

MY CAREER SO FAR (Dec. 1999 – April 2011)

By David Powell – April 2011

When I was eight years old and started playing Table Tennis I didn't want to play for Australia, I just wanted to have fun. Eleven years on, not much has changed. My enjoyment factor is still the major reason I play but making Australian Teams is now more of a focus as I've improved my level.

Looking back, I've experienced many ups and downs.

Some highs have been:

- Australian U21, 18 & 16 Singles Champion plus Oceania U18 & U15 Singles Champion
- Representing Australia at, World Teams & Individual Senior Championships, Youth Commonwealth Games, 2 World Junior Championships plus other international events
- Representing Oceania at World Cadet Challenge
- Training in various countries against strong international players and experiencing different cultures

Some lows have been:

- Not qualifying for 2010 Commonwealth Games
- Missing selection by one spot for 2006 & 2007 World Junior Championships
- Losing the 2005 U14 Australian Singles Final 11-9 in the 7th

When someone asks me what's my career defining moment it's not necessarily an achievement. It may be the daily training that I've done over 10 years or it may be training stints overseas or it could be the friends I've made along the way. The point I'm trying to make is that throughout the past 11 years, I've just enjoyed table tennis, I've enjoyed the hard slog at training, I've enjoyed competing at every level, I've enjoyed nearly every aspect of it – off course it's difficult to deal with the down times that we all have but I've learned that's part of playing competitive sport. It's part of the challenge.

As an athlete I quickly realized you'll have extreme highs, and you'll experience the lowest of lows. I've learnt to enjoy those highs as they come round and it gives me great motivation to keep improving and moving forward to my ultimate goals. I've had, like anyone some moments when things have been hard, when I just wanted to give up. Whether it's losing important matches at a crucial tournament, or its travel/training overseas by myself and having to deal with the loneliness of everything. These situations have improved my mental strength and allowed me to deal with difficult situations in a way that would have not been possible if I was winning everything and things were easy along the way. It's been a character building exercise and I look forward to the tough moments now and know it's not the end of the world if I don't achieve a certain result even though sometimes it feels like it directly after a negative experience. You develop this mental toughness, not by being happy and winning everyday, but surviving difficult times and challenging adversity. Table Tennis has allowed me to make lifelong friendships; it's also taught me a lot of life skills such as dedication and hard work and hopefully provides a good springboard in my future life after I stop competing.

I have been fortunate enough to have a great long term mentor and coach, Mark, throughout my whole career both on and off the court. I know some of my achievements would have not been possible without the help and guidance of Mark and I believe looking back on things now, he has done a fantastic job and I know he has got the most out of me. All coaches have different styles and different ways of going about things, so I think it's really important that you find a coach that you trust and are comfortable with.

It's very unusual for a player to be coached by only one coach these days, and it has been 11 years since I started with Mark. I think this has allowed me to develop into a more 'consistent' player rather than having multiple coaches and having multiple ideas which could lead to some confusion, mainly in my developing years (first 6-7 years of playing) when I was trying to learn all the shots to be used at a higher level in the future.

However, it hasn't always been smooth sailing – with any relationship, there are always disagreements, times when I didn't want to listen because I thought I knew best and times when I know I could have not been easy to deal with but its team effort so you're in it together. I know I am personally better off for it, and I'm sure myself and Mark will work together for the rest of my table tennis career. I don't know of another Australian coach that has nearly 50 players make State Teams and about 45 Australian titles won by his players. There are many opinions out there as to how coaches should go about their coaching and the different methods they use, however, it would be hard to disagree that if we had a few more 'ducks' around the sport would be in a whole lot better position than it is today.

There have also been other coaches, last 2 National Coaches (Marcus Gustafson and Brett Clarke), I've worked with developing my game throughout the past few years as my standard has reached a level where input from others can help. In recent times (2009 & 2010), I've worked a lot with Brett whom I definitely benefited from his experience and knowledge in developing parts of my games.

There will always be influences on you in your table tennis career, family and friends who come along for the ride and everyone has something to offer, we should keep an open mind, listen to everyone, and take what you think is most important for you to implement in your game.

I have an exciting 12 months ahead of me. In a few weeks, I am off to compete in the World Individual Championships, in the Netherlands. I am also playing the Luxembourg Open as a preparation tournament. I then come back to Australia for a couple of months, competing in the Australian Open and finishing my semester of university. After that I head overseas to Europe for two months training before I compete at the World University Games in China. From there, I will be heading to Poland for a season of league which starts in September. I am really excited about this opportunity as it's the first time I get to be a professional at what I actually love to do. I will be coming back sometime in February 2012 to play in the Australian Olympic Qualifying Tournament, with my ultimate goal which is the London 2012 Olympics.

For all those junior players out there striving for success and those results you desire, my advice is this; keep things simple, work hard and be willing to change when needed and most importantly, listen. Be patient and persevere with your goals. Learning how to deal with situations when times get tough should give you a lot of motivation to work harder and improve which will help you become a better athlete and person in future. I'm still learning and I know I will continue to keep on learning for the rest of my career.