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Impressed coaches tout island as training venue

by Nick Mann

GUERNSEY table tennis is firmly part of the national system.

The island hosted its first British and Irish Championships, also known as the Six Nations, last weekend.

It left the other nations impressed with the facilities on offer and gave locals the opportunity to compete against top players.

Now some of the competing countries are looking at coming back to hold training camps at the Guernsey Table Tennis Centre.

Scotland won the men's team trophy, Wales the combined and women's, while Guernsey avoided the wooden spoon in the three-team competitions with victories over the Isle of Man.

'Virtually every six years we will be holding this tournament. This was our first and it went well,' said Guernsey Table Tennis Association president Derek Webb.

'It was a superb tournament and we had some fantastic players, although England didn't send their best.'

He added that from a local players point of view it was a great opportunity to play against a higher level.

'It also put Guernsey on the map. We've only had positive comments back about the table tennis centre,' said Webb.

'People who had not been before found it unbelievable we had a purpose built hall dedicated to table tennis – two coaches from other countries want to come over and hold training camps.'

The association was happy to let others use the facility for free if local players were also included.

'I think the teams liked the facilities, the hotel, and were just very pleased with the organisation. We were very pleased, there were a couple of hiccups, but everybody gets them. All in all it went very well.'

He added Guernsey performed extremely well, which was

heartening with the Island Games ahead next year.

'We're quite fortunate, not only are we involved in the Six Nations at the senior level, but right through from under-12s. Next June we're holding the British Schools Championships, bringing 120 players over, which is great for Guernsey and for tourism.'

He added the island competed very well at the junior level.

'The future is very bright for us, we've a lot of youngsters playing now, just touching the 100 mark with players under 15, which is fantastic,' said Webb.

'We've got a lot of good talent coming through and a fairly good structure of coaching that goes on from our development officer.'

He added the association would like to see the seniors competing with the other nations, agreeing with non-playing Guernsey team captain Phil Hunkin that they were 10 to 20% below that level.

'Our aim must be to keep improving to compete. I'm not sure if it's achievable, but we must keep aiming for that level.'

The side travels a lot, he said, and is learning all the time about different things that can be done.

'It's also down to the players, how motivated they are, but we've got a pretty dedicated bunch at the moment.'

Deutsche Bank sponsored the competition.

'We were very pleased to host it, it was special for the people that went to watch – we're just so proud to be part of it.'