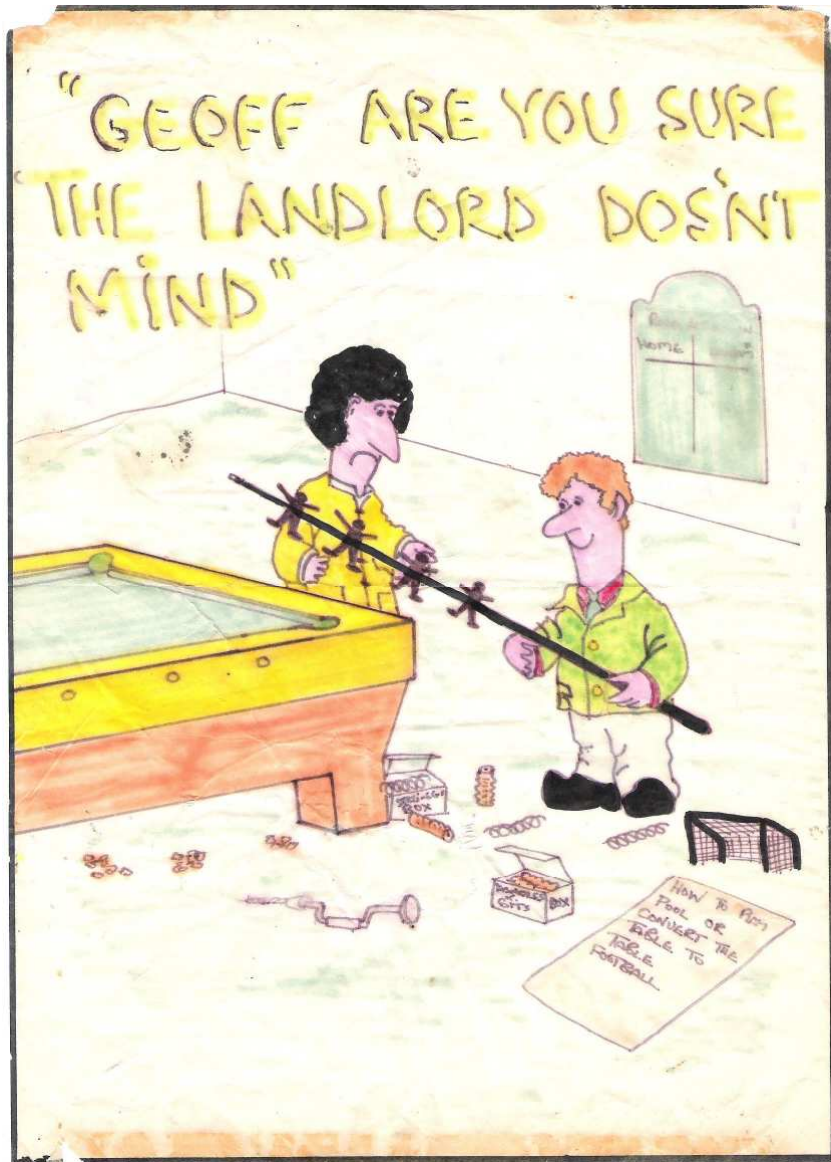




British Foosball Association

August Newsletter 2008



©Geoff Brice

Geoff Brice Special

The Man who taught so many of us the joys of Foos speaks out, and tells it like it *really* is. Find out what he has to say on the state of the game – and what he really thinks of the snake!

2. UK Championships Announcement
3-5. UK Open Results and Pictures
6-7 TecBall World Championships
8-10. Garlando World Championships
11-43. Geoff Brice Special

Including:

36. BFA Chair Boris Atha responds
44-46. Jon May on the UK Game
47. Competition results

For further information and all the latest details please check out:

www.britfoos.com

To advertise in the BFA Newsletter, please contact:

commercial@britfoos.com



August Newsletter 2008

UK

Championships

British Foosball Association

UK Championships 2008

This tournament will select the UK Representatives for the 2008/2009 ITSF World Championships

The Venue

***The Holywell
London Road
Hinckley
Leicestershire
LE10 1HL***

The Schedule

Saturday 30th August 2008

11am - Amateur Singles
12pm - **Open Singles**
2pm - Junior Singles
4pm - Senior Singles
4pm - Junior Doubles
6pm - Senior Doubles

Sunday 31st August 2008

11am - Amateur Doubles
12pm - **Open Doubles**
1pm - **Women's Singles**
4pm - Women's Doubles

More details coming soon.

Keep checking the Britfoos website for the latest details:

<http://www.britfoos.com/phpBB2/viewtopic.php?t=6641>



August Newsletter 2008

UK Open Results

Open Singles

1. Joe Hamilton
2. Jonathan May
3. John Shovelton

Women's Singles

1. Mayya Racy
2. Olga Lasecka
3. Jody Walding

Roberto-Sport Singles

1. Joe Hamilton
2. Tom Burdett
3. Mike Amsden

Senior Singles

1. David Ziemann
2. Christopher Haddon
3. Brian Harms

2-Ball Super Meleé

1. Tom Burdett
2. John Shovelton
3. Alex Shovelton

Open Doubles

1. Joe Hamilton & Rob Atha
2. Stephen Lyall & Tom Burdett
3. Jonathan May & Mayya Racy

Women's Doubles

1. Mayya Racy & Jody Walding
2. Catherine Brown & Olga Lasecka
3. Sarah Brice & Sukaina Jaffer

No-Pro Singles

1. Krisztian Juhasz
2. Luke Ashley
3. Grzegorz Zakowski

Roberto-Sport Doubles

1. Rob Atha & Olga Lasecka
2. Mike Amsden & Joe Hamilton
3. Rob Davey & John Shovelton

DYP

1. David Ziemann & Mike Amsden
2. Jonathan May & Joe Hamilton
3. John Shovelton & Colin Fallon

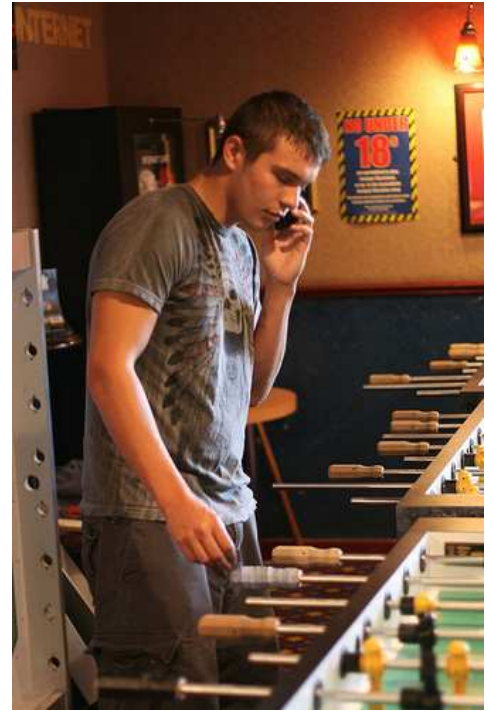


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UK Open Pictures



©Dave Ziemann



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UK Open Pictures



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August Newsletter 2008

TecBall World Championships

The Tecball World championships were held in Mid-July, in Aschaffenburg, Germany. A large British contingent took part, with some excellent performances. The British team were knocked out in the second round of the Nations Cup, losing to Germany having beaten Lithuania in the first round. Selected results are:

OS

- 1 - Fred
- 2 - Tom Yore
- 3 - Michael Brauns

- 33 - Rob Atha
- 65 - Steve Lyall
- 65 - Tom Burdett
- 129 - Simon Yeung
- 162 - Dan Kingston
- 172 - Rob Moss

OD

- 1 - Fred & Todd
- 2 - Rob & Henk Habets
- 3 - Ismael Saban & Giuliano Bentivoglio

- 65 - Steve Lyall & Tom Burdett
- 65 - Rob Moss & Dave Ziemann
- 117 - Simon Yeung & Dan Kingston

More results at

http://www.ftv-hessen.de/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=124&Itemid=107
or http://www.table-soccer.org/tournaments/results/2008/20080720_ger_aschaffenburg.pdf

WS

- 1 - Samantha di Paolo
- 2 - Sarka Holomoucka
- 3 - Katrin Matsushi ta

- 17 - Olga Lasecka
- 33 - Cath Brown

WD

- 1 - Sabine Steinlechner & Asimena Kiroglou
- 2 - Natalie Jacob & Samantha di Paolo
- 3 - Pavlina Bartosova & Silvie Vavrova

- 17 - Olga Lasecka & Szilvia Blasko
- 17 - Cath Brown & Sarah Brice

Senior Singles

- 5 - Dave Ziemann

Senior Doubles

- 4 - Dave Ziemann & Kathy Brainard



©Dave Ziemann



©Dave Ziemann



August Newsletter 2008

TecBall World Championships

Dave Ziemann attended the Tecball World Championships and posted these comments on the Britfoos forum:

It was an excellent tournament. The table is very playable and very addictive because you get better quite quickly. It plays like an improved Eurosoccer table with slightly less grippy balls.

There are many extremely good players with an amazing variety of pin shots. This table is made for Fred. There is a chance to beat him on Bonzini or one of the other tables maybe, but not on Tecball.

I had great fun but was thwarted in senior singles. The ITSF format is the brutal qualifier plus SE KO. I lost in the first elimination round very frustratingly on sweat ball to Manfred Redel who went on to win the event. I know I could have won that, but I was pleased with how good I was by the end of the tournament(!) after my first real playing experience on the table.

Also impressed with the quality of the senior players generally, and not just those who entered the senior events. Check out the number of senior players just in the top 3 OD pairs.

Had the most awesome fun time playing pick-up with Tom Yore. More like 1-ball rollerball. He is blindingly fast when he has the ball and also generally around the table. He is a true multi-table player, adapting better I think than any other US Tornado player.

One of the best games I saw was when Tom B and Steve were playing a very strong pair in (I think) the ProAm. These guys absolutely canded our two lads and it was embarrassing to watch. It was one game first to 7 and these guys were 6-1 up. They played a very tight game until this point when they start hacking and shooting slingshots and mucking about. Tom & Steve were very dejected but somehow scored a couple and started to come back. At 6-4 they started to wonder if perhaps they had a chance. At 6-5 they knew they did. And guess what! They did it! Came back from 6-1 down to win. Never give up.

In the team event the Germans were too strong. Their women are particularly strong, although I think we might have finessed a couple more results elsewhere, although I don't think they fielded the strongest possible team against us.

The Czechs blew away the US team by the way. Jim Stevens was the star of their particular show, being the only US team player to win a game against the Czechs. Probably never saw a push kick before. So good to meet people I haven't seen for ages, and also to have made a bunch of new friends too. Kathy Brainard, Szilvia Blasko, Uwe Jentsch, Remco van Kerckhoff....

...and Joachim Jobb who is not a "scene" player, but who made a very interesting observation. His point was that there is only one thing holding back table football, and that is, simply, that tournaments must be held only in cities which are major transport hubs, and never in places like Aschaffenburg or Bolton.



August Newsletter 2008 Garlando World Championships

Rob Atha attended the Garlando World Championships and posted these comments on the Britfoos forum (please note these are as posted, so have not been edited for spelling/punctuation etc)

The tournament was a good one.

I will start first with the nations cup, we got drawn against Lithuania again in the first round, I decided to sit this one out to give everyone else a game, we won easily 8-0 the same as tecball. the singles players were Joe, Tom and Jon, Jody. Doubles Tom-Oli, Steve-Joe, Jon-Bobby, Sarah-Jody. Good work.

The next match was against Germany, I knew going in that it would be a tough one but I had a feeling we could pull it off. I played the first singles against Ingo, I won 7-1, Jody was playing against Sandra Ranff (2nd in WS) she put up a good fight but eventually lost 7-5. Next up was Tom against Ruben Heinrich, Tom was leading 5-3 but a good comeback from ruben saw him win 7-5, we had chances to close. Joe was playing against Tim Ludwig, tims shots from the back and solid play saw him win 7-4. That put us down 3-1 going into the doubles.

I played the first Doubles with Ste Lyall against Ruben and Robin Hanke, we smashed them 7-1. After that we went onto Cheer Sarah and Jody on against the German Girls Sandra Ranff and Petra Andres, The girst played great, nice shooting from Jody and solid play at the back from sarah, was 5-5 and Sandra had like 5 shots to go up but sarah blocked them all and scored 2 from the back for them to claim a awesome win which tied it up at 3-3 with 2 doubles matches left.

