches. Sorry about the increase but we really have no choice.

2. There will be no change to the annual Club membership fees, but members who paid half the annual fee last term are expected to pay the other half by the end of January. This means £7.50 for Juniors and £9.00 for adults and these payments will secure your membership until 31st August 2010.

3. The committee should aim to increase attendance and income at both venues by attracting new members and by seeking more regular attendance by existing members.

Coaching arrangements

We have listened to members. We have been trying to offer a flexible coaching programme that meets the needs and wishes of those who turn up at each session. After lengthy discussion we feel that we need to go back to a more structured approach for the younger players in particular. We plan to use the ETTA Butterfly Coaching Programme at both venues from

7.15 to 8.15 each evening. This is designed for young players and offers a very well planned development of skills with attractive awards for achievement. Players of all ages will be welcome to join in with the coaching and exercises if they are interested. The second half of each session will be for open play, practice and competition. During this time coaching will be provided to players through individual advice and guidance and will be aimed at adults as well as young players. To make the most of the coaching, players need to arrive at 7.00 and be warmed up in time for the coaching to start at 7.15 .

Townsend operates in two linked halls. As long as numbers work out sensibly we'd be happy to reserve the smaller hall for adults whilst using the main hall for coaching. We'd be pleased to see young players with their parents at these sessions and to make it very much a family based programme there. We are very aware that the players who regularly represent the Club in the Poole League do not have much opportunity to benefit from coaching unless they also attend Townsend on Tuesdays. I would strongly recommend that they think about attending the Saturday morning coaching sessions which are starting on Saturday 16th January at Portchester. These are organised by the Bournemouth League. If you would like more details please ask me or phone James Lewis, the organiser, on 07543 834 032.

Finally, just a reminder that we start this term at Portchester on Wednesday (6th Jan) and will be getting everyone warmed up with a handicap competition. Don't miss it!

We have a busy term ahead. There will be schools tournaments for the Portchester players and Cadet League events on 6th February and 6th March. Please note these on your calendars now.

Best wishes and thanks for taking time to read a long letter!

Ralph

*Portchester
Townsend
Community
Table Tennis Club*

