

Actions of the USATT High Performance Committee (HPC)  
June – July 2014

Reported by Carl Danner, HPC Chair  
November, 2014

During June-July 2014, the HPC held one committee meeting at the U.S. Open, and otherwise conducted business through email.

1. HPC Chair Carl Danner participated as part of a USATT committee in reviewing the application of the Fremont Table Tennis Academy for certification as a USATT National Center of Excellence. Three other HPC members also participated due to their leadership in other USATT roles (Attila Malek, Jasna Rather, and Han Xiao). Following a review of written materials and a conference call with Academy representatives, the committee was happy to recommend approval of the application.
2. The HPC reviewed and discussed selection procedures for the 2015 Para Pan Am Games.
3. The HPC discussed the different playing characteristics of the various brands of new plastic balls adopted for ITTF competition, and appreciated Mr. Gheorghe's efforts to get supplies of them to national team members as quickly as possible. HPC members observed that for international high performance purposes, it would be best to maximize the number of high-level domestic tournaments using the new balls.
4. USATT Board member Kagin Lee assisted the HPC by proposing improvements to the format for the cadet and junior national team trials.
5. An issue arose as to the priority order in which non-national team players are entered by USATT in international junior tournaments. For the Hong Kong Junior Open, Mr. Gheorghe followed the approved method that gave priority to entrants nominated by a USATT Hot Spot training center. HPC members received and considered points of view presented by some parents, including concerns that the approved method could result in substantially stronger players not being offered one of the limited entries available to USATT.

The HPC meeting in Grand Rapids occurred on June 30<sup>th</sup>, with the following discussion and results:

Present: Carl Danner, Tahl Leibovitz, Attila Malek, Sean O'Neill, Jasna Rather, Han Xiao, USATT Board members Anne Cribbs and Kagin Lee, guest Amanda Malek.

1. USATT High Performance Director Doru Gheorghe asked for the HPC's view regarding an invitation for Youth Olympic Games qualifiers Lily Zhang and Krish Avvari to train for two weeks in July at the Lily Yip training center. The HPC's suggestion was to forward the invitation to the players and their parents to decide.

2. HPC members noted the recent outstanding results of Kanak Jha and Crystal Wang, and encouraged the USATT HP Director to seek specific funding for them from the USOC as potential Olympic prospects.
3. The HPC discussed the results of the adult teams in the recent World Championships, and their relationship to the general priorities that have been adopted for USATT high performance funding in recent years. A consensus was reached on several points:
  - a. Our current approach to high performance funding is not producing the level of international adult performance that we should be achieving.
  - b. The only way for the U.S. to significantly improve its adult performance is through developing a core group of potential team members who will demonstrate a strong commitment to training and competition through their teen years, and into adulthood.
  - c. While beneficial in some ways, much of the budget for national team training and competition has been allocated to players who are not developing into strong competitors at the international adult level.
  - d. A potential solution is to reallocate some resources towards players with promising international potential who are willing to make strong commitments to training and competition. Given our limited resources, this will necessarily mean reductions in funding for other players and competitions.

By unanimous agreement, the HPC decided to adopt the following policies:

- a. For 2015 and assuming an overall HPC budgetary allocation comparable to recent years, the USATT High Performance Director should reduce the business-as-usual budget for high performance activities by a sum of \$50,000 to \$100,000. These funds will be used to support up to two male and two female players on the able-bodied side, and two Paralympic athletes as well. Budget reallocations to be considered should include (among others) a reduction in the number of players to be funded to international junior and adult competitions, a reduction in the proportion of costs to be paid by USATT for a covered international trip, and a reduction from 8 to 6 in the number of members of the U.S. Paralympic National Team.
- b. Players will be given the opportunity during the fall of 2014 to apply for one of the 6 supported positions. Their applications should speak to the extent of committed training and competition they will undertake during 2015, and include a budget for related costs. There will be no age limits for these supported positions, and the objective will be to promote the ultimate success of our adult teams. The USATT High Performance Director and HPC will select up to 6 players to receive support during 2015. The HP Director and

HPC will use their judgment to determine what level of financial support to provide to each player, and no set formula will be guaranteed – in other words, players may receive significantly different funding depending on their financial needs and competitive potential. Similarly, no particular number of recipients or total level of support will be guaranteed for a given year. Supported players will be eligible to apply again for support in subsequent years, although renewal will not be guaranteed.

4. The HPC discussed and agreed to implement a multiple trial system for cadet and junior national teams. The initial approach will be as follows, based on two trials:
  - a. The national teams will be expanded to team squads of eight players for each age group and gender. On each squad, the players will be listed in rank order for receipt of available funding and/or entries into international competitions for self-funded participation.
  - b. The team trial events will occur at the Nationals and U.S. Open, and will use identical playing formats in each. The national teams will be named after the U.S. Open, based on current world age group rankings and the results of the two trials. For 2015 only, national teams will be named following the 2014 Nationals and continuing for about six months until the final 2014-15 national teams are determined based on the U.S. Open trial.
  - c. Priorities for making cadet and junior national teams will be as follows:
    - i. 1<sup>st</sup> priority: Players ranked in the top 20 juniors (for the junior teams), or top 10 cadets (for the cadet teams) in the most recent ITTF world rankings published before the start of the first day of the final trial for selecting a given team.
    - ii. 2<sup>nd</sup> priority: The winners of the Nationals trial events.
    - iii. 3<sup>rd</sup> priority: The winners of the U.S Open trial events.
    - iv. 4<sup>th</sup> priority: Players in order of point standings combining the results of the two trials. The tiebreaker will be players' performances in the Nationals trial (e.g. if two players each had a second and third place finish in the two trial events, the one who finished second at the Nationals would win the tiebreak).
  - d. Further specifics and refinements to this approach will be spelled out in the final trial and selection procedures to be published later in the year.
5. Another issue of importance is the financial burdens on the families of our athletes, which run into the tens of thousands of dollars per year in many instances. Some national team members are holding back on the frequency of their training because they find coaching fees to be unaffordable past a certain point. While the HPC recognizes that professional fees are necessary to allow excellent coaches to make a living, committee members also believe that it is a

privilege for a training center and coaches to work with national team members, and that honors and special designations provided by USATT to training centers should come with some obligation to help make training more affordable for national team members. The HPC encourages the High Performance Director to communicate with training centers on behalf of national team members to help obtain some discounted or more affordable services, to favorably publicize those centers that are supporting NT members in this way, and to recommend policy changes for honorary designations (such as a National Center of Excellence) to reflect some level of expected assistance for NT members who request it.

6. Finally, the HPC discussed the national team coach positions, concluding that a periodic review process should take place for the performance of each of the NT coaches, and that USATT should have written agreements with the NT coaches.