Tom and Jon May played against Tim Ludwig and I think Frank Brauns, they were loosing 5-2 I think then jon may scored 4 from the back which put us ahead, but good play in the clutch saw the germans finally win that match I think 8-6, we had a few chances to claim the win. So we were losing 4-3 going into the last doubles, we had to win.

Up Next was the hero from last years semi final win against Swiss, Joe Hamilton and Debutant Oli Deaking playing against Ingo Aufdeheide and Charly Friessen, they were 4-2 down then joe and Oli started playing really good, very high quality play from both teams, the crowd started to gather, the match was tied up at 6-6 we then go up 7-6 (win by 2 until 10) but the germans level it up again until then oli deaking gets the ball at the back and does a push shot with his far man on the 2 bar and he angles it back to the far post, what a gem. then the match was going ball for ball till 9-9, joe was shooting nearly %100 on charly. On the final point, joe passes it through, his 5 was unstoppable under pressure, Joe takes a time out, Ingo goes to the back, blocks it and then scores a push from the back to win the match. Very well played guys, the matches could of gone either way, nearly all of them, so it shows that we can beat everyone.

I wanna say a little bit about OD, I played with Joe and we had a laugh basically, it made me play without pressure which got the best out of me im sure. The first match was the hardest it went 5 games against Marcel Glaus and Pierino Keller from swiss, we eventually won 5-3. It didnt look too good at that point as we just scraped through. But the more matches we played the better we got.



August Newsletter 2008 Garlando World Championships

Rob Atha attended the Garlando World Championships and posted these comments on the Britfoos forum (please note these are as posted, so have not been edited for spelling/punctuation ect)

We beat a polish team 3-0 after that, then we had to play against David Csar and Markus Rosicky, hard team from austria. Was a tough one because it was in the morning, was 1-1 and 4-3 for them but we pulled it out winning 3-1 which put us at 9th place.

Next up was the best team from Hungary, Tamas Csige-Tibor Szabo. We were down 4-1 in the first game, then we decided to start playing, we came back to win 5-4, then I caught fire for the next 2 games and good switching earned us a 3-0 win, 5-4, 5-1, 5-2.

Our next one was against 3 time finalist Dalibor and Wolfgang, it didnt start very well as we lost 5-1 first game, 2nd game was going well when we were leading 4-1 but 3 quick goals from them tied it up at 4-4, he stole my pass then tried a 5 bar shot which I stuffed into his goal which gave us some momentum, joe blocked him well and scored a point up front. We won 3-1 which put us in the winners final.

We got destroyed by fred-todd, 5-2 5-2 5-4. We didnt play good but they did. haha.

The next day we had to play against Laszlo and Alex Lukas in the LBF. We controlled this match, we won the first 5-1, joe was playing great, defending and passing to my 5 or my 3. 2nd game was 5-1 also. 3rd game we were up 3-1 then they started to play better, and they came back to win 5-3, was my fault cos i started dickin around a bit.

4th game went ball for ball until 4-4 but I closed the deal for us to get to the final.

Joes style of play complimented mine which made us a hard team to beat, going into the final we didnt have much expectation to be honest, but we though we have nothing to lose so lets go for it. We won the first game 5-3, joe blocked well I was passsing and scoring good too, they then spanked us 5-1, but another good 3rd game performance saw us win 5-3 in the 3rd game, they came back again winning I think 5-2, the 5 game we had chances, joe was clearing the ball well and he kept feeding me the ball, I think I had 15 shots in the 5th but I didnt score on todd, the goal seemed to get smaller, we were up 6-5 in the 5th, and had the ball on the 5 but fred stole it and scored. at 6-6 they scrapped 2 goals into the goal, lucky ones which won them the title, we put up a good fight. Joe played very smart made the right decisions and did a solid job, he didnt look out of place in any match. Thanks for playing I had great fun.

I played with another english man in Pro Am which was another good decision, Tom Burdett, we scraped through a couple matches we should of lost at the start but then we got better, We played fred in the WBF, we won the first 5-4, lost 2nd 5-1 but won the 3rd I think 6-4, we both played well.

Fred Came back to the final of course, they played much better, they won the first dip 7-5 in the 3rd, but then we both stepped up and took it down 5-3 5-3. good playing tom you played great, congratulations.



August Newsletter 2008 Garlando World Championships

Rob Atha attended the Garlando World Championships and posted these comments on the Britfoos forum (please note these are as posted, so have not been edited for spelling/punctuation etc)

In OS I played like sh!t, I had no motivation, I just got through my first round match 5-3 in 5th game due to my 2 bar, I had no 5 or 3, I was mentally exhausted after playing lots on tecball the week before and then playing hard in OD in Tulln, so OS was not so good, in my 2nd match I got spanked 3-0 by a hungarian semi pro who wasnt even that good, I played like crap. I just knew if I stayed in OS till the next day I would be fine, I did.

Next day felt much better, stormed the losers bracket winning 2-0 in all of them till 9th place but eventually lost to Buba Kovacevic 5-4 5-4, I must of ran out of steam cos I normally beat that clown. So I took 9th, in the money at least.

Open Mixed was good, I played with Ola of course, We had a couple of 5 game matches but we always seemed to come back and win, we were down 2-1 in games (against Roli Prisi, Pio Keller twice) in 3 of the matches we won, we lost the winners final against Fred, we won first 5-1, then lost 5-3, then 4-4 in 3rd ola blocks him but then he scored the next time,

I didnt have the ball. the won 4th game 5-3. We got back to the final though after beating pio keller 3-2 in a tough one then we played fred again in more of a fun match, they won 5-3 5-4, 4-5, 5-2.

In Pro Master Doubles I played with Kevin Hundstorfer (he beat fred in OS winners bracket) we got to the winners final against fred-todd, we should have won, kevin was bricking fred, but he adapted at the end and they won 8-6 in the last game. We beat Dalibor and WOlfy to get back to the final, it was the last event going and nobody wanted to play it cos it was late so we split and went home.

So all the doubles events I played good but in singles I wasnt upto par. All I need is to take 2nd at tornado worlds to do the grand slam of 2nd places in world events in OD, (Paris-bonzini 2nd with Tim, Tecball 2nd with Henk and now 2nd with Joe garlando)lol.

Fred won everything else.

The main results were 2nd in OD for Rob Atha and Joe Hamilton, and a victory in Pro-Am for Tom Burdett and Rob Atha.

Great results in both cases, with the challenge now for Joe and Tom to go on to the top level and play that well every tournament.

The strength of the UK game at the top level is clearly as good as it ever has been, and is something that as a country we can all be proud of!

Roll on the Tornado and Roberto-Sport Worlds later in the year....



August Newsletter 2008

Geoff Brice Special

Geoff is a legend in the UK foosball game. He has nurtured countless thousands of foos players at schools, colleges and pubs all over the West of England. He is one of the most enthusiastic table football players and keenest promoters of the game.

Geoff has had a mixed relationship with the BFA – from being the promoter of the first 3 BFA ranking events to being antagonised with the introduction of new style Garlando tables for tournaments. He has promoted no-snake tournaments supported by the BFA. Many of the top UK players got their first introduction to foosball on a Geoff Brice table including the Shoveltons, Tom Burdett and Steve “Mr Angry” Lyall amongst many, many others.

Geoff has spent 3 months agonising over the answers to these questions, and the answers are undoubtedly from the heart. They are controversial, and they have potential to offend, particularly where people are named. Neither the BFA nor the Editor of this newsletter agree with all Geoff has written, but there are many very valuable and important issues that he raises. To discuss the newsletter, log on to:

<http://www.britfoos.com/phpBB2/viewtopic.php?t=6650>

**Geoff playing in the Indoor League, produced by Yorkshire Television in 1973.
(Note the clear ends to allow better camera shots)**



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August Newsletter 2008

Geoff Brice Special

1. When did you first play table football?

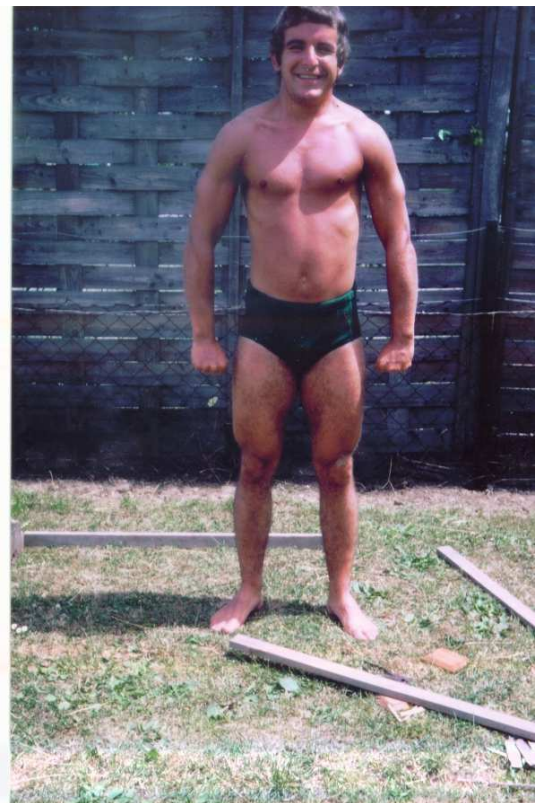
I first played foosball at a college in Cardiff where I had gone to train as a P.E teacher in the mid 1960's. The college was split over several campuses, which resulted in only first-years being taught at my site. We were thus all beginners together.

I was a rather sorry creature when I arrived at college. My father was in the RAF, and my family had led a very nomadic existence where I was rarely in a school long enough to forge friendships. Being small and frequently bullied led to my indulging in that most pathetic of clichés - an obsession with weightlifting. A succession of boys-only schools added to my social awkwardness, particularly in mixed company.

With pool and electronic games still a few years in the future, foosball was the centre of the social scene at the college. The game was phenomenally popular and all breaks involved a race to get to the table. Unless you were quick, up to 40-50 old sixpences (2½p) were already down and you could forget playing for at least an hour. Luckily, I emerged as one of the best players fairly quickly. This had many beneficial effects - not least of which was that I could now stroll into the common room at my leisure, as I was always asked to partner someone who already had their sixpence down. This had the double benefit of my getting to play even more games than most others, consolidating my top position in the game.

It took me about eight weeks to successfully reinvent myself. I could even get away with entering the common room with a swagger. For the first time in my life I was one of the cool guys! Of course many students use the opportunity provided by a college or university to reinvent themselves, but I believe I was such a hopeless case that the process would have been much harder - if not impossible - without foosball.

The picture on the right was taken three weeks before Geoff broke a British record. I'd think carefully before disagreeing with Geoff in the future!



©Geoff Brice



August Newsletter 2008

Geoff Brice Special

2. What made you decide to start operating table football tables (and dare I ask how long ago it was)? And why specialise so strongly for table football when most games machine operator go for a wide range of machines (Pool, Quiz Machines, Fruit Machines etc)?

I became a foosball operator in 1989, quite by accident, and ironically I owe my business to a game of pool. My sister Val and her husband - a keen pool player, were visiting me over the August Bank Holiday. A local pub was hosting a competition and I took him along. I decided I might as well enter and was eventually drawn against the pub landlord. During a boring game he remarked how he regretted the demise of table football as he remembered it as a much more exciting game. I told him I also enjoyed the game, and still had an old football table in my garage.

He invited me to take my table along and put it into the pub. It quickly proved enormously successful - too much so, in fact, as he promptly bought his own and asked me to take mine away! Any thoughts I had about a profitable little sideline quickly evaporated, as I imagined all pubs would probably do the same.

Luckily, shortly after this a friend managed to get the Barrels interested in having a FT. As the pub was popular with students, I decided to buy a new model, and it was the best investment I have ever made. It was again immediately successful - the owner of the Indian restaurant next door even had to come in frequently to drag his waiters off the machine - and has led to a partnership of almost 20 years, during which over a quarter of a million games have been played at the pub.

