

Developing Table Tennis Champions

A White Paper Plan for International Sustained Competitive Excellence by 2020

USA Table Tennis High Performance Task Force

Contents

Executive Summary

1. Introduction
2. Background and Process
3. Results of Coaches Survey
4. Core Development Areas
5. Long Term Goals (2012-2020)
6. Review of Current Programs
7. Goals and Recommendations for 2009
- A. About the Task Force

Executive Summary

The USA Table Tennis (USATT) Team is simply not competitive at the international level and has not been for many years. The High Performance Task Force (HPTF) conducted a survey of currently registered US table tennis coaches to assess the state of athlete development and determine what is needed to sequentially make USATT competitive and podium positioned by the year 2020. The HPTF set a target of winning Olympic medals in the Men's and Women's team events in the 2020 Olympics to focus its planning efforts toward a concrete goal.

The results of the coaching survey showed that:

- Currently only a small percentage (about 20%) of table tennis coaches are committed to the sport full-time.
- Full-time coaches are far more likely to focus on the development of juniors (under the age of 18).
- Participation in organized competition (tournaments and leagues) among players receiving coaching hovers around 30%.

Additional feedback and suggestions from the coaches identified that the lack of international competitiveness of USA Table Tennis is due primarily to an overwhelming

lack of organization and support in **4 core development areas**:

Club Development: Includes facilities, grassroots player recruiting, training programs, organization of teams

Coaching Development: Includes coaching certifications, recognition, coach training, mentoring, policies (ethics) and organization of coaches

Competition Development: Includes local and regional junior competition, high school competition, collegiate competition, national competition, and international competition

Player Development: Includes identification of talent, team selection, and advancement through several phases of competitive development

It is clear that in each of these areas, the current development infrastructure is woefully inadequate. In each of these areas, we identify a series of goals or milestones in 4 year increments to map out how USATT can get to the medal podium by 2020. Our long term goal is the creation of a strong infrastructure to create a true Olympic pipeline. This will allow for the constant identification and development of our young players to compete at a top 10 level in the world as young adults.

Our task force has identified several recommendations for the next year and for the next four years. We've based our recommendations on other successful US sports and successful table tennis development programs in both Europe and Asia. Unfortunately there is no overnight solution.

It is clear the club setting is the most critical training ground for all advancement. USATT will need to reconstruct the club structure to allow for our juniors to become the primary focus at a large number of clubs. **Team-based clubs** conducting daily training sessions with a qualified coach, **that regularly compete in leagues** and tournaments form the backbone of our 2020 long term goal. **State or regional associations** will help to organize clubs and competitions within a region.

Clubs will also be charged with recruitment and identification of new talent. Tied with a **new national coaching recognition program**, local coaches will work closely with their national counterparts and mentors. All coaches will have an opportunity to increase their working knowledge through additional mentoring and **coach training programs**. A set of **regional and national training centers** will also need to be established to aid in development of our top juniors.

We recommend seeking new opportunities to work with schools of all levels (elementary, middle, high) to develop table tennis, particularly **high school programs**. At the college level, the focus should be on developing college table tennis from a club sport to an NCAA sport recognized through additional **college scholarship programs**. We will actively seek “emerging sport status” with NCAA.

1. Introduction

"We choose to go to the moon. We choose to go to the moon in this decade and do the other things, not because they are easy, but because they are hard, because that goal will serve to organize and measure the best of our energies and skills, because that challenge is one that we are willing to accept, one we are unwilling to postpone, and one which we intend to win ..." -- John F. Kennedy, in a speech given at Rice University, September 12, 1962

Despite some success at the 2008 Olympics in Beijing, it is clear that the USTT is simply not competitive at the international level. With a solid plan in place and a focused and well-organized commitment from the organization, we believe it is possible for USATT to compete with the best in the world.

This document consists of several different parts; first we discuss the process we followed to develop this plan (Section 2) and review the results of a survey sent out to all of the certified table tennis coaches in the country (Section 3). We build on the input from that survey to highlight four core development areas that are essential to competitive excellence (Section 4). Working backward from 2020 in 4 year increments, we propose some intermediate and long term goals, both in terms of performance results and in the four core development areas (Section 5). With an idea of where we need to be over the next 12 years, we then evaluate the programs and activities of our elite athletes and coaches as of 2008 (Section 6). Based on this assessment we recommend some more specific steps and goals for the immediate future, some milestones we think are achievable by the end of 2009 (Section 7).

