



Report
Women's European Team Championship 2017
Luxembourg

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Introduction

After a big event like the European Team Championships it is time for some reflections and analysis of our experiences. What follows is my report and thoughts of the Women's' Team prior to and during the championships. I conclude with some thoughts of how we can move forward to improve both results and the strategy until the next similar event.

This report has 4 main themes, which I think has been the most important observations and challenges. These can be divided in the sections:

- Preparations
- Experience
- Attitude

In the next sections I handle them separately, and in the end I finish with some overall thoughts.

Observations, Challenges & Learnings

Preparations

The first thing we have to consider when going into tournaments at a championship level is how we come prepared. In sports of this level, especially in team events, the preparations are crucial. Not only for the players' fitness and confidence, but also for the team building. It is important in team sports to build trust between player and player as well as player and coach. What I needed to focus on and use quite much time for during the first three days of the tournament was to make us become a team, which is a big challenge as the tournament starts basically at arrival. For several of the players these type of events is completely new, and it can be difficult for them to focus on what is important for the team, and realize that we are there as in first and second hand as athletes. The other teams of our competitors in place 17-32 were generally better prepared and more focused from day 1, which made it easier for them to perform immediately. A good start is also crucial to these tournaments if you want to succeed at the 2-2, 10-10 moments later on.

An important learning from this is that regular training and talks are something that we need to improve on. If we would be able to arrive 2 days earlier in Luxembourg, and have a little bit more days of training together before, it is easier for us to be prepared as a team, and not only as individual players. The social aspect of a team should not be underestimated.

Experience

An important observation is that 3 out of 4 players have recently entered the stage as a senior player, and they do not have experience of being in a tournament for senior players. I could see, and they told me that they were nervous, and I observed that they reacted and acted different than they would have done to some similar situations if this would have been a tournament for junior players. To be playing in a tournament for senior players is different, and the requirements for professionalism is much larger. The more experienced team knew where to walk, how to talk, how to warm up and how to prepare during the night before and morning before match, as well as resting as it is a long tournament. For us this was more of a learning experience, and we used quite much energy that the other teams did not need to on basic things like orientation etc. I think this is very normal when you first become a senior player.

What I learned from this is that team integration is important. If we look for example at the Swedish Men's team, they had one more junior player in Källberg, and as the other players have more experience, he becomes formed by his team. For us, we had three new players, thus we needed to build a new team foundation, we could not just integrate one younger players among three senior, we had to start from the basic. I think we all learned that experience is really important, and if you have experienced players in a team, they can help a lot in terms of making the younger players understand what they need to do, and integrate the "next generation" into a team.

Attitude

The most important thing that I observed, and what many spectators also could see was the lack of attitude among the players. Both in terms of seriousness and "the game is not over until it is over" mentality. In terms of attitude we were lagging against our competitors, both between countries that played for top positions, middle positions and for the last positions in the tournament. Some of the visual happenings which one could see even as a spectator are e.g.:

1. A player after a loss takes of her number bid, shoes and gets ready to leave the court when we are only behind with 2-0 in the team match.
2. Player only focusing on her own games, rankings and performance etc. during the team match, and not supporting team members.
3. Player not wanting to win and do not want to play when we are playing matches of less importance.
4. Player lost control over mental stability at setback during a match and forgetting that they are fighting for the team.

These are just a number of incidents that are unacceptable during a match, and completely unacceptable during a team match. It sets the team into a negative spiral, when we in a long tournament like this need to be in a positive spiral, constantly improving team trust and we need to be stronger mentally than our opponents in the last days of the tournament, because this is where you really can develop.

What I have learned is the importance of a team captain or player/s stepping up to take responsibility to lead the team, not always by doing the best result, but in terms of mental attitude. The matches that we were performing good in the players stepped up and fought for each other, and when we did not perform it was the opposite. Another example of this is e.g. Slovenia (men) where their old player was able to inspire the other players to do everything they could during and between matches. For the Women's team, the old lady of Luxembourg had the same role for her players. This is an attitude issue that we need to deal with, and if we do so I am sure that our result will also be much better.

In terms of attitude I would also like to say some positive thoughts. Nicoline for example was able to after tough start with 4 service errors come back and keep a good temper during matches. If she can transform this attitude to other players that can be really good, and I see some potential here. For a young team the first priority is not the results, but finding out what we need to improve on, and I think that you will be able to do so if you are able to fight, no matter the result.

What to do next

In terms of *preparation* I strongly believe that we have to meet before the tournament, or in connection to the tournament so that we know that when we arrive, we are ready to play match. What I see is that the more experienced countries are doing this, and it has many advantages, and can fix most things mentioned in the preparations above. Resources are limited; thus we have to use everything we have. I suggest that prior to next team event that the team have a meet-up a few days before, and travel to the tournament together. This can be done at Halvorsminde, where the school will take care of costs for the players. They just need transportation. It is a cheap but very efficient way.

Experience is a skill that you get from learning by doing. The three junior players have to see the world, and they need to go to some Senior tournament, so that they get a better education about how to be a table tennis player. The level of the opponents is not that important, but the junior players have to go out on more tournaments so that they get a better foundation when it is time for the next team tournament or championship.

Attitude is one of the most important thing in a match. The players need to be in more challenging positions, so that they know how to handle team experiences and pressure. I think that this is something the players have to work with in their clubs. Here they have opportunities to daily practice, and they can add some moments like team matches starting from 10-10 or 8-8 to practice attitude and fighting spirit. They also need to understand that the team is always the first priority in these tournaments. The players are representing Denmark, and they need to understand what this means in terms of pride and attitude.

Overall summary

The championship has been a learning experience for the players, and I believe that they have many thoughts in their mind after this trip. I think that we need to prepare them better from a younger age. They are not used to these situations, and I think that we need to challenge them a little bit more, at the junior level, so that they are ready to enter the senior world. This team has potential. It is impressive that we are one of the youngest teams in the whole championship, so the future is definitely ours. I am positive about the future, I think that the girls gained a lot of experience that they can use in coming tournaments and in the training hall.