Shortly after the above, one of my new friends from the Barrels went to Bath for a funeral. He had lived there for many years before moving to Hereford. He asked me if I wanted him to speak to the landlords of his old haunts about getting a FT. Of course I agreed and the Hat-and-Feather and Bell soon joined my little enterprise. Others quickly followed. I have been very fortunate in that my business was largely given to me on a plate!

I did consider diversifying, but I took a great deal of flak from local amusement machine operators when I first started out. They viewed my supplying FTs in "their" pubs as a ploy to getting my foot in the pub's door, and suspected I would soon take over the pool table etc. I could not blame them - all amusement machine companies were busily pinching each other's sites at the time, and making a living from FTs alone was considered impossible, even then. Threats to myself and family followed, which is why to this day you will never see "supplied - by" signs on any of my FTs, or a business entry in any telephone directory.

For the first five years of operating FTs, I dealt exclusively with pubs for no other reason than I thought all colleges and universities probably already had them, and it did not occur to me there was potential in schools. In addition, from 1989-1995 I was a full time civil servant who was only able to service the FTs in the evening or on weekends. Schools were therefore impractical.



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Geoff Brice Special

Fortunately, in 1995 the Civil Service offered a huge sum to get rid of me. By this time I had about 60 pubs, and was fairly sure I could make a successful business from the game, so I accepted their offer. Again I was extremely lucky in that just before I left the job, a colleague who had connections with the local Cathedral School arranged for me to put a table in their tuck shop. Again it was very successful, and another business opportunity presented itself.

Schools are by far the best option for an operator who enjoys playing the game. Students always challenge me to a game, which usually leads - as Sarah has also discovered- to a nice little ego massage. With sixth forms on a two - year cycle, I can usually manage to avoid being beaten too often – even in my decrepit state. In addition, schools engender a much more relaxed approach to the business in general. When there is a fault, the conversation is usually along the lines of ‘Geoff, I’m awfully sorry but the football table is broken. Don’t make a special trip, but if you could pop in when you’re next in the area it would be much appreciated’.

With a pub, however, the conversation will more likely be “Geoff, the football table’s bugged”. “Ok. I’ll be down as soon as I can”. “Well, when’s that?” “I’ll try and make it tomorrow”. “That’s no good, it’s Friday and it will be a busy night tonight”.

So I used to go straight away. The problem is that most amusement machine operators will repair a machine in an average of 45 minutes 7 days a week up to 9 pm in the evening. My pubs therefore expected me to do the same.

I was once ‘phoned at 7:45am on a bank holiday by the then (thank god) manager of the Pig and Fiddle in Bath, one of my most popular pubs. The conversation - although several years ago - is still engraved on my mind “Geoff, it’s Mark from the Pig. The machine’s broken. I’m ringing you early because it’s a bank holiday and if you leave now you’ll avoid most of the traffic”. I sleepily pulled myself out of bed and set off, cursing more and more as I gradually woke up and realised what I had been asked to do. My mood on arriving at the pub darkened when I discovered the FT was completely playable and the ‘fault’ was a broken score - counter. Even though the manager could see I was unhappy at being called out in such fashion for what was a trivial problem, he was totally unrepentant, casually observing that the broken score – counter made the FT look untidy.

I have also lost seven FTs when arriving at pubs to do routine maintenance, only to find them boarded – up. They were all tenanted pubs, and I later found out that in every case the tenant had amassed huge debts and had suddenly announced to all in the pub one evening that everything was to be auctioned off. They know, of course, the brewery will be around immediately if they get wind of the event, so secrecy and urgency are necessary. In many cases not only the contents of the bar, but all of the pubs fixtures and fittings - even floorboards and joists disappear. The tenants then do ‘a runner’.



August Newsletter 2008

Geoff Brice Special

Although the brewery often know exactly where the tenants have gone, they don't even bother to report them to the police. They know the tenants are so deeply in debt that securing a court order for restoration will be worthless and the brewery will simply incur more costs. "Forget it, Geoff" is always the brewery's advice.

Lastly, pubs tend to be greedy. All my schools and colleges are on a 50/50 split of the proceeds, but most pubs insist on a rental, which is a fraction of this. As their pool table operator will almost certainly have an old FT in their warehouse - which they will give to the pub for free to get me off "their patch" - I have to agree to a nominal rent. Unfortunately, most pubs do not realise how much effort is required to keep the FT clean and playable. For the first year or so I am forever replacing rods and springs that do not need replacing, ensuring the landlord notices. I grumble incessantly about how temperamental the model I have given them is, but how I have to supply them because they are the most popular with the games' fans, and are used for all of the major championships etc. etc. Hopefully with all these shenanigans I can deter them from going elsewhere.

Schools, however, also come with a host of problems. Students are always short of funds, of course, and many seem to devote their very existence to getting a free game out of my FTs. By far the most popular ruse is the use of 1p coins instead of the 20p I still charge in 99% of my sites. As they are only slightly smaller than a 20p coin, they will work if used with a hefty kick, or with less force if wrapped with paper to increase their size. This is not a problem in pubs, of course, as the landlord would soon suss out what was going on and eject the perpetrator from the pub.

My collection of 1p coins now totals almost 100,000, and I have kept every one in the expectation that the Inland Revenue will query why my accounts show a £20,000 deficit between games – counter readings and cash collected. Incidentally, lest any of my schools' current students chance upon this piece, I can reveal the above fiddle now as I have finally got a local engineering works to manufacture a bracket for me which will enable me to use the "pull" type of coin – mechanisms most often seen on continental FTs, on my models. The fiddle does not work on these mechs. There are six other methods of getting a free game from the Garlando, but I will keep these under my hat for now!

I have also found a massive increase in the incidence of vandalism in my schools and colleges over the past five years, which I have detailed in my answer to question 6.

4. What do you think of the changes to the Garlando table that have been made over the last 5 years or so? Can you see yourself putting the new fully world spec tables out on any sites? And how similar are the tables that you currently operate to the latest World Spec table e.g. Do they have through bars, open/glass top, pinny men or block feet?

Garlando must be one of the few companies I have ever known whose ceaseless introduction of "improvements" has, in my opinion, proved counter – productive.



August Newsletter 2008

Geoff Brice Special

Almost every single batch of their FTs I have bought every six months or so for the past 20 years have come with a modification – however slight. These have at least proved useful on the many occasions I have been offered a “nearly new” model, which I can instantly identify to be several years old - 12 years on one occasion.

The latest modifications have been very badly thought out, or they simply weren't adequately tested before manufacture. For example the latest plastic playfield – surrounds have been modified to produce a smooth transition from playfield to ramp. Fine in principle, but the only way this could be achieved, of course, was by making the surround at the point of contact to the playfield extremely thin. As a result the playfield edge breaks up within weeks of installation on many models and has to be continually replaced – and fairly quickly as the plastic break – off's interfere with play and look very unsightly.

More recently, the black plastic clips - which secure the rods - have been completely redesigned. And here Garlando has made a total pig's – ear of it. The new clips are very fiddly to assemble, and are so thin I have again had breakages within a couple of months of installing a new model. I now use old clips from decommissioned FTs in my new sites.

Add the above to the chromium rapidly peeling off bars becoming much more of a problem lately, and you can appreciate that I am not Garlando's greatest fan presently!

With regard to FT type, I now have 6 World Spec(WS) FTs, 38 telescopic models with “pinny” feet, and the rest are telescopic with blocky feet. My 6 WS models were part of an experiment to help certain players develop the snake and to assess the popularity of the model against the telescopic ones. I had long harboured the suspicion that the BFA's decision to use the through – rodded models exclusively (and with hardly any transitional period) following the Reading competition of 2002 to have been a monumentally poor decision. I have analysed this in more detail in my answer to question 7.

To try to make the experiment as fair as possible, I delivered two WS models to sites which already had a telescopic model; in another two sites the reverse happened (to negate the argument that players often prefer the model they learnt to play the game on), and the last two WS models were delivered together with two telescopic models to fresh sites which agreed to take them both. It is surprisingly easy to get sites to have a foosball table when you tell them they are part of an experiment!

The results surprised me and should, I believe, make certain people responsible for the governance of foosball sit-up and take notice. During the last 4 weeks, for example, I have visited three of the above six sites, and these are the figures of the number of games played extracted from my records:



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1 / 5 / 08 BRISTOL G. S. WS model: Through rods...63 games Telescopic...610 games
20 / 5 / 08 SIR THOMAS RICH'S SCH...WS model...295 games Telescopic...692 games
23 / 5 / 08 ABINGDON COLLEGEWS model...213 games Telescopic...1008 games

BGS and STR results are difficult to draw strong conclusions from as they are skewed by the use of the model by the snakers at the sites, which also seems to affect their popularity (see question 6 if you are interested), but these figures are also mirrored by those from the other three sites where I have WS models sited. In addition, in my research for the topic closest to my heart (the snake article) I also took the opportunity to seek the opinions of the foosers at the six sites where I have both models as to which model they prefer, and why they prefer it.

The results were exactly as I expected, and yet I still seem to be regarded as some sort of foosball freak for having them. By a ratio of approximately 4 – 1, I found the male foosers who can choose which model to play on prefer the one with telescopic rods. I am currently examining the various reasons which lead a fooser to prefer one model over another, and will produce the results later if anyone is interested..

Girls, in fact, voted about 7 – 1 in their preference for the TR model – mainly because their comparative lack of power in their right wrist made shooting a decent shot on the three bar much harder on the WS model. Many are reduced to hacking in order to play a reasonable game – and this also seems to be more effective on the TR model. Perhaps facilitating a hack is a poor excuse for recommending the use of a particular model, but at least it keeps the girls interested in the game. This, in turn, assists the game in becoming the social hub of the common room – which also, of course, then draws more males to the FT and so on.

Most of the above were beginners, of course, and it can be argued that their opinions should not be influential above this level. But I have personally found the same opinion prevailing throughout my 40 years involvement with foosball. Again and again I am advised that everyone who has the opportunity to graduate to through - rods will soon prefer them. This is completely at odds with the opinions of the estimated 500 players from the six colleges and schools who have had the choice of which model to play on (and many are on four – year courses), and virtually all of the many hundreds of foosers from my pubs who have had the opportunity to play on both models over many years.



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This was discussed often in the months following the first Reading competition to use the through-rods. In recent years I have noticed how the telescopic-rod (TR) models seem to be perceived as little more than children's toys in comparison to the WS models. Tornado fans, in particular, have often been scornful of my preference for them. I would have liked to have analysed in detail why I believe telescopic models give a better game for beginners and expert foosers alike, but I want to concentrate on matters of more concern for now.

I have also found, surprisingly, that WS models need more maintenance than TR models. If anyone wishes to dispute this, please remember that I have serviced a football table on over 36,000 separate occasions since I started my business. I have found that most of the stiffness found in rods after 500 – 1,000 games have been played (my maintenance window) is derived from the point of contact between bar and bearing. With WS models there are, of course, two such points whereas with TR models there is only one, with the rod effectively balanced on the bearing and lightly resting on the inner-rod, depending on how much of the outer-rod is in or out of the FT. It is worth adding here that according to the main Garlando importers, Excel Leisure, out of every 100 coin-op models sold, 99 are of the telescopic variety. In this litigious age, they have advised me, there is no chance whatsoever of any amusement machine supplier installing any WS models. All WS models sold in the year up to my discussion with them, were ordered by players intending to use them for themselves.

So, with all the evidence showing that the majority of foosers actually do prefer playing on telescopic models, and 99% of models still being purchased by "the trade" to be of this type, I shall be using these exclusively in the future. I have expanded on this in my answer to question 6.

5. I can think of loads of Brice pupils over the years – Clegg Tassell and Matt Cockburn, Dave Bareham and Drew Carter, the Shoveltons, and latterly a production line who have gone on to Warwick Uni. Who were the best players at school that you have seen, and do you feel proud that so many of them that have been introduced to the game on your tables have gone on to become top players. And why do you think some people stay keen, and others all by the wayside?

As I write my answer to this question, Boris has just posted the GB team for the Tec Ball WCS to be held at Frankfurt between 17 –20 July, and, of course, I am immensely proud that Tom Burdett, Stephen Lyall and Simon Yeung have all been selected. As far as I can remember they all learnt to play foosball at Sir Thomas Rich's School in Gloucester. Unfortunately the school is closest to my base, and as such I used to service the machines (they have both models), either first thing in the morning, or in the early evening as I was returning home. Consequently I don't remember playing them much, and can take no credit for their team selection. No doubt my absence was the reason for their success.