2. Background and Process

"The greater danger for most of us lies not in setting our aim too high and falling short; but in setting our aim too low, and achieving our mark." -- Michelangelo

2.1 Choosing a Goal and Time frame

The first step of our task force was to identify an overarching goal that would help focus and organize the high performance activities of USA Table Tennis. Owing to the visibility and popularity of the Olympic Games, and the recognition and admiration of Olympic medalists, it made sense to target the Olympic medal podium, rather than focus on other international events. Wanting a feasible, yet challenging target date for Olympic success, we decided on the following:

Goal: *Win a medal in the Men's or Women's Team events by the 2020 Olympics*

2.1.1 Why 2020?

It wasn't obvious that any members of the present junior or cadet teams have the qualities or training opportunities necessary to compete with those that will be vying for medals in the next 12 years. We felt a new generation of players would be necessary to reach the medal platform. *To be medal contenders, players need more than just talent and skill, they must be in a competitive environment that will allow for constant improvement against higher level players.* This suggests that the new generation of players we are

targeting will need to come up through an athlete development system capable of producing elite international players, guided by a coaching development system capable of producing elite coaches. Such a system is not in place now, but we feel the key pieces can be developed over the next several years.

2.1.2 Why the team event?

The Chinese domination of table tennis is certainly no secret. In the men's and women's singles events in the 2008 Olympics, China swept all 6 medals. In singles play with 64 players, Team USA would have to have multiple players entered and get a favorable draw to have a realistic chance at winning a medal. The team event, however, is far more open, with a maximum of 16 teams. While currently the Chinese also dominate the team event, each team can only win one medal and there are only a few other countries: Korea (men's and women's teams), Germany (men's team), and Singapore (women's team) that seem to have a strong pipeline that is consistent yielding international success.

In the case of the Singapore women's team, the players are largely products of the Chinese system (having started playing in China and immigrated). Tough new ITTF regulations on changing associations, makes forming a team of 'imported' players a difficult proposition moving forward. Japan, with their solid young men's and women's teams seems to be another country on the brink of joining the upper echelon of table tennis. All of these teams consist of full-time professional players with a mix of seasoned players (over 26) and young players (under 22).

By targeting the team event, it means that USATT must develop a system capable of developing several elite, internationally competitive athletes, rather than just one. If we aim to develop an elite team capable of winning an Olympic medal, the elite team will have to consist of some of the top players in the world. So by aiming for success in the team event, the chances are good that we would also be in position to medal in the men's or women's singles events. From a long term standpoint we don't need to focus separately on singles. **Singles development then will be a parallel by product of our team development.**

2.1.3 Why the medal podium?

Realizing that medal winning team by 2020 was ambitious, we considered setting a top 8 finish (quarterfinals) instead. Ultimately the consensus was that if we had a solid system in place to develop a Top 8 team, then going one round further (to reach the medal round) should be within reach. In a 16 team field, finishing short of the top 8 would only require 1 team victory. Plus, if we targeted the medal round and came up short, we would be closer to sustained competitive excellence, than if we targeted a less ambitious goal.

2.1.4 Sustained Competitive Excellence

While the 2020 target is an important goal, we as an organization, are really interested in *sustained competitive excellence*. Which means not just winning an Olympic medal in 2020, but winning international competitions even well beyond the next 12 years. We must have a solid, repeatable, and sustainable system for developing generation after generation of internationally competitive athletes. This led our task force to identify an

important secondary goal:

Goal: Create an infrastructure to develop elite athletes and allow for sustained competitive excellence in table tennis

2.2 Developing a Plan

With a long term goal of a 2020 medal in place, the HPTF turned its attention to identifying what steps are necessary to reach that goal. Considering the critical role coaches play in recruiting, identifying, training, developing and retaining athletes, any such plan needs to be driven by the coaches and developed based on their input. Thus, our task force decided to turn to USATT currently certified/registered coaches. We developed a survey that was distributed to all coaches with an email address in the USATT coaching database. The survey was designed to assess coaches' current activities, as well as their thoughts on the steps and programs necessary for USATT to achieve international excellence. Included among the survey recipients were all levels of coaches, but special attention was paid to our National-level coaches, as well as coaches with demonstrated ability to develop top players, such as former World Champion Stellan Bengtsson from San Diego.

Once the survey results were collected, our task force compiled all of the input and feedback received and circulated a summary of the key results and ideas to all coaches once again for further comment and refinement. Ultimately, the coaches' input guided our task force's discussion about possible future directions in high-performance development and formed the foundation of our eventual recommendations. Through several phases of deliberation we developed the consensus recommendations described in this plan.

3. Results of Coaches Survey

3.1 Survey Design

The coaches' survey was basically designed to gather input in two distinct areas. The first section was geared toward gauging the activities and concentrations of the coaches and their students, and also gave us an idea of how many coaches were interested in participating in the 2020 pipeline. The second part of the survey sought to gather opinions regarding the intermediate goals, programs, and other potential steps needed to reach the medal podium by 2020. We also polled coaches for any additional comments or concerns they might have.

3.2 Response Rate

Four hundred and twenty five coaches in the database are current USATT members. Coaches have to maintain their current USATT membership to stay certified and remain in the database. Of these 425, only 302 have email addresses registered with USATT.

Of National-level coaches with email addresses, 38.1% responded to the survey.

3.3 Coach and Player Activity

Coaching experience covered a wide range (between 1 and 55 years), but the median years of coaching experience of respondents was 18 years. This indicates that the survey results (particularly the input on programs and steps necessary to achieve our 2020 goals) reflect the experiences of people that have been involved in the sport for many years.

