

# On the contrary, our locals have the taste for success: STTA

## Letter from Wong Hui Leng

CEO, Singapore Table Tennis Association (STTA)

WE WOULD like to thank Mr Dash Sia for his feedback (“Home-made losing its flavour”, March 11).

The STTA believes in the holistic development of our local and foreign sporting talents in table tennis.

The STTA has a comprehensive system in place to nurture local sporting talents from the grassroots to elite level. Working

with the PCF Kindergartens in 15 con-

stituencies and five Junior

Sports Academies (in collaboration with the Ministry of Education),

a broad base of 1,000 promising local children

from Kindergarten to

Primary 6 are introduced to the game at

a very young age, monitored and developed.

During this time, talented players are sent to the STTA’s training zone centres at Bishan, Tampines,

Toa Payoh, Yishun, and Clementi

for intensive training. From these zones, the more promising ones will be directed to the Youth Development Squads when they get to Pri 6. This cohort will be further short-listed to join the national youth team and eventually be part of the national team.

The development of local talent for any sport will take time and we believe the seeds we have put in place through this comprehensive system of identifying and nurturing local talent will bear fruit over the next 10 to 15 years.

Alongside these programmes, the foreign sporting talent scheme supports and complements our local sporting talent development efforts. Local players are exposed to a much higher level of play through sparring sessions as well as training tips from elite coaches.

Pang Xue Jie and Zena Sim are two good examples of local-born athletes who have benefited from sparring with the foreign-born athletes. Xue Jie’s world ranking has jumped from 1143 to 504 in less than two years while Zena, from 751 to 335 within three and a half years.

Indeed, we are starting to see some early results in our local-born talent Isabelle Li

(picture). Last year, Isabelle won the mixed team bronze at the Asian Youth Games, and a girls U-15 singles bronze at the Asian Championships. In September, she became the top junior girls’ qualifier at the ITTF World Junior Circuit Finals and ITTF Cadet Challenge. In February this year, Isabelle won a singles title on the International Tennis Federation Junior Circuit, at the Egypt Junior Open. The *Table Tennis Illustrated’s* autumn issue also featured Isabelle Li as the cover girl and described her as “Queen Isabelle” of the Junior Circuit in South America.

Isabelle is definitely a talent to be reckoned with and STTA will continue to nurture potential local-born talents like her.

STTA reckons that there is a lot of hard work to be put in. Nevertheless, STTA is working towards striking a balance between local-born players and foreign sporting talents in 2016 Olympic and beyond. We would like to assure Mr Sia and Singapore that the STTA is fully committed to nurturing and fielding local-born players. We hope that Singaporeans will continue to give our local players and STTA their full support as we continue to strive to become one of the top table tennis nations in the world.