I remember playing the shovies in their formative years, and it was evident pretty quickly that they had the skills and desire to take them to the top. Surprisingly, though, many players with awesome talent abandoned the game long before they had reached their full potential.



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I remember two lads in particular who were students at Oswestry School, a posh school in Shropshire. The pair were amazing characters, on and off the FT. One of them had a part - time job and told me he had arranged for his £80 per week wages to be paid to him entirely in 20p coins. He did, however, sell some of them to resident students for 25p each. The other admitted his addiction to the game was out of control, and he even went burgling to enable him to play as often as he could.

But despite being far more talented than me they never managed to beat me. Both had a major flaw in their game, which, to my surprise and frustration, they had no interest in correcting. They found passing the ball from the 5- bar to the 3- bar boring. Their pull-shots and tap-bangs were at least as fast as any player I have recently seen, but their lack of passing ability resulted in them rarely being able to use their speed. Both knew this would seriously affect their progress in the game, but it didn't make any difference. All they were interested in was hitting the ball faster and harder. They both abandoned foosball after their first year in the sixth form, although the game remained enormously popular there. They had simply exhausted their potential for playing the game the way they wanted to play it, and when they realised they could no longer hit the ball any harder or faster their interest in the game was gone.

I have come across this mindset many times, and have now come to realise we all want different experiences from foosball. This is the main reason I can persuade so few out of their cosy common rooms into the competitive arena. So, in a rather convoluted answer to the latter part of your question, it seems to me that many foosers fall by the wayside not because they have realised their full potential at the game, but they have reached what they perceive to be their peak at playing foosball the way they want to play it. This, of course, has implications for the "snake debate."

The interview this month included a question to Geoff about the snake, and it seems to have resonated in the Brice household. Here is his full response. Following that is a response from BFA chairman Boris Atha.

6. You are often seen as being "anti-snake". Can you clarify what you think of it, and its place in the game.

I was surprised to see you had included this question. The replies to my 2006 post on the subject led me to believe everyone but myself considered the "snake debate" dead. For example, my research before deciding to hold a snake-free competition in 2006 involved seeking the opinion of well over 1,000 players from my 58 schools where the shot was in use, and 36 pubs where players had been exposed to it. Since 1996, I have discussed the snake with at least 3,000 foosers as I have sought to understand why this, to me, aberration of our game was tolerated. I was aware that others were unhappy about the shot and discussions on banning it were not new, but I was advised by foosers who had participated in previous debates that I was the first person to research the subject fully, and provide actual examples of how the snake damages the game.



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I foolishly thought this, plus the experience gleaned in my 20 years as an operator, would at least entitle my conclusions to be treated with respect, and engender some spirited debate.

My optimism was soon crushed, however, as a little after half an hour of posting my thoughts on the discussion forum, BFA committee member John Worthington replied with a withering "...and lets not get into another ... 'ban the snake' discussion." It is standard practice that when committee members of any organisation place their opinions in the public arena, it is accepted that they are advancing the views of the committee, unless a disclaimer is issued to that effect. As none was forthcoming, and no other committee members distanced themselves from his comments, it must be assumed he represented BFA policy on the matter.

As well as being disappointed with this immediate attempt to quash any further debate on the snake, I was also a little perplexed. My research had convinced me there was still a great deal of opposition to the snake, and I was certainly not attempting to flog a dead horse. In addition, foosball is in a massive decline (for example my pubs have fallen from 74 to just 3) and the snake, in the opinion of 99% of my interviewees - including many candid snakers - had contributed to this decline. The only difference in opinion was over the extent the snake had added to foosballs' pending demise.

So, with foosball heading into oblivion, and the snake accelerating this process, how could the debate be considered dead? Surely there was something sinister afoot. Further evidence recently appeared revealing in unequivocal terms the tactics snakers were using to suppress debate.

Time and again anti-snakers have telephoned me or sidled up to me in competitions to express their wholehearted support for my stance. Often this was furtive and I found it frustrating that few seemed willing to give their opinion openly. "What's the point?" they would say, "you're either told it cannot be banned" - untrue, as I will show later - or "you're ridiculed and insulted by being accused of disliking the snake simply because you can't shoot or defend it."

I sympathise with the above comments because I have been on the receiving end of them - often delivered smugly - too many times to remember. One cannot really blame the snakers. Why engage in a debate which you are likely to lose when insults and ridicule can be relied upon to silence your detractor?

Stephen Lyall put this snakers standard into print in the April 2008 BFA Newsletter. When defending himself against others who had the temerity to call his brush-snake game boring, he replied "...but they're only moaning because they have no answer for it,"

I cannot describe how depressing such comments are to so many of us foosers' who choose to have nothing to do with the shot.



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Why we cannot at least be respected because we strongly feel the snake has changed the game so fundamentally that we no longer recognise it as the sport we have loved for so long - and to a far inferior version – is beyond my comprehension, and does the snakers no credit.

I have also suspected for some time that the BFA may not have been committed to ensuring that the snake debate was held on a level playing – field.

For many years I had requested an open vote to be held on the question of the snake being banned. I specifically requested that I be informed if such a vote were to be held, in particular if it were via the internet, as I was computer illiterate – and a lot of the players on my FTs had better things to do than trawl TF websites. At the time I had assisted the BFA on several occasions, providing extra FTs for competitions and, whilst there, repairing jammed coin-mechs. I did not think I was asking for much in return, and I also thought that as Britain's largest dedicated foosball operator, I would at least be extended this courtesy.

At the time my business was at its peak, with over 230 sites boasting about 10,000 regular foosers and countless casual players. Roughly a third of these - over 3000 foosers - were familiar with the snake. I would have thought a vote on the snake would be utterly meaningless without seeking their opinion on the matter. The BFA thought otherwise.

Some time later I was chatting to a BFA committee member who, when asked again if a vote was to be held, casually replied that one had indeed been held recently– and via the internet. He advised me just under 100 votes were cast and the result was in the 40's for both camps – with the snakers just winning. When I complained that I could have easily got ten votes to ban the snake for every one for it, the reply was 'yes, I know, why do you think we didn't tell you we were holding the vote?' He seemed amused at the subterfuge. This was some years ago now, but is still very relevant because I still hear this "vote" bandied about as evidence the BFA had done all they could to assess players' opinions on the subject.

It is partly because I feel opposition to the snake is still very strong - and it is apparent both the BFA and snakers in general have used somewhat dubious tactics to ensure its survival - that I have decided to update anyone interested in my latest research into the shot.

I also feel it may be useful for another reason. From what Sarah tells me the snake is now pretty much de rigour in competitions. I also suspect pubs from whence the competition attendees emanate will have a strong snake culture. It is altogether likely, then, that such lofty foosball cliques have become isolated from the 'word on the street,' and fail to fully appreciate the detrimental affect the snake still has on the game - particularly at grass roots level.



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I have completed a great deal of further research into this topic since my 2006 post and – despite John Worthington’s reservations – I am absolutely convinced further debate is more urgent and necessary now than it has ever been.

Indeed, as a result of my latest findings, I have decided that the snake has such a malign influence on the game – especially in schools and colleges – that from September 2008, to coincide with the new academic year, I will be banning the snake in all of my sites. I intend to remove all the through – rods and pinny – feet from my FTs. I shall reverse the playing field to leave the smooth side uppermost, which will make the snake almost impossible to complete. Whereas before I have freely given out details of the BFA website and encouraged students to use it, I now intend to isolate them as far as is possible in this internet age from exposure to this greatly diminished version of the game we now call foosball.

I know I will be criticised for this manoeuvre, but I strongly feel the game will benefit in the long term from it. I ask only one thing – that you read the following pages before you vent your spleen. I will then be only too pleased for you to point out the flaws in my analyses, which have led me to take this drastic step.

Firstly, I think it would be helpful if I put the snake debate into an over-view of foosballs health. I concede that if our game were growing in popularity, the question of whether the snake should be banned would lose much of its thrust.

But, as most of us know, foosball is in very serious decline - possibly terminal - at least in the UK and the USA. Dave Courrington of Tornado admitted this in an interview he gave recently which can be viewed on FoosWorld.com. With my 20 years experience as an operator, my connections with many other operators who also supply football tables, and anecdotal evidence gathered from many other sources, I can categorically confirm this decline is even more pronounced in the UK. I also believe that this downward trend is likely to accelerate, for the following reasons.

Changing social mores are resulting in pubs disappearing at an alarming and exponential rate. Those left are increasingly being ‘themed’- rarely to the benefit of foosball.

The game is also losing its already lowly and fragile place in the hierarchy of pub games. Rarely, if ever, the star performer, it nevertheless earned its keep as a ‘stayer’. Whereas other games such as pinball would take £250 a week initially, after 8-10 weeks this would fall dramatically to a little more than a fiver a week. It was a maxim of the trade that you needed a minimum of 15 different pinball machines, which had to be constantly rotated to keep interest at viable levels.

The same could be said for single - gamed video formats. There was only so much that could be programmed into a tennis/boxing/driving game- with the limited technology available at the time- to hold the punters interest for long.



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Against this background, the football table sitting in the corner earning £30 - £50 per week, year after year, and using no power was well tolerated by landlords. The introduction of multiple game cabinets, however, offering over 200 games with endless hefty cashbox's has now eroded the benefits of this "nice little earner." Unless the pub is very large, the space the FT occupies can now almost always be filled by a game generating higher cash returns – or so most amusement machine operators believe, and will try to convince pub landlords likewise.

Even more of a threat is the fact that a huge number of FTs are in tenanted pubs. Traditionally the tenant pays a rent to the brewery, and is contracted to buy their booze. On the plus side for foosball, the tenant had autonomy over the choice of pub entertainment he provided, and kept the pubs share of the income they generated for himself..

Firms like Enterprise Inns are revolutionising this concept. They are gobbling up tenanted pubs from other chains and now have nearly 8000, but, crucially, they have removed all input from the tenant with regard to the amusement machines sited in the pub. They have their own vetted list of suppliers, and keep the pub's share of the revenue the machines generate.

I recently lost a very popular two - table pub where the game had been a strong feature since 1994, supplying many competition entrants in the late 1990s. Enterprise Inns took over the pub, but foosball did not feature in their plans for it - partly because their local appointed machine supplier thought other machines would be more popular - so after 14 years and well over 100,000 games, foosball will no longer be played there. What is particularly significant is the fact that the game is now losing sites where it is very popular, and the landlord wants to keep it.

Universities and colleges, those traditional bedrocks of foosball, can also no longer be relied upon to give the game succour. A university JCR will often display £20,000+ worth of amusement machines to tempt the students. Most universities also put their entire machine contract out to tender each year, resulting in dedicated foosball promoters being squeezed out. Even if a football table is provided it is usually older than me, poorly maintained - if at all - and consequently neglected by students. This was Sarah's experience when she went to Keele University, and students returning from other universities during holidays have confirmed this is the norm.

My own business now relies almost exclusively on school sixth forms for its survival. A few years ago this provided what was a reasonably healthy and secure source of income. With another 100 - odd students arriving in the sixth form every year, interest in the game could be maintained, and sixth form heads – always in a constant battle with their school's bursars for funds – usually used their share of the proceeds to keep the students common room refurbished. But this happy scenario began to change dramatically a few years ago with the government's desire to increase the number of students in further education. 16 – 18 year olds were paid £30 a week under certain conditions to stay at school. There were political overtones to this strategy, as it enabled the government to manipulate youth unemployment statistics.



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Previously to this, sixth formers remained at school because they wanted to. University was the goal, of course, and even if 'A' level grades were insufficient to achieve this, they at least gave better employment prospects.

The governments' initiative, however, ensured there were now a great many students in the sixth form who had no desire to be there. Without wishing to digress into a sociological debate about whether certain types of student are more likely to indulge in nefarious activities, suffice to say a five-fold increase in problems soon resulted. From roughly 90% of my schools yielding a profit, now only 50% at best do so, with 25% breaking even and the remaining 25% recording a loss.

I now have 17 FTs lying vandalised and abandoned in schools' common rooms – some for over three years. They have been vandalised so many times it is simply not worth the effort and expense of repairing them again, or retrieving and refurbishing them to re-use elsewhere. Five years ago all my FTs were in use.