3.3.1 Key Observations

- A small percentage (21%) of the respondents were full-time coaches, a significant majority were part time. Our expectation is that full-time coaches with a great deal invested in the sport would be most likely to respond to the survey and inactive coaches the least likely. This suggests that the true percentage of full-time coaches is actually less than 20% and the true percentage of inactive coaches is much more than 10%.
- The 53 coaches that responded coach a total of 1160 players and 65% of the players coached (760 players) are juniors (under 18).
- About half of the players coached by part-time coaches are juniors (under 18). For full-time coaches, this fraction jumps to about 3/4 of their students are juniors (under 18). This suggests that full-time coaches are far more likely to focus on coaching juniors and developing junior programs than part-time coaches.
- Only 27.3% of players coached (by survey respondents) participate in tournaments and only 31.9% participate in leagues. Considering that players receiving regular coaching probably have an above average dedication to the sport, it is surprising that so few participate in organized competition.
- Interest in the 2020 plan was significant (at 79.2%), although just over half of the coaches that responded indicated that they coached players that would be candidates for the elite athlete pipeline.

3.3.2 Implications for Our Plan

The number of juniors already receiving coaching while not huge, is far greater than one might guess merely by looking at the number of USATT members under the age of 18. Clearly these juniors cannot develop at the rate needed to achieve international excellence without regular competition experience. But with some effort and the support of our coaches, the number of juniors participating in regular, organized competition domestically could increase drastically.

3.4 Areas for Improvement

Here are some of the key areas coaches identified where improvements could lead to better player development and more success at the international level.

1. International training and competition
2. Coaches training and development
3. Facilities, places to play
4. Fundraising and financial support
5. Recruiting and identification of talent
6. College scholarships

3.4 Programs Needed for 2020 and beyond Success

The coaches surveyed indicated several programs would be needed in order to get Team USA on the medal podium and to develop sustained competitive excellence. These programs include (again listed by number of mentions):

1. Elite and national training centers
2. School athletic programs (general)
3. College programs
4. Local, regional table tennis leagues for juniors
5. High school programs
6. National Team training camps and international competition
7. State/regional associations

4. Core Development Areas

“Action expresses priorities.” -- Mahatma Gandhi

4.1 Overview of Core Areas

In reviewing the input provided by the coaches surveyed, our task force identified *4 core development areas*, that we believe are critical to sustained competitive excellence for USA Table Tennis. These areas are: **Player Development, Coaching Development, Club Development, and Competition Development**. Clearly all of these areas are interrelated, often in a variety of ways. Slow or limited progress in any of these areas has the potential to severely impact our ability to achieve our 2020 goals. But, by the same token rapid progress in one or more areas has the potential to help the pace of progress in the other development areas.

4.2 Club Development

4.2.1 Organizations

Clubs should have their own organizational structure, management, policies, etc. and also fit within the larger organizational structure of the organization. Many clubs are currently just an address, nothing more. Of clubs that do have an organizational structure, board of directors, non-profit status, few target youth, much less Olympic pipeline youth. Without a solid organization backing a club it is difficult to grow or support the programs mentioned below.

At the high school and college level, the school itself plays the club role, providing facilities, recruiting players, organizing training and competition, etc.

4.2.2 Facilities

Clubs provide facilities, equipment and a place to play. Although this is one of their most important roles, it is not their only one, they should also support grassroots outreach, programs, and competitions as mentioned in the next sections. Most existing clubs are part-time based on shared facilities and many full-time club after full-time clubs have failed due to lack of programs or members providing the financial support. Most popular US sports partner with either schools (elementary, middle, high), local recreational centers (parks and recreation departments), and/or local community centers (YMCA, Boys and Girls Clubs, etc.).

4.2.3 Grassroots Outreach

A prime responsibility and effort of a club should be recruitment of new players. This is necessary for the club to survive and thrive and also for the athlete development pipeline to have a large talent pool to draw from.

4.2.4 Weekly Training/Coaching Programs

Coaching and regularly supervised practice are essential to player development and in most sports, coaching and training programs are organized through clubs. Most current clubs are just locations for pick-up games similar to basketball on public courts. We must change this mindset. If we were to institute the European model of less tournaments, but more club to club league play that could certainly help. Coaches should feel allegiance to their club and support its programs.

4.2.5 Competitions

Clubs are the key organizers of competitions, especially at the local level. Clubs can run internal competitions among their members, host head-to-head league matches with other clubs in the area, run tournaments, and also host various USATT events at a state or regional level based on their success of running local events.

4.2.6 Teams

Clubs organize, support, and sponsor teams. Team sports are naturally organized this way, as are many individual sports (tennis, bowling, swimming). Even when competing in individual events, players usually compete as part of club rather than an unattached group of individuals. This builds a strong interdependence between both the players and the club, each needs and depends on the other for its success. There is no reason why table tennis in the US cannot be organized in the same way.

