

a.r.champneys@gmail.com

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Open Letter to leadership and membership of Table Tennis England;

A call for reconciliation and improved transparency.

I am a University Professor who has enjoyed table tennis at local league level for 40 years. I have little direct experience in table tennis management, nor am I necessarily looking for any. In my professional life, I have led teams of hundreds of staff, have been involved in senior recruitment, national and international governance, multi-million pound grant and philanthropic fundraising, public outreach and public-private partnership. I believe I am known not only for being outspoken, but also as an empathetic and self-deprecating enabler of innovation, open debate and collaboration.

Table tennis is a mass participation sport that has survived since its heyday in the 1970s and 80s due to the tireless work of a large number of unsung heroes, community volunteers who have gone above and beyond to keep our sport alive. There is a strong ethos of fair play and openness. There are very few professionals in our sport.

Like many ordinary members of Table Tennis England (TTE), we have been following the events of the past few weeks and seen the communication sent out on Friday 5th February by the TTE board. Frankly, I believe many people are dismayed.

First let me say, that I personally believe all parties involved in recent events, genuinely believe that they have been acting in the best interest of our sport. However, while I don't believe anyone would have chosen such a divisive mechanism as an EGM, clearly that meeting exposed a number of important issues that have simply not been addressed by the recent communication.

In a forum witnessed by over 200 ordinary members of our community, we heard the Senior Independent Director state unproven and, in at least one case, demonstrably false allegations against an elected Deputy Chair as if they were proven facts. Apparently, a longer version of this tirade was also presented in an off-agenda item at a recent National Council meeting. Such allegations have also been presented as facts to third parties. We also heard unprofessional and slanderous language used against the same Deputy Chair by an independent board member with expertise in marketing. We heard evidence of unconstitutional board meetings held to discuss hearsay allegations. Then there have been numerous reports of a senior officer of the Members Advisory Group (MAG) - whose role is to represent members views to the Board - lobbying Company Members that voting in a certain way at the EGM would cause the suspension of any insurance for local league play.

These kind of behaviours may sadly be the norm in cut-throat private sector boardrooms, but clearly should have no place in a membership organisation that receives most of its income from the public purse. That these behaviours have been unchallenged by the leadership of TTE have led many ordinary members of our community to suspect a

systematic plot to use character assassination of a whistleblower to deflect from the real issues at stake. Frankly, these issues, and the response to them in front of many witnesses, are way more serious than the specific issue investigated by the Stockwell report, namely the use of ill-judged language in private emails.

Rather than dwell on the behaviour of individuals, it would probably be more helpful to reiterate the concerns of the wider table tennis community that recent events have highlighted.

1. Local leagues and clubs feel that little effort has been made to support the decline in participation. Ping and ping-pong parlours have been a fantastic innovation to get more social table tennis players, but the lack of a joined-up approach with local leagues and clubs has meant that no pathway has been put in place to bring these people into our sport.
2. There is a perception of an unhelpful culture within the performance side of our sport. It would seem too many important decisions about coaching, development and hiring are placed in the hands of a single post. It appears unfortunate that the current postholder, while clearly working tirelessly for our sport, does not come from a background within racket sports. Rightly or wrongly, many with considerable expertise and experience as players and coaches feel they have been ostracised after their offer of help and advice was misconstrued as criticism.
3. There appears to be an air of secrecy in how crucial decisions are made. For example, many ordinary members have been appalled to hear that parents of juniors in the performance squad are asked to pay considerable amounts of money to participate in TTA endorsed training. It is not clear whether the little support that is available is directed at those without the ability to pay.
4. There is a significant worry that metrics involving the performance of our elite men's teams are being used to mask the lack of promising players coming through at the next level. There would appear to be a lack of strategy involved in the creation of the environment in which such players will be identified and nurtured.
5. Clearly our sport needs diversification of income rather than relying heavily on Sport England grant funding. Despite the appointment to the board of professionals from outside our sport, there has been little success in attracting major sponsorship. As a mass participation sport, there are TTE members from all walks of life; corporate, philanthropic, entrepreneurial. Before the current era, there was a tradition of local-level sponsorship of leagues, players and tournaments. There is no evidence that the board have attempted to exploit the huge membership database to build a proactive and professional approach to fundraising.
6. MAG is not providing a forum for genuine ideas generation and debate from the wider table tennis community. So far, it's main activities seem to be run consultation exercises about issues and initiatives identified by the leadership. There is no mechanism for fresh idea generation nor to hold the leadership to account.

In the light of these issues, the entire table tennis community were expecting a far more contrite and consolatory message from the board of Table Tennis England on 5th February that acknowledge the mistakes made and sought to rebuild the confidence of the membership. It is a shame this message should again highlight the minor offences

committed by an elected Deputy Director while failing to acknowledge neither the arguably more serious poor behaviours on the part of others, nor the crucial issues at stake. Many people within our sport have been calling for the recent unfortunate events to lead to a period of genuine reconciliation, to reset the relationship between TTE and its members, and to herald a new era of transparency in which all are working together for the good of our sport. The clear misjudgement that led to the announcement of 5th February has unfortunately further eroded trust and led much of the membership to wonder if the leadership of TTE have really appreciated the challenge at hand. Members would like to believe there is still an opportunity for genuine reconciliation, but given the further harm caused by this recent communication, urgent action on behalf of the leadership of TTE is clearly required.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Alan Champneys', with a large, sweeping flourish extending to the right.

Alan Champneys

P.S. Given that the leadership of Table Tennis England have access to the membership database to put out communications to all members and I do not, would it be reasonable that this letter be put out via the same medium as an unsolicited but well-intentioned communication to all members?