Competitors have had similar experiences. Two rivals have sprung up in recent years intending to supply FTs to educational establishments. The Foosball Club was the first and the biggest of the two, and they eventually had several hundred sites, with their theme being support for the Sports Aid Foundation.

I first became aware that things were going awry for them when they offered to sell me 120 of their sites, to include the FT, at a distressed price.

For various reasons I decided not to proceed, but it seems they persuaded a firm by the name of Kiddycare to take some. Kiddycare, as far as I could gather from the liquidation details, was a firm operating children's rides in the North, South and East.

Apparently they decided to diversify and no doubt the Foosball Clubs offer was tempting. Regrettably the FTs proved a poisoned chalice (the words of a director at the liquidation auction) and the firm folded. I can confirm the above because most of the FTs with sites offered to me by the Foosball Club were the same as those listed in the liquidation documents from Kiddycare.

I hope by now I have shown that foosball is in a very perilous condition, with all its traditional outlets presenting an increasingly hostile environment to it. If I can achieve one thing with this piece it will be to get you foosers out there to WAKE UP, and realise that unless we take foosball by the scruff of the neck and address what's wrong with it, we will soon find that we have nothing left to fight over.

It is clear from the above that the snake cannot be blamed exclusively for foosballs declining popularity. Equally, banning it will not be the panacea it needs to secure its survival. I do think it is vital, however, to understand how it has changed the fundamental nature of the game in order for there to be a debate on foosballs future based on analysis rather than rhetoric.



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Again what follows is extremely lengthy but I have found from previous experience that one small oversight or error leads inevitably to the debate being hijacked by detailed discussions on the error – however trivial – with the whole essence of the debate long forgotten. I have also rather boringly used statistics where I can, as I wanted to shift the debate from conjecture to fact.

I believe the snake has the most dramatic effect on the popularity of foosball at the level where we can least afford to lose potential fans - beginners. With the almost complete absence of the game in amusement arcades, and now rarely seen in youth clubs, the school sixth form common room has increasingly provided many future foosers with their first exposure to the game.

In my 2006 post, I highlighted the experience of one of my sixth form colleges. With 1,000 + students and no other form of entertainment, the FT is played all day, every day. According to their own estimates, 70 students played daily and a further 100 casually. Their annual competition boasts attendances between 86 and 127 over recent years.

With such a popular site the standard of play is very high and some students - up to now with my encouragement – will access the BFA website and discover the snake. Despite my reservations I will demonstrate the shot for them. It has always been my policy to give my punters what they want and not what I think they should have.

By 2006 a group of seven students were quite proficient at the shot and used it exclusively. They were an unusually candid bunch and I was able to gain many insights into the dynamics of college foosball. They freely admitted that when they were playing on the FT they received very few challenges from non – snakers. Most students preferred to wait until the snakers left the FT before they had a game. This caused many arguments if the snakers were at the FT for too long and the others were waiting for them to finish. There was even a two – tier challenge system, whereby the snakers put their 20p on one end of the FT, with the non – snakers using the other end for their challenges. Needless to say this caused yet more arguments when students placed their money on the wrong end of the FT.

The above is a good example of how the snake can have a divisive effect on the game. The college also enabled me to gain further evidence of the shot's negative features. The other 70 daily players were, again by the snakers' own admission, not interested in learning how to shoot or defend the snake.





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It was simply regarded as boring and the majority of players preferred to play the “fun way” (their terminology). I wonder how many players in pubs silently wait for the snakers to finish their games before they play? I know all of us at the Barrels would, although perhaps without the silent bit. Surprisingly, since my 2006 post was done I have noticed a gradual decline in the use of the snake at the college, and it disappeared entirely in early 2007. It seems this small group of snakers rather tired of playing amongst themselves, and used it less and less in order to encourage some of the other foosers to play them. The students at the above college were lucky, however, because they were able to play the FT during “free” periods. Roughly half of my schools only allow the game to be played during morning break and lunchtimes. It is in these schools that the snake has its most damaging effect, because a lot of students waiting for the snakers to finish their games – as in the above college – will be squeezed out completely and eventually get fed up of waiting. It is in these schools I can confidently state that the snake is directly responsible for the loss of many potential recruits to foosball.

My experience of the snake’s effect on foosball at the above college was repeated to a lesser extent throughout the 58 of my then 152 schools where some students were using the shot. Only one school thought the snake did not have a detrimental effect on the game. Since my 2006 post, incidentally, the same school – Bristol Grammar – would now categorically state the shot has had a disastrous effect on the popularity of foosball there. This may surprise some, as the school was producing some useful foosers who had even spread their wings to the Bush. I also had great hopes for the venue. It is nevertheless true, and anyone who wishes to dispute the fact is welcome to come with me when I next visit the school to see for themselves.

BGS is also an example of a phenomenon I have only recently become aware of. It seems that the snake does not only have a detrimental effect on the popularity of foosball whilst snakers are still at the school, but it continues to exert a negative influence long after they have left. Foosball has been played at BGS since 1999. It was the first school I provided with a silver/black WS model, at their request, as they wanted to practise the snake. They already had a telescopic – rod model.

The telescopic model had always been very popular – regularly recording 1000 games played over a typical three - week period. Initially the WS model was well received, but cracks soon appeared. I would often visit the school to find a large group of foosers around the telescopic model with the WS model deserted. As the WS model was the first of its type I had used, I was naturally keen to discover whether the students disliked the WS model or its dominance by snakers, or a mixture of the two. Sarah was with me(I emphasise this so that you can interrogate her at the next competition if you wish) when a large group of students told us that they much preferred playing on the telescopic model as it was more fun and, and in any case, “just a small group of players use that table”- pointing to the WS model –“ and they play in a weird, boring way”. After this little group of snakers had left the school I noticed that interest in the WS model had collapsed, and has still not recovered. During my last trip to the school I found 610 games had been played on the telescopic model and just 63 on the WS model.



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One example can only be indicative rather than definitive, of course, and I set out to find if I could establish a trend. I did not have to look far. Sir Thomas Rich's is my oldest surviving school and was once home to Stephen Lyall, Tom Burdett and several other giants of our diminished game. Once again Foosball had long been extremely popular at the school and they were the second of my schools to get an WS model to complement their telescopic one. Once again I noticed a complete collapse in the popularity of the WS model when last years snakers left. The number of games has dropped from an average of 800 every three weeks for over ten years to - and these are the figures from my first three visits to the school in the current academic year – 132, 106 and 123 games.

At this stage I had intended to produce a wealth of comparative statistics to prove that in my schools and colleges at least, the snake has a very negative influence on the game. Sarah has already cautioned me that I am losing the plot, however, (and probably anyone left reading this), so I shall leave the thread here with the proviso that if anyone remains sceptical about the effect of the snake in educational establishments, please let me know and I will forward a further 28 pages of comparative statistics to further emphasize the point.

By now some of you may be wondering if all of this is relevant to the overall health of foosball in the UK. After all, very few students attend competitions and most never play again after leaving school (although they would very much like to!).

I am of the firm opinion that maximising foosballs popularity in schools and colleges will prove to be crucial to its survival in the UK. Over the past 20 years I have introduced the game to 243 pubs. Roughly half of these have resulted in some form of assistance from students in local schools. I usually find most keen student foosers will ask me where they can play the game in the evening. More often than not there will be nowhere within reasonable travelling distance. I then ask where most of the students drink in the evening and am usually given the names of a few local pubs. We then discuss each pub's suitability (space etc.) and availability (managed – forget it – or tenanted / freehold – good chance). I then give the student a resume of the benefits to the landlord of having one of my FTs, and then – and this is the key – I get them to approach the pub. It is far more beneficial for the recommendation to come from a known regular at the pub than me – just another businessman peddling his wares. Generous bribes all round facilitate the process.

I have used this method very successfully in Bath where I had FTs in 7 schools, a college and the university. It quickly had other advantages. Pub landlords – noticing some punters disappearing to the pub down the road with the new game – quickly asked me for their own FT. Local amusement machine operators were not slow to suss out what was happening, and began persuading the pubs they supplied to get one. Another 7 FTs appeared locally to add to my 26, and although it was annoying to see these others feed off my success, it was nevertheless good for the game.



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Foosball will not be rescued by amusement machine suppliers. The industry is in its worse state for decades and will only invest in proven, quantifiable winners. I have built up cordial relationships with most suppliers in the midlands and south – west and none of them have any intention whatsoever of resuscitating foosball. They consider me eccentric for persisting in trying to make a living from the game. It is for this reason that I feel foosball's future may well rest in keeping the game as healthy as possible in schools and colleges in order to capitalise on the “Bath effect.” Incidentally, if some of you are wondering why I have not used this method to revitalise the pub part of my business, it is simply because I have not needed to be pro – active in generating business before, with my last 38 sites – all schools – coming from recommendations from existing ones.

With Sarah soon to join the business, however, I intend to exploit the “Bath effect” to its fullest – especially in cities like Coventry where I have FTs in 7 schools, and with the game so popular in one of them they now have six tables.

PUBS

Before I try to assess what effect - if any - the snake has on the popularity of foosball in pubs, I think it may be useful to explain how my own dislike of the shot evolved. I haven't always had such a negative stance against the snake as this piece reveals I have now. I was certainly never happy with it, but as I have said earlier my business plan has always been to give my punters what they want and not what I think they should have. I was the first person in Britain to order pinny feet when they became available in the UK. They were obtained specifically to assist Clegg Tassell in developing the snake at the Barrels. I have mentioned earlier that I have also supplied WS models to schools, also knowing they would be used primarily for snakers to improve their shot. I now have 36 pinny feet Garlandos.

My reservations about the shot continued to grow, however, as I saw how the shot was causing many problems in my schools. It was not until a competition in Reading in 2002, I think, that its negative effect was proven to me beyond any doubt. I have detailed the events of that day in my 2006 post. To briefly recap, I had invited several of my top foosers from Bath to the competition which was the first to be held on the new WS models.

It was their first exposure to the snake (and to the WS models, which I have covered elsewhere). It is no exaggeration to say they were all horrified, and told me never to invite them to another “foosball” competition again. They literally thought the BFA were trying out an “Americanised version” of the game as it was also the first time they had heard the game so described outside US TV programmes.

Although they were top class foosers who had mostly competed in all my Bath competitions every year from 1991 to 2000, none of them ever appeared in another competition again. Subsequent visits to Bath revealed several “THIS IS A NO SNAKE PUB” signs appearing.



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I then detailed how, visiting Bath every two weeks to service my FTs there, I never saw anyone shooting the snake. It was evident they simply wanted nothing to do with it.

We feel the same at the Barrels. Over 20 years and a quarter of a million games under its belt, I estimate about 2000 foosers have variously graced its FTs, as the pub has a very transient student population. Of this number, well over 200 have become useful players. Clegg Tassell, much to everyone's disgust, uses the shot but is one of the true gents of the sport, and does so sparingly as he is aware it is just not part of the pub's ethos. Interestingly, in all that time, only one other player has shown any interest in developing the shot. We have never needed to ban the snake at the pub – we all instinctively knew it robbed the game of the main reason we all played it – to have fun.

Many snakers agree with me on the above points, but will point out that their main priority is to win. Quite right, of course, and even after playing the game for forty years I still want to win as much as I ever did. Probably even more so, as I win fewer and fewer games these days. But the beauty of playing foosball at the Barrels, is that I can win and enjoy the maximum amount of fun the game offers at the same time.

Naturally snakers will counter with, "but I want to win competitions, and you have to use the snake to have any chance, now." Again, a fair comment. If the snake is banned in the UK, then there will be no problem, of course, but we are now making our presence felt on the international scene. Here it is quite simply a trade – off. With foosball in such a dire state, and literally hundreds of potential foosers lost to its ranks every year as a direct result of the snake – not to mention the fact that the game is now more boring to play and watch than at any time since it was invented in 1936, again as a result of the snake – is it really worth all off this just to come fifth instead of sixth at the world championships (and risking the future of the game in the process)?