4.3 Competition Development

4.3.1 Junior Competitions

In most sports in the US, youth compete primarily, if not exclusively against other youth. This is true in all the team sports, as well as tennis, golf, swimming, track and field. In US table tennis youth primarily play against adults during their junior development. The top table tennis countries like China, Germany, Sweden, Japan also primarily have junior-focused competitions. Youth definitely have less stress and more fun when they are playing other youth.

4.3.2 High School Competitions

Most high schools in the US field competitive teams in a variety of different sports. Table tennis is not one of them. High schools have the facilities and paid coaches to support these teams which compete against other high schools in their area and in regional, state, and national competitions if they are talented enough to qualify. Successful high school coaches often go on to become successful college and professional coaches; and the same is true for players. As a result it forms an important part of the athlete development pipeline.

4.3.3 Collegiate Competitions

Most popular US sports are well supported at the college level through their affiliation with the NCAA. Many sports college programs and competitions are an important training ground for both eventual professional competition and international success (in the Olympics or other international competition). In table tennis, though a national system of collegiate competition does exist (as organized by NCTTA), current college programs are still far from an NCAA-level of organization and professionalism that is needed to allow our elite players to improve while attending college. USATT will initiate the process to be recognized as an emerging sport with NCAA

4.3.4 National Competitions

In all other sports and in countries with successful table tennis programs, national-level competitions are not open to beginners or anyone who wants to show up and compete. It

is the culmination of a career started at the local level, progressed to the state level, then taken to the regional level until ultimately reaching the national and possibly the international level. Merely qualifying to play in a national level competition is an important achievement, and part of development path of many top players. The results of national-level competitions are closely followed by developing and aspiring players, and the events often draw significant numbers of spectators.

Until we change the filtering process of who plays at the National level we will NEVER be able to function at the ELITE level. There is no satisfaction of playing in the Nationals as it is NOT a privilege but it seems to be a right of all USATT members. This must change and by having change we will begin to create a tournament structure that actually makes some sense. We are in control of our events, not the 800+ players that play in Nationals in December. At a very minimum we need to stage a qualifier to compete. For example you must have won a USATT sanctioned age or rating event to qualify. Imagine the costs savings if we only needed 40 tables to run the event?

4.3.5 International Competitions

We have both Adult (ITTF Pro Tour/IOC) and Junior events that fall under this scope. While we can never deny an athlete's right to compete in certain events, we can choose which ones we are going to fund. We are required by the USOC to have team selection procedure for certain event and running trials has always seemed to be the easiest way. We believe there are better ways than a one-shot event to guarantee our best teams are selected. International results, rankings, commitment, and future aspirations should factor in along with coaching input. Running more international Junior/Cadet events is one of the most cost effective ways to help our pipe-liners and their families see where they stand and how much more work is needed to reach the truly Elite Levels.

4.3.6 Team Selection

In some sports teams are selected based exclusively on results in a single trial (swimming, track and field), but other sports seem to have a lot more subjectivity in the process. Sports like tennis rely heavily on their ranking system for team selection in both singles and doubles. Other sports place the national champion on the team and let a panel of coaches select the remaining members (gymnastics is one example). Historically USA Table Tennis has relied on the single trial approach to team selection, but in light of the success the US has attained in sports with different selection procedures, it is worth evaluating alternatives.

4.4 Coaching Development

4.4.1 Levels and Certification

Coaching certifications are important to assess and identify different levels of coaching expertise. It is also important to recognize that coaches often focus on players in a particular phase of development (see Section 4.5). The coaches working with high level

players in the later phases of development are generally among the coaches with high levels of expertise. Currently, there is no way to identify coaches working primarily with juniors and targeting a particular phase of development.

4.4.2 Recognition Programs

Excellence recognition and award programs highlight outstanding coaches in the coaching community. Recognition programs are an incentive for excellence and help establish coaching reputations. Currently, USATT is part of the USOC Coaching Committee's Recognition Program with Coach of the Year awards for: Volunteer, Developmental, National, Paralympics and Doc Counsilman Awards. Candidates are nominated to USATT and then USATT selects their winners and forwards their names to the USOC for consideration for national awards competing against all the other USOC NGBs. We need to identify addition awards, recognition and incentives for our coaching corps.

4.4.3 Ethics

USOC has mandatory forms and material on codes of ethics for all coaches. Since our 2020 coaches will be working with youth, we will also implement mandatory background checks for all coaches.

4.4.4 Camps, Seminars, Mentoring and Training

Just as players need to go to camp to learn so do coaches. Developmental and high performance coaches should get together and communicate on a regular basis to discuss plans, players, techniques, tactics and goals. Higher level coaches should be involved in mentoring not just players, but also other coaches. Technology allows for distance learning and nearly continuous, ongoing collaboration. Encouraging online video review and webinars can provide cost saving while helping to disseminate information and knowledge.

