

I.T.T.F. THE 'X' FACTOR STRATEGY

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Utilising the unique attributes of our sport, establish a worldwide awareness and promotion campaign built on Health and Wellbeing and specifically A Drug Free Therapy for Alzheimer's.

BACKGROUND

Whilst there is a general appreciation that participation in sport is good for one's health, the specific and unique health benefits of playing Table Tennis are not widely known or understood.

Those involved know most of the attributes:

- Low – impact;
- It can be played across all age groups;
- Players do not have to be fit to play;
- Entry cost is low;
- Boys can be as good as girls;
- It provides a means of social interaction.

Our sport has to compete against all other sports (some of which have greater awareness, more marketing muscle) to secure new entrants, increased media coverage and sponsorship. It is stronger in certain parts of the world (Asia) than others (Europe and the America's).

For our sport to successfully compete against others and reach its potential, I believe we need an 'X' factor to differentiate us and for the public to 'buy into'.

Here I will digress and give an example from the U.K. drinks industry, which was my business background;

The cider market from the 1960's basically had 2 producers, one of reasonable size, the other quite small. They had to compete with the marketing budgets of large brewers /small brewers (ale) and from the mid 1970's lager brand owners. Their market share was therefore tiny. This remained so until the turn of the century, when someone came up with the idea of marketing their cider with ice cubes in a glass (Magners). This was their 'X' factor. Timing was right, the public wanted something new and cold. The cider market was

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transformed. Sales grew significantly and market share was gained over lager and ale.

Timing is hugely important. There is now an increasing understanding of what constitutes a healthy lifestyle, and the importance of this. The population of the world, on the whole, is living longer, and we take a greater interest in the factors that contribute to our diet, the sourcing of food and safeguarding its future availability.

Health and wellbeing is now recognised to be very important. Many aspects of health are understood and through awareness campaigns and research, prevention as well as cure are now possible for a range of health issues. However, this is not the case for all illnesses.

Alzheimer's is such an illness. There is currently no cure and it is debilitating for with the condition and their families.

It has largely gone 'under the radar' and, until recently, had little research carried out relative to e.g. Cancer.

I will not go into the specifics of the illness but whilst it generally effects older people, it can also develop in younger people too.

The lack of a 'silver bullet', together with the realisation that the major pharmaceutical businesses are not investing to find one, and a growing sense of awareness has recently triggered an increase in the level of research. Whilst there is more to understand, what has been found is that, for those with the condition, playing table tennis for as little as 20 minutes, can stimulate parts of the brain that have previously been inactive.

[WORLDS NUMBER 1 BRAIN SPORT](#)

" Table tennis has so many factors involved; hand-eye coordination, its fast moving, there's a visual aspect to it, there's a social element, and we believe it can help exercise the brain in a way that may really benefit people in the early stages of Alzheimer's "

DR. Matthew Kempton, MRC CDA Fellow at Dept. of Neuroimaging, Kings College London

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There are other quotes and individual stories that support this statement. I am not aware of any other sport that has all the attributes of table tennis, and in so doing, offer a drug free therapy for Alzheimer's.

AWARENESS AND PROMOTION CAMPAIGN

My proposal is to;

“Hold a World Alzheimer's and Fundraising Day

Table Tennis- A Drug Free Therapy “

SPONSOR

I.T.T.F.

WORLD MEDIA

MEMBER COUNTRIES

CELEBRITY SUPPORT

T.T.CLUBS

WORLD RANKED PLAYERS

Each member country gets behind this initiative and selects / invites a club by region/ state to host an event similar to the one we are holding in Cardiff on World Alzheimer's Day on 21st September this year, whereby local/national organisations/ businesses are invited to enter a team of 2 people at a cost of £250. Funds are used to buy specially designed Table Tennis Tables to be placed in hospitals/ care homes. The winning team get their logo embossed on the tables. Local media (radio/T.V.) cover the event, which is launched a few weeks before the tournament in a highly visible location. Local celebrities are invited to attend. We have used a Just Giving page for members of the public to make donations too.

There are opportunities to engage with selected Universities/ Hospitals who undertake research into the benefits of playing table tennis to people who have the Alzheimer's condition. I am in dialogue with one major University who is very keen to work with the team in Cardiff. Funding is available and I am in the process of understanding the nature of this.

We get the world media to promote and cover this event, the first of its kind in the history and Sport and Health.

We get celebrities to support (by country); here in the UK, The Bat Foundation (referred to in my earlier email) have links into this world, particularly acting and music. If possible we should also seek the support from World Ranked Players.

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We should try to find a sponsor as this event will carry much kudos. Ideally one who identifies with our objective and is either connected to this sector (sport/health/wellbeing), perhaps with a social conscience eg Bill Gates, Richard Branson.

If we could get a famous singer, one with an affinity for social causes, to write and record a song and donate the royalties to the campaign, it would help with marketing/ promotion. As Alzheimer's does not recognise any boundaries, it is probably the case that many musicians have had this condition.

I would like to see someone of the standing of Springsteen or Lady Gaga, or maybe a duet?

OUTCOMES AND BENEFITS

Increased awareness that Table Tennis provides a drug free therapy for those with the Alzheimer's condition.

Increased number of specially designed Table Tennis Tables provided to care centres.

Improvement in brain stimulation and wellbeing for those with the Alzheimer's condition.

Our sport would be seen in a new light by the general public.

There should also be long term savings to individual countries health budgets. In Wales I have the support of the Welsh Government who readily agree with this position and have recently introduced a specific Health and Wellbeing Strategy. With the right approach this area might provide funding for grass roots club development.

The campaign would create huge awareness for the illness, the therapy and, of course, our sport. With appropriate marketing strategy, our sport should escalate in popularity. This should drive further participation from

- people with the Alzheimer's condition
- people who now appreciate the unique attributes of our sport

In summary, using the interest generated from the campaign to highlight the broader benefits of Table Tennis to a wider audience and, in so doing, gain increased participation.

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The combination of the above should make our sport one that the media wish to cover- because of its increased profile and what it now is seen to represent.

Who knows we might even start to win over the hearts of the general public.

This of course only represents one pillar of the Health and Wellbeing agenda. If you believe this approach has merit, it could be applied in other areas, use it as a tag to The World Vets Tour events (some synergy re profile of participants?).

If you believe any of this has traction for the objectives you have for our sport I would be pleased to discuss it with you.

Mike Watts, Chairman, Welsh Vets Table Tennis Ltd.

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