This would not be the case if foosball had a higher profile. As I write, Andy Murray has just reached the fourth round at Wimbledon, and tennis clubs are already salivating at the prospect of huge numbers of new recruits to the sport if his success continues. The same would be true for foosball if it were on the telly every day for two weeks – and Boris was a little prettier. For the moment, until we see his backside modelling underwear on billboards in Times Square the above paragraph holds true. We must accept the fact that 99.99% of foosers play for fun. Most do not even know there are foosball competitions. One thing is certain – any success we have on the international scene will have little effect on the popularity of the game in the UK- at least with beginners, where it needs support most. Indeed, if pursuing success abroad is used as a reason for not banning the snake, it will be actively assisting the games decline.

Occasionally, I manage to have a discussion with a snaker where most of the above points have been covered, and their eyes are yet to glaze over. But they still have a few tricks up their sleeves. Time and again snakers have agreed with me on most of the above observations, only to employ their last line of defence – that the snake should not be banned because to do so would be a backward step for foosball



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I have been called a dinosaur for my views on the shot hundreds of times - often disparagingly. Some snakers have even hidden behind the rules, and I have been solemnly advised by a BFA committee member that there was no contingency within the sports constitution, which would enable them to ban the shot.

This is all nonsense, and demonstrably so. Using Wimbledon as an example, tennis affords an excellent insight into just how weak and pathetic the snakers final line of defence is.

In the late 1970's and early 1980's, tennis was extremely popular. Ever the geek I remember running home as fast as my little legs could carry me so that I did not miss a moment of a clash between the then giants of the game, Jimmy Connors and John McEnroe. Connors was the first player to use the double – fisted backhand and used to blast his opponents off the court. McEnroe was a player of extreme artistry who deftly guided the ball out of Connor's reach. He was also magnificently bad - tempered which added richly to the frisson of the occasion. Their games were full of innovation and diversity.

Around this time, however, composite materials were being incorporated into rackets, which greatly increased the speed with which the ball could be hit. This in turn led to the game being dominated by taller players who combined their height and the new racket technology to develop a devastating serve. One game was won by a player hitting 47 “aces” which, for those not familiar with the game, gave the receiver virtually no chance of winning. Even when the ball was returned, the server was waiting at the net to deliver the coup de grace.

The game became very boring. Crowds were falling. Spectators started watching women's games.

Something had to be done.

Several options were considered. Amongst them were raising the height of the net; moving the service line forwards or the baseline backwards – even creating a new service baseline a metre behind the normal one. The fast servers were aghast. Their arguments were familiar. Tennis had moved on, they cried, and any attempt to deprive them of their precious “aces” would surely be a backward step. Where have I heard that before? Isn't it uncanny the similarity between tennis' “aces” and foosballs snakers, both in the way they damaged their sport and in the excuses they used to justify their actions?

Fortunately tennis's governing body was more sensible than foosball's, and they knew it was vital to maximise the games popularity. It was eventually decided to reduce the pressure of the balls slightly, so that the speed they left the racket would be reduced. This had the desired effect, and we can again look forward to classic slugging matches, such as those enjoyed between Federer and Nadal .



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After writing all this I decided to have a vodka and lie in the sun. Believe me, I have no more desire to write this than you probably have to read it. But I hope you will have stuck with it in the knowledge that it is a genuine – last ditch – attempt to try and wake up those of you out there who care as passionately about the future of foosball as I do.

Anyway, I digressed. Back to my vodka. Whilst lying in the sun, I amused myself by trying to think of other sports which had changed their rules for no other reason than to make their sport more popular. They came thick and fast and I had reached nine before I decided dreaming about having sex with nice young ladies might be more interesting.

Pondering on this point later, I realised I could not think of a single sport which had not changed its rules for this purpose. To ram the point home, some of you may have followed the recent furore surrounding the derivation of the “reverse sweep” utilised by cricketer Kevin Pietersen in New Zealand recently.

The ensuing debate on whether the shot should be banned was fascinating – and relevant. Purists were horrified and demanded the shot be banned. It was variously cited to be “unfair to the bowler,” as he would not know which side of the wicket he should bowl from. It would also make the captain’s job impossible, as he would not know where to place his fielders etc. etc. Although there were some who said it was against the rules they were roundly set upon as it was agreed that the main criterion should be what effect the shot had on the games popularity, as it was also a dying sport in most countries. Rules were made to be broken in any case, it was stated over and over again. It was eventually decided that the shot was to be accepted. The reason given – and I wrote it down so that I could accurately quote it here – was “because it added diversity to cricket, and the crowd loved it.”

Isn’t it amazing how foosball – a dying sport whose complete demise is almost certain – has sanctioned the removal of the one element in its armoury which has been so instrumental in keeping the game alive over the last 70 years – its diversity. The mind boggles.

I have already over – used the word “diversity,” in this piece, but it is crucial in understanding as far as is possible exactly why the snake reduces the games appeal to most foosers. I have already used pinball to illustrate a point earlier, and it is useful to use it again here.

Pinball is another game whose success followed a cyclical pattern almost identical to that of foosball. Although the game somehow manages to trace its origins back to the 15th century, it took until 1931 for the first commercially successful models to arrive. And very successful they were, with one model said to have paid for itself within four days. Just one year later there were approximately 150 companies manufacturing the machines.



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Pinball reached its heyday in the 1970s and enjoyed a decade of massive popularity. Although I was not playing foosball at the time, I understand that it also enjoyed a golden age during this period, with the UK championships being held on over 60 FTs, and the top six teams being sponsored to go to the world championships.

The video boom of the 1980s shook pinball to its core. Rows of pinball machines sited in arcades were replaced by Space Invaders, Asteroids and Pacman – all of which will be familiar to older foosers. Foosball also suffered badly.

The coin – op video industry collapsed in the 1990s, enabling pinball to make a comeback. But it was brief, and the game is now considered dead from a commercial stand-point by every amusement machine operator I know.

I apologise if you found the above an unnecessary diversion, but it is relevant. Pinball players always thought its cyclical nature meant they just had to be patient and their game would once again be back in all its former glory. It was just too big, and had been around for too long, to die. Pinballs capitalisation was over ten times that of foosballs' at its peak, but this did not save it. I know some older foosers also believe our game will return to its former glory one day, but the above example should serve as a useful reminder that this cannot be taken for granted, and indeed now seems unlikely.

I could be wrong, for we have an advantage that was not available to pinball. During the games' many revivals, pinball designers used every machination imaginable to increase the games appeal. Between 1931 and 1993 pinball's designers instituted no less than 36 very distinct changes to the game in an attempt to improve its appeal and - latterly - to try and secure its survival. In the final analysis, however, pinball is a game whereby the input of the player is limited to an occasional use of the flippers. The "improvements" were seen as largely cosmetic, and the game foundered. When you have scored 86 trillion points on a game, there seems little point in trying to improve your score further.

The point of all this, of course, is to show that pinball died because of its lack of diversity in an age where its competitors can now offer so much more. But does this mean foosball must necessarily suffer the same fate?

My experience with a boyfriend of a niece (perhaps I should re – phrase that), has led me to believe it is not inevitable. Maria, the young lady referred to, has a keen interest in the game and now operates seven FTs of her own in the south – west. Some years ago she had a relationship with a designer of computer games. She dumped him. He went on to become a millionaire, working on massively popular games such as "red – alert." Her mother never forgave her for dumping him. He was called Zak.



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At the time – around 1993 – I was expanding my own business rapidly and Zak and I had many conversations about what makes a game popular. At the time video games were a license to print money and I wanted a piece of the action! Zak cautioned against this, advising me that they had already had their day. He was right. But it was why he was right which is so relevant and important to this piece. Zak said that computer technology at the time was just not advanced enough to provide games with sufficient variety and variation to hold the punters interest for long periods. We thus had the scenario where – like pinball – games took vast amounts of money but only for very short periods. This is precisely why the pub video game boom was over so quickly.

By now I expect you will have guessed where I am going with this, for the conclusion is both obvious and inescapable. Whatever your views on the snake, it has robbed foosball of the one thing that allowed it to stand tall on the shoulders of its rivals – its diversity.

Before finishing, perhaps I should reply to those who answered my 2006 post with the contention that the pull – shot, for example, or any shot starting with a stationary ball, could be said to have the same effect on the game as the snake. Dave Z didn't agree that my sister Val's assertion that she felt useless against the snake was right, opining that "you'll feel useless against anything you don't know how to block." These comments rather flummoxed me, as they are totally at odds with my experience.

I have calculated that I have played about 5,000 beginners in my schools over the past 10 years. I often demonstrate the pull-shot first as it was the most popular shot before the snake, and is relatively easy to learn. It was also my favourite shot for many years so I am reasonably good at it. At least beginners think I am.

In contrast to what Dave Z has suggested, I have always found that right from the start beginners have a fairly good idea of how to defend against most shots. With the pull-shot, for example, they will put a man from the two – rod in front of the ball and the goalie just behind, and slightly to the side they expect me to pull the ball. They then seem to know instinctively what they have to do – move their men as fast as they can in the same direction the ball moves. It is not rocket science. Of course they do not know how to defend the best way, and as their skills develop I show them the most effective way to block the shot. Longer tap-bangs prove more difficult for the beginner to suss out a blocking strategy, but again I find they have some idea of what to do which just needs refining.

I also find that such shots tend to have a "wow" factor, often accompanied by students saying they can't wait to practise them for themselves. When I demonstrate the snake, however, the response is usually a very muted "Hmmm, isn't that a spin?" I have personally never known of any foosballer so frustrated by any other shot than the snake that they prefer not to play the game at all.



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My experience has led me to emphatically believe it is only the snake which literally does reduce some foosers to feel so useless and alienated by it that they are sometimes not prepared to seek assistance in learning blocking strategies, preferring in many cases not to play the game at all. This was certainly the experience of my sister Val, who was so embarrassed by her complete inability to fathom any kind of blocking strategy when she was first introduced to the snake, she quietly retired from the game - despite appearing in most of my Bath events, and being a very keen fooser since 1969. I only discovered this myself several years later when I tried to coax her out of retirement for my 2006 competition. I very much doubt she is unique in this respect.

There are also those like myself, all the Barrels foosers, and the vast majority of foosers from my old Bath pubs who simply would have no truck with the snake at all, believing, as I have said before, it changed the game fundamentally into a much cheaper version of the sport. I would, indeed, now liken foosball to a very sick alcoholic, and - for me at least - shooting a snake would be akin to giving an alcoholic another drink.

I think that Jon May was closer to the problem when, again in reply to my 2006 piece, he acknowledged that the snake defence "was not about reacting or racing at all" but needed a completely different approach. Interestingly, he continued to say that you needed to "read the play." I think Jon has unwittingly revealed the reason why beginners in particular find the shot so difficult to defend against. To be able to "read the play," and to develop a "feel" for the nuances of the game is crucial. How many times do we just know Martyn is going to dink us? Unfortunately, this ability to read the play comes with time and experience. It cannot be taught or hurried. And this is why beginners find the snake so devastatingly off - putting. I have no doubt that hundreds of potential foosers are lost to the sport each year, either because they find the snake impossible to defend - and some have no wish to learn how to - or they have simply found the shot has committed that most cardinal of sins - it has made foosball boring.

It seems there is universal agreement on this last statement, even amongst snakers. But they again often counter with the comment that the same could again be said for many shots. They are indeed quite right. But the snake also emerges as a clear winner here. Pinky stated the case far more succinctly than I could hope to do (thanks, Pinky), again in her reply to my post.

Apparently a player was shooting "snake after snake" against her, prompting her to think "don't you do anything apart from a snake?.....my god it makes foosball so dull!!!" (her exclamation marks). She continued, "to a certain extent the same would go for any shot if you came up against it all the time.....but there is something indescribable about a snake....a certain je ne sais quoi....that sets it aside from other shots as THE (her emphasis) most boring!" Well said Pinky, my sentiments entirely, to which I can add the emphatic approval of the vast majority of the estimated 10,000 foosers who play on my FTs every year.



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Thanks to anyone who made it this far. Now I must make a confession.

There is, of course, no chance that the snake will be banned.

Snakers have infiltrated the depths of foosball and its corridors of power, thereby ensuring we will have to make do with this greatly diminished version of our sport. At least I hope I have justified my decision to isolate my happy band of foosers from their malign influence on the game.

PS. Yes, I know the pin-shot can be lumped in with some of the above, but it is virtually unknown in all of my sites, and is therefore not a problem for me. I am also, believe it or not, trying to keep this as short as possible!