4.5 Player Development

All international players go through various steps of development related to **Physical Skills, Tactical & Technical Skills**, and **Mental Skills**. Further, they have different **coaching** needs at different stages of development and participate in various **competitions** locally, regionally, and nationally depending on which stage they are in. In this sense, player development is highly dependent on coaching and competition development. Many athletes will take advantage of resident training programs, camps, exchanges, USOC support (EAHI, College Tuition, direct athlete support, and performance bonuses), particularly as they advance to later stages of development.

We identify the following 3 key phases of player development:

Introduction/Foundation Phase: 6-12 years of age, 2-4 years in phase. *Theme:* Fun & Fundamentals

Refinement/Transitional Phase: 10-20 years of age, 4-10 years in phase. *Theme:* Training and Competing

World-Class Performance Phase: 15-30+ years of age, 4-10+ years in phase. *Theme:* Personal Excellence

5. Long Term Goals (2012-2020)

"If you don't know where you are going, you'll end up someplace else." --Yogi Berra

For each of the four core areas of concern for high performance (Clubs, Coaching, Competition, Player), our HPTF has come up with both long range goals spanning the next 12 years. Working backward from a medal podium finish in 2020, we created a set of goals in 4 year intervals. We think these goals reflect a rapid, yet achievable rate of development that will help USATT achieve international competitive excellence by 2020.

5.1 Concepts and Definitions

For the purposes of understanding our long term goals, the following definitions may be useful:

ranked player - a player that competes in at least 4 USATT-sanctioned competitions per year (whether in tournaments or leagues)

2020 team program center - a USATT-affiliated Club with a *developmental coach* focused on developing players in USATT 2020 Pipeline Program

elite training center - a USATT-affiliated Club with a *high-performance coach* with a proven record of placing a player on the national cadet or junior team

national training center - location/facility where members of the national cadet and junior team train with *national coaches*

state league - local leagues organized by a regional/state association

national league - elite clubs competing against other elite clubs

national coach - a full-time 2020/National team coach that works at the national training center and/or accompanies 2020 or national team in training camps or international competitions

high-performance coach - a full-time 2020 coach working primarily with junior players from 2000+ in rating

developmental coach - a full-time 2020 coach working primarily with junior players from 0-2000 in rating

assistant coach - a part-time coach that supports the efforts of a developmental coach

5.2 Goals for 2020

Performance	Players	Clubs	Competition	Coaching
<p>4 players ranked in Top 5 Pan Am Cadets</p> <p>4 players ranked in Top 5 Pan Am Juniors</p> <p>4 players ranked in the Top 10 on both Boys and Girls Cadet Singles</p> <p>3 players ranked in the Top 10 on both Boys and Girls Junior Singles</p> <p>3 players ranked in the Top 25 on both Men's and Women's Singles.</p> <p>Men's and Women's Teams (adult) ranked in the Top 4</p>	<p>400 ranked boys and girls pre-Cadets (U-10)</p> <p>800 ranked boys and girls Cadets (U-15)</p> <p>1600 ranked boys and girls Juniors (U-18)</p> <p>16 full-time professional players playing in international leagues or actively on the ITTF Pro Tour</p>	<p>32 team program centers</p> <p>12 elite training centers</p> <p>1 national training center</p>	<p>32 state/regional leagues</p> <p>2 national leagues (male & female)</p> <p>National Cadet and Junior Circuit</p>	<p>64 Assistant Coaches</p> <p>32 Developmental Coaches</p> <p>16 High Performance Coaches</p> <p>8 Full-time National Coaches</p>

5.3 Goals for 2016

Performance	Players	Clubs	Competition	Coaching
<p>3 players ranked in top 5 Pan Am Cadets</p> <p>3 players ranked in top 5 Pan Am Juniors</p> <p>3 players ranked in the top 15 on both Boys and Girls Cadet Singles</p> <p>3 players ranked in the top 15 on both Boys and Girls Junior Singles</p> <p>Men's and Women's Teams ranked in the top 12.</p>	<p>200 ranked boys and girls pre-Cadets (U-10)</p> <p>400 ranked boys and girls Cadets (U-15)</p> <p>800 ranked boys and girls Juniors (U-18)</p> <p>12 full-time professional players playing in international leagues or actively on the ITTF Pro Tour</p>	<p>16 2020 Team program centers</p> <p>8 elite training centers</p> <p>1 national training center</p>	<p>24 state/regional leagues</p> <p>2 national leagues (male & female)</p> <p>National Cadet and Junior Circuit</p>	<p>32 Assistant Coaches</p> <p>16 Developmental Coaches</p> <p>8 High Performance Coaches</p> <p>6 Full-time National Coaches</p>

5.4 Goals for 2012

Performance	Players	Clubs	Competition	Coaching
2 boys and girls ranked in Top 10 Pan Am Juniors 2 boys and girls in Top 10 Pan Am Cadets 3 players ranked in the ITTF Cadet Top 25 in both Boys and Girls Singles 3 players ranked in the ITTF Junior Top 50 in both Boys and Girls Junior Singles	75 ranked boys and girls pre-Cadets (U-10) 150 ranked boys and girls Cadets (U-15) 300 ranked boys and girls Juniors (U-18) 6 full-time professional players playing in international leagues or actively on the ITTF Pro Tour	8 – 2020 Team program centers based on the standards established by USATT 4 elite training centers based on standards set by USATT 1 national training center Implementing National State Association network	8-12 state/regional leagues 2 national leagues (male & female) National Cadet and Junior Circuit	16 Assistant Coaches 8 Developmental Coaches 4 High Performance Coaches 4 Full-time National Coaches Review and improve national coaching program Implement mentoring program for coaches Have in place distance learning for coaches.