Newsletter editor Dan Gallon's response to Geoff's snake answer

Wow! Boris Atha has written a full response to Geoff's response overleaf, however I also want to reply to Geoff.

I feel that the general message that Geoff is putting across is vital for the UK game – and that is that at the moment the game is dying, and something needs to change. Look at what regular venues there are now compared to even 2-3 years ago.

How many of these regulars have people playing every week for more than 1-2 games? Even those that are still going are having trouble attracting more people / a decent turnout every week / struggling to maintain the table in the venue. How many very good players now no longer attend tournaments. I know I hardly play....

As to what the solution is, I'm not convinced banning the snake is the answer, although I am no great fan of it. Geoff's comments about the differentiation in his venues between snakers and non-snakers is obviously of great concern, and needs to reopen the debate.

I thought Geoff was overly harsh on some individuals in the commentary, as there is very much a culture among all the Britfoos regulars that the issue is closed, and to focus on some is unfair. It is also true that the British game does not exist in a vacuum – why is the snake so popular in other countries, and how is the popularity of the game there not suffering in the same way that the UK game is are very important questions that need answering.

I don't have the answers but Geoff's comments are immensely thought provoking (especially the analogies with other sports) which deserve further discussion by the "cognoscenti" of the UK game.



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BFA Chairman Boris Atha gives this response to Geoff's answer to question 6 about the snake

NB Boris had not seen any of the other answers before drafting this response.

I have known Geoff since I first became a BFA member 10 years ago, and fully appreciate the massive contribution he has made towards developing the sport of foosball in the UK. With the placing of his machines in schools and colleges throughout the land he is in a unique position to gauge the mood of the average player and the newcomer to the game, and to nurture the coming generation. Many of today's top players started playing on Geoff's tables.

When I returned to the game after a 20-year competitive hiatus, having not lost to anyone during the intervening period, I had my arse handed to me on a plate by the late Tanny Iqbal, who shot this crazy 'spin' shot against me, yet claimed it was within the rules. I persevered and learned how to block it better than most, and took to shooting it myself. My 12 year old son Rob however took to it like a duck to water, and playing at his first tournament managed an impressive 5th in OS after only a couple of months practice. Within 12 months he had won his first open title, and has rarely lost an open UK event since.

I share many of Geoff's reservations about the snake, yes it is boring to face the same shot over and over again (although not as boring as waiting interminably for a pull-shooter to set the ball up 'just right' before shooting on 14.5 seconds), and its current dominance of the tournament scene is simply explained by the fact that it is easier to learn than spending years perfecting a pull-shot, pull-kick or front-pin series, and scores at a high percentage, allowing players to become competitive in tournaments from an early stage.

If the snake had been invented yesterday would I vote to ban it? Unquestionably yes – it is ugly, boring, and against the spirit of the game. However it has been around now for about 20 years and a whole generation of players now use it, so banning it now would be fraught with difficulties. The snake is well and truly out of the grass, to mangle a phrase...

The snake *could* be banned tomorrow by the ITSF rules commission by tweaking the 'spin' rule, removing the clause 'before or after hitting the ball', or by outlawing shots other than with the hands (as opposed to the wrist). The problem would be that, unless this resulted from major pressure from the grass-roots, it would have the effect of splitting the world into 'snake' and 'non-snake' nations and causing the greatest schism the foosball world has yet known. The ITSF is a young organisation – formed in 2002, and although it has now over 50 member federations it would need to be much more established before it could impose such a fundamental rule change on unwilling federations, without them breaking away to form a rival federation.

Geoff's analysis of the ill health of foosball, particularly in pubs, is welcomed, although laying the blame wholly on the snake shot is missing the point. I have hardly ever come across pub players not in touch with the BFA who have ever seen it, let alone tried to shoot (or defend) it.



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Geoff Brice Special – BFA Chairman Boris Atha responds

The main reason for the decline is in the concentration of pub ownership within a small number of all-powerful 'pubcos' attempting to cram in as many people as possible and sell them as much booze as possible in the shortest possible time; and with exclusive machine-contracts with operators for whom foosball is an irrelevance compared to bandits, quiz machines etc. When tables are found in pubs they are almost invariably with telescopic rods which, if not lubricated and maintained regularly, seize up and become unplayable within a short time.

Educating operators towards using through-rod tables, which can be lubed from both sides by the players even with a glass-top, would reduce the levels of maintenance needed and prolong playability and hence coin-revenues. Encouraging operators and landlords/managers to promote the game via competitions, expert challenges etc would revive interest in the game and turn occasional players into regulars, but if landlords/managers have no stake in the machine takings they have no incentive to do any of this.

My biggest problem with Geoff is his failure to encourage competition at youth level, with the result that the turnout for Junior events at BFA competitions is so pitiful that they hardly ever happen even when advertised. Geoff boasts of having thousands of regular players in his schools and colleges, and is in an ideal position to nurture their talents and competitive instincts, but he now admits he has been actively discouraging his players from becoming involved with the BFA, lest they become contaminated by the dreaded snake.

The game desperately needs Geoff's players as they are the future, and they cannot remain isolated for ever. I would even support a scenario where the snake could be banned in Junior events if this were the price of his participation. This would have the effect of forcing junior players to develop an all-round game if they wanted to become successful, to which they could add the snake when they enter 'adult' competitions, although they would have to learn it (or at least learn to defend it) before they tried to compete at the World Junior Championships.

If each of Geoff's schools held a singles and doubles competition, with the winners qualifying for the UK Junior Championships, then we would get the best of the new generation competing for a meaningful junior title. If the price of this is banning the snake in junior competitions, then in my view this would be a price worth paying.

Response from Newsletter Editor Dan Gallon:

I don't see that squabbling amongst ourselves is going to get us anywhere. Saying Geoff's players cannot stay isolated for ever is true, but it is much more likely that both the BFA and Geoff's table football business will wither as table football dies in the UK. Working together is the only way forward.

Further we cannot rely on the ITSF doing what is best for the UK game. However to split away without provable benefits would be naïve in the extreme. Where do we go from here? Join the debate on the Britfoos forum: <http://www.britfoos.com/phpBB2/viewtopic.php?t=6650>



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Geoff Brice Special

7. You haven't always been the greatest fan of the BFA: What does the BFA do well, and equally what do you think the BFA do badly.

I have already given examples of how I feel the BFA have not acted in the best interests of foosball in my answers to questions 4 and 6. In my last answer I even indicated that I thought some decisions they have made were personally motivated. This is a serious accusation, and it therefore needs further substantiation.

My first close contact with BFA committee members occurred when I had been invited to their annual meeting in February 2002, held at Tamworth. I remember being quite excited during the long drive from Hereford, spending most of the journey thinking of ways foosball could exploit the opportunities afforded to capitalise on the forthcoming football World Cup. I remembered the success of the 1998 foosball competition organised by J & B Whisky Rare to coincide with the World Cup that year, and how they advised me they were looking forward to seeing us all again in another four years. Given the peripheral advantages the World Cup gives foosball, I was also keen to hear what initiatives the committee members would be exploring.

It was quickly evident that the committee had other ideas. Hours were spent discussing the minutiae of the ranking system then in use, and when I brought up the subject of the forthcoming World Cup I was told - with heavy sighs - that we were already behind with the agenda etc. etc. More detailed discussion on the ranking system ensued, and the debate became dominated largely by two committee members whose motives were rather transparent, to say the least. One last attempt to broach the subject of the World Cup was met with responses which left me in no doubt that I was being a tiresome nuisance.

Before leaving, the suggestion was made that perhaps my experience as an operator might prove useful, and I was asked if I wished to join the committee. I was a little surprised and hesitant given my earlier experience, but nevertheless agreed. A vote was taken and it was decided my application be rejected as my acceptance onto the committee might confer an unfair business advantage. Thus I was invited to join and rejected in the space of a few moments. It is interesting to note that some current committee members seem happy to ignore the above ruling when deciding to operate a few FTs of their own.

So I travelled home depressed, frustrated and embarrassed - and resolved that I had just attended my first and last meeting. Over the next few days, I was 'phoned by both committee members who had been at loggerheads over the ranking system. Both apologised to me over the way I was treated and wasted no time in blaming the other for arguing for the system which would have elevated their own ranking, rather than the one which was fairest for all.



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I have already mentioned briefly the experience of a large group of foosers from Bath who attended the first competition to use the “through- rods” in Reading in 2002. I was particularly upset by the way some BFA committee members hoodwinked me into inviting a lot of the top foosers from there to the event. I was asked to invite as many as I could because the competition was to be a “biggie.” I discovered, quite by chance and just two days before kick -off, that the through- rods were to be used for the first time. It was too late to warn most of the foosers I had invited of this, and they had a thoroughly miserable time – unable to adjust to the doubly- whammy of the new FT and the snake, which by then was already a strong influence on the game. Most of them refused to believe I did not know of the format before inviting them. I later discovered that the failure to inform me of the use of the new rods was not an oversight, but was deliberate as it was thought some foosers may have been deterred from attending had they been aware of their use. This was probably true, but it is not for the BFA to use such tactics to ensure a healthy turnout.

Worse, I took the BFA to task during the competition for deceiving me and was categorically assured that there were no plans whatsoever to hold further events using those rods, and that I could appease my Bath foosers by advising them categorically that the competition was a “one – off.” I duly relayed this to my invitees whose anger was tempered a little, although most made it clear they found it hard to believe I was an innocent party throughout.

When news subsequently came through of further competitions using the through rods some of the Bath players took this as confirmation that I had been “ sharing the same bed as the BFA” all along. I had known them for years and we had shared many epic battles over the table. I considered them good friends. Now some of them would barely acknowledge my presence. I can hardly blame them. Even to this day I can barely believe the BFA ensured the attendance of my foosers at Reading by deception, had effectively removed about 13 long – term competition attendees from the scene for good, and had sullied my name in the process.

I thought long and hard before deciding whether to include the above items in this piece, as I have no wish to be gratuitously rude to BFA committee members. I have, however, often been criticised for failing to liaise more closely with the BFA, and this seems to be perceived by some as my fault. I have variously been labelled a “loose-cannon” and even a “rogue element” in the sport. Unfortunately, it is only by giving examples such as those above that I hope my reluctance to forge closer links with the BFA can be understood. I should also stress that some of the committee responsible for the above events still serve.

I am aware, however, that serving voluntarily on committees is frequently a thankless task, and the nature of foosball makes it difficult for the sport to benefit from impartial leadership. In my youth I was heavily involved in athletics, weightlifting and bobsledding. Due to the severe effects on the body all of these sports have, it is rare to find active participants over the age of 35. Upon retiring from their sport, many wish to “give something back” and become committee members.



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As they are no longer competing, any decisions made concerning the development of their sport can usually be relied upon to be free from personal motivation. Most sports will form their governing bodies along these lines, with the odd current participant co-opted to give his peers a voice. With foosball, however, we tend to play until the game holds no further interest for us, and then disappear from the scene. For some, including me, the game holds such an enduring fascination that we play into an age well beyond that seen in most sports. As a result foosball's governing bodies tend to be formed from existing players. Understandably, any decisions to be made by such persons which will impact on their own game will cause a conflict of interests. It would therefore be wrong of me to heap too much scorn on the BFA, although I will admit their actions have sometimes driven me to despair.

I would also like to add that not all BFA members deserve such acrimony, and I have nothing but praise for all those who helped organise and run my 2006 competition – especially the Shovies – who could not have been more helpful.

Newsletter Editor Dan Gallon responds;

I feel that Geoff has been unfair here on the committee. Many times there are less candidates for positions than there are positions available, and the committee is a thankless job, being held accountable for many things you are not directly involved in or care about but seem very important to others. As an example from my point of view I remember being very annoyed by the amount of vitriol flying around concerning selection of candidates for the World Championship's when I was on the committee. I hadn't checked the internet for about 3 days and found a million posts all demanding the BFA made their decision clear, pushing the claims of the posters for selection. I actually didn't care at all, but to take the level of criticism was very harsh and in my arrogant and unhumble opinion unjustified.