6. Review of Current Programs

“Don’t tell me where your priorities are. Show me where you spend your money and I’ll tell you what they are.” -- James W. Frick

6.1 Club Development

6.1.1 Organization

As of October 2008, there are more than 250 table tennis clubs affiliated with USATT. Most clubs are organized by an individual or small group of people that make a playing facility available for between 2-6 hours 1-5 times a week. There are a small number of dedicated table tennis clubs in the country, but this is a relative rarity. Some clubs have monthly/annual club dues or a well established concept of club membership, but many do not. This makes it difficult to know who is a member of which club(s), and difficult for a club to organize its members. Players migrate from one club to another or simply train at different clubs during the same week or month.

6.1.2 Programs

The most common club-supported activity is unstructured or open play (pay as you go), where people of all ages and levels show up. Some clubs run weekly round-robins or ongoing weekly leagues. Many clubs offer private lessons, especially when the owner is

also a coach. A small number of clubs periodically organize training camps or clinics.

Some clubs host tournaments one or a few times a year (in some cases on a monthly basis) which are open to any player that wishes to enter. Except in a few isolated cases (in a couple of metro areas), clubs do not field teams for inter-club competitions.

6.2 Competition Development

6.2.1 Tournaments

More than 250 tournaments are organized annually throughout the US. Tournaments are categorized according to a star system to indicate how much total prize money the event awards. Participation varies from 30 to 600 players in a tournament based on the location and star level. Tournament formats vary with the most common being multi-event tournaments with events based on rating-level, age, and gender. Not all tournaments have junior-level events and in the rating events players of all ages and genders play against each other.

6.2.2 Leagues

Some small leagues are run by individuals in different cities; some of them are successful locally and players enjoy it. An effort was made to organize a national team league for recreational players last year but it was not very successful. The future status of that program is unclear. Leagues seem to be a model that is a program successful in many nations and one that is desired to be integrated in the US.

6.2.3 Collegiate Competitions

The National Collegiate Table Tennis Association (NCTTA) oversees table tennis competition at the collegiate level throughout the country. During the 2007-2008 Competition Seasons, 124 colleges and universities fielded competing teams. Schools field men's teams, women's teams, and one or more junior varsity teams. Schools are grouped into 17 geographical regions for the purposes of organizing competitions in a region and qualifying teams to the annual College Table Tennis National Championships.

While collegiate competitions are organizationally successful, there simply aren't enough talented players coming out of the junior ranks for more than 100 (or probably even 20) schools to have full rosters of elite level players. As a result its difficult for an elite college player to get regular, high-level training against other elite college players. There are currently 3 full-time scholarship programs, supported by their schools, with coaches and regular training.

6.2.4 National Competitions

USATT organizes two National Competitions annually: US Open and US Nationals. Both allow open participation by all USATT members, while the US Open is additionally

open to all foreign players affiliated with an ITTF member association. Currently, the time and resources devoted to organizing the US Nationals and US Open competitions are significant, yet these events do not play an important role in either the development of elite players or even to promote the sport to new players.

6.2.5 Team Selection and International Competitions

National Team Trials are held every year usually at the US Nationals. Pan Am and Olympic Team Trials are held every 4 years following ITTF/IOC and USOC guidelines. The US Trials are usually followed by a North American Trials. National Teams compete in the team and individual World Championships and the Pan Am and Olympic Games. Participation at other international competitions such as ITTF Pro Tour events is sporadic and happens on a strictly individual basis, rather than as an entire team.

6.3 Coaching Development

Currently USATT has **5 levels of certification** (Instructor, Club, State, Regional and National). The Instructor level is primarily aimed at non-USATT members and physical education (PE) teachers, or others wishing to teach basic table tennis rules and skills. Each level has a curriculum and tests, in addition to being based on applicant experience as current or former player. Foreign coaches and top players have the ability to be grandfathered into the system based on previous records as a coach or if they were a national level player for the US or a foreign association. See http://www.usatt.org/coaching/guidelines_general.pdf for more details on the current levels of coaching certification which are based on similar certification systems in Europe.

USATT has 520 certified coaches in its database and only 425 of which are active USATT members. Although USATT has many experienced and quality coaches in the country, few are working within a club structure with well structured programs. Many work somewhat independently giving private lessons. Unfortunately individual coaches often have a resistance to working together. In part, this may be due to the scarcity of students and the diverse international backgrounds of our coaches who often bring with them differing ideologies and training methodologies from their home countries.

In terms of coaches training, USATT runs clinics at major US table events (US Open and US Nationals), giving coaches an opportunity to share new ideas and to see new trends on the international front.

6.4 Player Development

Current player development is based almost exclusively on private lessons with a coach paid by parents, occasionally supplemented by clinics or group lessons held by various coaches. This is true both for beginning players and for very advanced players. The amount of time a player spends in training is far below the minimum needed for high performance due to a variety of factors: lack of financial support, lack of school-affiliated

program, and competition from other sports which tend to be better funded and more popular.

Current National Team programs are minimal consisting of occasional training camps. They are a far cry from the full-time training programs in other countries or for other sports here in the US. Primarily this stems from lack of funding, lack of organization, and lack of commitment.

7. Recommendations

"Make use of time, let not advantage slip." --William Shakespeare

7.1 Current Junior Team Development

Currently, junior players train by their own schedules, have to work around schoolwork, activities and other commitments. Furthermore, families need to pay out to continue supporting their children's training which can get quite expensive at the international level. Current national junior and cadet teams do participate in a handful of tournaments and training camps, but these are scattered and somewhat infrequent. Often the players do not get enough exposure to players outside the US and Canada, and other times many of the players have not been training year-round and are in less than ideal condition.

7.2 Future Junior Team Development

If we are to reach the medal round in 2020 with our current (cadet) team members, they will have to begin all year round competing and training with their international counterparts. The training camp and tournament opportunities outside the country will probably require players to spend several months internationally over the course of a year. This is clearly a significant time commitment and may require tutoring or home schooling to be achievable for some of our juniors. In return for the athlete's commitment, USATT must make a commitment in return. USATT's role will be to provide financial support for this international training and competition, in addition to selecting qualified team coaches and suitable training facilities here at home.

Our task force believes that in the next year, we should identify a select group of elite juniors/cadets to form this 2020 Team Program. If we don't start today we will always be one generation away from competing with the best in the world. The focus in the first year of this rolling plan should be on the current cadets and juniors who will form the basis for our future national teams. Some of the current players already in our pipeline are considered as being by a consensus of coaches to have the potential to medal in the future. Additionally, waiting for players produced by an expanded future pipeline probably will not be sufficiently developed in time for the 2020 Olympics. Abandoning current junior players to develop focus exclusively on future infrastructure may send the wrong message to the membership as well as to current and future juniors and discourage them from committing to the sport. Plus, it would delay development of the team and coaching selection and training processes needed to develop champions well into the future.

Certain families of elite juniors have already been contacted regarding the feasibility of this 2020 Team Program idea and have already expressed interest and a willingness to

make the commitment if USATT is able to uphold their end of the bargain.

7.3 Team Selection Pool

A national pool of young, talented players should be identified. This pool would consist of younger players, preferably cadets and pre-cadets and would feed into future national junior teams. National coaches should grow familiar with these players and assist in their development. Currently no such organized pool exists, since players are very much responsible for their own development.

7.4 Training Centers

A national training site is needed for when the national junior and cadet teams are in the country, as well as for the adult national team. This training location could be a standalone training center, or it could be one or more clubs where USATT could send its program 2020 players. Appropriate contracts for training, food, lodging, etc. would need to be negotiated with the clubs if that route were taken.

7.5 Grassroots and Development Infrastructure

Our task force believes that it will take some time to develop the needed player identification, training, retention infrastructure that is vital for the growth of the junior team selection pool. Organizationally, several improvements need to be made to better coordinate the efforts of individual players, coaches, and clubs. State or regional associations as are common in most sports, seem to be the logical approach here. These organizations will allow for delegated responsibility from the national level, and will facilitate club system reform as well as the creation of viable team-based leagues. Ideally this process would begin within the next year.

7.6 Player Development Goals for 2009

Quantities

- 25 ranked Pre-Cadets (U12) in national system
- 50 ranked Cadets (U15) in national system
- 100 ranked Juniors (U18) in national system

Performance

- 1 Cadet boy and girl among top 10 in Pan Am Juniors
- 1 Junior boy and girl among top 10 in Pan Am Juniors
- 1 player ranked in the ITTF top 50 on both Boys and Girls Cadet Singles
- 1 player ranked in the ITTF top 100 on both Boys and Girls Junior Singles

7.7 Recommended Steps for 2009

7.7.1 Club Development

- Create checklist of requirements for 2020 Training Programs
- Identify 4 clubs for selection to become 2020 Team Program Center
- Require all juniors (U-18) to be associated with a sanctioned-USATT club for any USATT-sanctioned competition and tracked in our national membership database.

Junior players would also be required to identify their personal coach(es) in the system.

- Develop USATT school and collegiate program strategy
- Create Organizational & Governance template for state/regional associations.