8. Which players do you most enjoy watching? I'm guessing the brush-pass-snake clones from Warwick...?

I only occasionally attend competitions now, and just to give Sarah and Louise moral support. The snake has completely killed my interest in the game as a player and spectator. One of the saddest effects of the snake for me is to deprive me of the opportunity to observe someone like Rob using his awesome skill and speed to dismantle an opponent. I have found watching such talent wasted on the snake unbearably frustrating.

9. I'm sure you have noticed by now a couple of younger members of your family have gotten the foos bug. Presumably it nearly makes up for the disappointment of not having boys instead? And do you think they only use it as a way of finding boyfriends? (Chances of Sarah actually passing this question onto you have to be pretty low!)

I have no doubt foosball's attraction for Louise and Sarah has been greatly enhanced by the opportunity it gives them to flirt. Perhaps I should leave it there!



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Geoff Brice Special

10. What are your favourite moments in foos? And what was your worst moment?

This would have to be the last time I won a decent competition. It was my annual “thank you” event for the players of my FTs, and as such no entry fee was charged and all the tables were set to “free – play.” It was 1994, and I decided to throw it open to all – comer’s. To give it a bit of kudos, I advertised it as the biggest competition in Britain for at least ten years. I had no idea whether that was true or not, but it ensured a good turnout of 114 entrants.

I put up prize – money of £1000, which I could not really afford. This was a good way to keep me sober and sharpen my game. I somehow managed to win doubles and singles, and thus was able to go home with a healthy slice of my money. It was, however, the tone of the games which I remember most, and how I wish some of the current snakers could have witnessed the event. Both finals were bruising encounters over 9 games.

Competitions in those days were very partisan, and the finals were usually contested between top Bath and Hereford foosers. The spectators were always three - deep, with a group around the FT, another group behind them standing on chairs and a third bunch standing behind them on any tables they could push close enough. It was like a Celtic v Rangers match with each teams supporters baying for blood. Both finals went to four – games – all before the result was decided. I remember driving home with the car floating two feet above the road all the way. Even after I had got home (at about 2 a.m.) I still could not relax and drank half a bottle of vodka in one go. Still very hyper, I read a book until about 4a.m. Out of curiosity I took my pulse and was amazed to find it was still over 100 – and this was a good 4 hours after my last game!

I learned later that one of the semi – finalists was taken ill a couple of hours after the event, and was diagnosed later as having had a heart attack. I know some of you will suspect I have embellished the above, but the fooser concerned will be attending our little party Louise and Sarah are organising next month, and will happily confirm all the facts as stated.

With regard to my worst foosball moments, there are exactly 10 of them – one for each time I held a competition between 1991 and 2000!

I always hated running tournaments, but it was part of my advertising blurb at the time that sites agreeing to have one of my FTs would be entitled to enter their punters for free in an annual competition with prize money of not less than £500.

As soon as I had set the date for the event I started to worry, for I was only too aware of the horrors that awaited me. No matter how many times friends, landlords and foosers in general assured me that “this time it will be different,” it never was, of course. I remember Louise and Sarah helping me to load FTs on to a van when they could have been no more than 8 and 6 respectively.



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Geoff Brice Special

I finally called it a day after the 2000 tournament when everyone disappeared in such a rush I had the choice of going home without the 5 new FTs I had provided for the competition, and returning early the next morning to collect them, or staying overnight on the landlord's sofa. I chose the latter option but even then things went wrong with the promised help the next morning failing to materialise. If it had not been for two Canadian competitors turning up at the pub to collect some photos they had left behind, and kindly agreeing to help me load up the FTs, I swear I would have been there to this day.

11. Not really a question, but more I just wanted to say thank you for all the help and encouragement you gave us at Oxford University, and for all the great tournaments you used to run! I really enjoyed those tournaments which only had the one event: big Open Doubles groups and DE. They were great fun and a fantastic introduction to the tournament scene.

Many thanks for your comments. I feel quite guilty now about some of my above observations. I hope I will still be able to put in the odd appearance at competitions without being lynched.

Some apologies are due. Reading through this I realise I have been a little brutal at times. Please remember I have been on the end of insults for over twelve years now over the snake issue, and at times I had to stop writing this because my anger at what is being done to foosball overwhelmed me.

The real tragedy is that pre – snake foosers are now disappearing, and my voice will soon be silent, too. Snakers will rest content that they have won the day. Newcomers to the sport will accept the shot without question. But they will be entirely unaware that the snakers legacy will be to leave them with a pale shadow of a once great game. Even at its most dynamic, foosball would have struggled to survive in the current hostile environment it now inhabits. Crippled by the snake, it stands no chance.

Snakers have won the battle.

But they will lose the war.



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Geoff Brice Special

Newsletter Editor Dan Gallon responds:

Publishing this is controversial I know, and is going to raise questions as to whether it is appropriate that the BFA publish this. I feel it is important to bring this issues to attention although as a former Committee member comments are aimed at me as well as others identified by name.

Has Geoff been unfair? – I think so. Rude – probably, Guilty of singling people out who haven't had the chance to reply? This is all true.

Still Geoff has spoken so much sense, and has so much experience of the industry. He has of course been brutally critical of the BFA, and individual committee members in particular but he has more connection to the grass roots of young players coming through than everyone else put together.

We should listen to what he has to say and think about it seriously, even if we decide to do things differently to how he would do them. This is a wake up call to the BFA, to Britfoos and to all table football players in the UK.



©Geoff Brice

Geoff took this photo in St. Tielo's in Cardiff. The loved their table so much they painted the common room in the same colours! (Although it does appear that they have done it upside down!)

The picture on the front page of the converted pool table was drawn by Geoff's brother-in-law



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Jon May

Jon May posted 2 articles in the Event Organiser's section of the Britfoos forum. They fit very well with Geoff's interview, and show the depth of feeling running around the Britfoos community. They are reproduced here with Jon's permission. The first article was entitled: **Precipice**

I feel we are sitting at an exceptionally important point in the development or collapse of the game in the UK. With dwindling numbers of participants in recent events, and no apparent efforts being made to remedy this situation (we have a number of theories as to why; lots of words, no action - this is not a criticism of individuals or the BFA, but of our community), we continue to increase the amount of money involved in the game, tournaments are MORE expensive and more geared to the top players, our ranking system creeps more players up into SP/Pro territory etc.

I'm probably speaking in vain, but I think a radical overhaul is required of the way we run the game. We need to acknowledge that we do not run tournament for commercial reasons and therefore making them commercial concerns is going to be very tough. The game has survived since I started playing entirely on the back of goodwill; Boris has shouldered a huge amount of work, as have many others over the years, for no or very little financial compensation and often very little thanks. But the spirit of goodwill is fading; more and more of the top players are doing nothing to encourage the development of the game, the "middle classes" are losing interest in expensive tournaments on ITSF tables (that they haven't played on before, since the pub only has the 2003 model or the old beaten up Tornado).

So where do we go now...? We are currently standing on a bridge as a community. The bridge connects the world of goodwill tournaments on local tables, amateur players - with the world of ITSF tournaments, professional tables, sponsorship deals, foreign participation, etc. It appears we have not yet decided to cross that bridge, but instead have decided to build our home in the middle... Unfortunately, I feel that bridge is slowly decaying and collapsing under our weight, and unless we take a major action and move to one side or the other the game in the UK will enter a major recession or be lost entirely.

Our two moves: embrace the ITSF tournaments, the new tables, the professionalism, the "sport", and, inevitably, the money. Or return to what we knew we could do and do well - the amateur events, on local tables run by local people for goodwill and nothing else.

We need to make this decision quickly. The former will require a huge amount of work - rapidly professionalizing the structure of the BFA both financially and organisationally, putting a lot of effort into generating funding, paying people for their time, spending time and money on improving the website, putting out press releases, working more closely with media, attempting to get professional presentation packages, working with film production companies to produce compelling table football videos and demos, etc. This is full-scale commercialization of the game. It will be very tough and will require some substantial time and money investment. There are ways we can pull in the expertise to do this - involving a variety of individuals working at risk for a while.



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Jon May

The latter will require some significant balls, as it will essentially mean pulling out of the table sponsors scheme and probably running very few Tornado events, and focusing all efforts on trying to develop a wider player base of regular players.

I am not going to force anyone's hand in this - I'm just concerned that at the current rate, if we do not act we will find that there is very little left of our game. This is not a genuine fear as yet, but already Roberto Sport could easily hijack the entire national scene simply by announcing a 6 event tour with low entry fees. This would not be prohibitively expensive for them, and if they agreed to do it for the next 5 years how many of us would not go out and buy a table...? 100 tables at £700 each = £70,000, over five years = £14,000 per year = £2400 per tournament. I don't know what their manufacturing cost is for the tables, so I can't comment, but I would have thought that these kind of numbers would work for them... If they did this, it would be very tough for the BFA/other table types to compete.

So let's end this indecision and move camp to one side of the bridge, or the other. I will support either side, I see the benefits of both. The ITSF-way will pull in more players through strong positive promotion and public relations; the pub-way will pull in more players by making participating more fun and welcoming. Personally, I think the ITSF way is where we ultimately should be, because it could inspire the pub-way in the longer term. But right now, with such a small player base, it's going to be a real struggle to convince anyone of the merits of going down this path. The pub-way gives us a larger player base and more chance of making a success of the ITSF-way, should we eventually decide to go there, but in the meantime there is a risk of stagnation at the top of our game.

The other article was entitled: **Bitterness**

For some reason there seems to be an awful lot of bitterness centered around the UK game at the moment. I am not entirely sure why this is...

Running tournaments seems to have stirred up some negative sentiment, due to a few errors or misjudgements. I'm not sure quite why there is so much animosity (in particular, I don't understand why other people are wading in on the discussion simply to stir up the Bloop any more than is necessary). I've spoken to some of you individually but I feel that we are not ready to get money involved in the running of tournaments... e.g.

Since we have been paying for Foos4Fun to supply tables for Tornado tournaments, very few people have actually helped with setting up tables, myself included. This is because there seem to be qualified capable people who are there early to set the tables up, and mostly because we are paying a relatively high "table fee". When we used to borrow tables free of charge we did so on the understanding we would be responsible for the set-up and breakdown. This situation only works if Foos4Fun are entirely happy that for the fee they are getting they should reasonably be expected to do all the table set-up/breakdown; in the past I don't think this has been true at all!



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The same now goes for the Garlando tables. Boris cannot be expected to either transport or set-up the tables. Those who have "sponsored" them have helped us all significantly assuming we want to pay the fees to get the tables, but using the tables incurs a significant cost above and beyond what goes to the "sponsors" - the cost of transportation and the cost of arranging people to help set up the tables. Again, since tournament attendees are paying substantially more than they used to for the tables, there is a feeling that someone else should set up the tables. Tournament organisers are largely not allowing for this and just hoping people will be around to help, which causes some animosity between those who do help and those who may feel it is not their job.

I guess my last comment would be that the word "sponsor" winds me up when we consider the tables. This is because money is involved more than anything else. I can feel myself getting irritated because the "sponsored" tables are being charged for; they are an investment, not a sponsorship deal. And yes in principle you could argue that those making the investment make a slight loss over the period, but we don't know this yet... And the point here is that I would be able to comfortably overlook this if everything were out in the open - but I feel that we have now involved money in the game, but kept it behind closed doors. Involving it in our fledgling and vulnerable structure is bad enough; but then not being open about where it is going is guaranteed to cause problems...

I have no clue what DP has a problem with, it sounds like it is not money, but I really don't care. At the moment, there seems to be very little goodwill indeed and a fair few disillusioned people.

Sounds ridiculous, but can we just try to sort out our differences without publishing them on the forum? Yes, some of what has been posted has been within non-public fora, but this forum for example has a significant membership, and the pervading sentiment of late is one of total discord. I enjoy table football, but the forum is becoming a much less welcoming place.

Newsletter Editor Dan Gallon responds:

At the end of both articles, Jon put a request that people use these articles how they want to, to try and create debate. Jon's views on bitterness are clearly reflected to some extent in Geoff Brice's view of the BFA elsewhere in this newsletter.

There is a whole lot that people can do for the table football community. There is always the "threat" that someone will come in and try and replace the BFA. To be honest, if they have the time, energy and resources to do so, I'd be in favour. But until then (this mythical point in the future) the BFA is all that we have, and we need to pull together and try and support it.

Keep the faith.....