7.7.2 Coaching Development

- Create new national coaching program focused on working with juniors in a club setting. The new program would include recruitment of new coaches, development of current coaches and a new certification/recognition process. .
- Select and hire National Coaches for 2020 Team Program/ Junior and cadet Team
- Select and hire National Coaching Coordinator
- Initiate distance learning program
- Run at least 1 national coaching camp/seminar (3 days)

7.7.3 Player Development

- Identify and select juniors/cadets/youth to be initial members of our 2020 team program
- Send 2020 team program to at least 8 ITTF Junior Camp/Events and provide all year round preparation

7.7.4 Competition Development

- Develop state/local league strategy and goals
- Require tournaments to associate players with clubs
- Run Junior and Cadet Team events at US Open at Nationals

7.8 Recommended Steps for 2010-2012

7.8.1 Club Development

- Hire National Clubs/League Director
- Designate eight (8) 2020 Team Programs Centers. These would be clubs or programs specifically geared to developing potential junior team members. They would have a coach or trainer supported by the club working with the kids on a weekly basis and then traveling with them to tournaments.
- Establish 1 National Training Center. This would be targeted for our best junior players to train with each other as well with our International Touring Team when they are stateside. Current members of our adult national team would be welcome to train also.
- Implement National State/Regional Association Network. Some associations might contain multiple states based on size and population of players.

7.8.2 Coaching Development

- Hire a National Coaching Director
- Implement new national coaching program with recruitment, development and certification processes in place.
- Select full-time coaches for National Training Center

7.8.3 Player Development

- Select every year juniors/ cadets/youth players for 2020 Team Program

- Send team to minimum of a dozen international competitions annually and provide all year round training

7.8.4 Competition Development (Domestic)

- Hire National Clubs/League Director
- National Championships based on regional or state qualification
- Create new national ranking program for juniors

Core Programs and funding:

2009 Core Programs

Program	Location	Date	Level	Budget
International competitions and camps	Varies	All year	Junior and cadets	\$230,000
Training camps in USA	Varies	All year	Junior and cadets	\$110,000
Team Selection-Trials	Varies	All year	Junior and Cadets	\$10,000
Coaching support for national Teams		All year	All levels	\$60,000
Coaching development	TBD	TBD	All levels	\$6,000
Athlete support- stipends			Junior and cadets	\$8,000
Total				\$424,000

2010 Core Programs

Program	Location	Date	Level	Budget
International competitions and camps	Varies	All year	Junior and cadets	\$250,000
Training camps in USA	Varies	All year	Junior and cadets	\$150,000
Team Selection-Trials	Varies	All year	Junior and Cadets	\$10,000
Coaching support for national Teams		All year	All levels	\$100,000
Coaching development	TBD	TBD	All levels	\$6,000
Athlete support- stipends			Junior and cadets	\$12,000
Athlete incentives				10,000
Total				\$538,000

2011 Core Programs

Program	Location	Date	Level	Budget
International competitions and camps	Varies	All year	Junior and cadets	\$250,000
Training camps is USA	Varies	All year	Junior and cadets	\$150,000
Team Selection-Trials	Varies	All year	Junior and Cadets	\$10,000
Coaching support for national Teams		All year	All levels	\$100,000
Coaching development	TBD	TBD	All levels	\$6,000
Athlete support- stipends			Junior and cadets	\$12,000
Athlete incentives				10,000
National League				20,000
Total				\$558,000

2012 Core Programs

Program	Location	Date	Level	Budget
International competitions and camps	Varies	All year	Junior and cadets	\$270,000
Training camps is USA	Varies	All year	Junior and cadets	\$160,000
Team Selection-Trials	Varies	All year	Junior and Cadets	\$10,000
Coaching support for national Teams		All year	All levels	\$140,000
Coaches for national Training Center				100,000
Coaching development	TBD	TBD	All levels	\$6,000
Athlete support- stipends			Junior and cadets	\$15,000
Athlete incentives				20,000
National League				20,000
Total				\$741,000

Resource Allocation:

Resource allocation	USOC allocation		USATT budget	Total
2009	\$200,000		\$267,440	\$467,440
2010	\$250,000		\$288,000	\$538,000
2011	\$280,000		\$278,000	\$558,000
2012	\$300,000		\$341,000	\$641,000

Appendix A: About the Task Force

The USA Table Tennis High Performance Task Force was organized in July of 2008, and charged with a developing a plan for bringing international competitiveness to US Table Tennis by the year 2020.

Han Xiao, Chair

Athlete Representative, 2607 rating player in US

Jackie Lee

Athlete Representative, 2008 Olympic replacement athlete

Sean O'Neill

Coach Representative, 21 times National Champion, 2 time Olympian and 2 times Paralympics Team Coach

David Del Vecchio

National Collegiate Table Tennis Association

Doru Gheorghe

Technical Director USA Table Tennis-15 times Romanian Champion, 4 times Olympic Team Coach

Mike Cavanaugh

Interim CEO- USA Table Tennis