

# A Guide to establishing and running a University Table Football Society

## Introduction

This guide explains the basics required to set up a table football society at your university, make it popular and successful and help you keep it going for the long run. This pack will give you the tools you need to get your new society up and running quickly so you can start having fun playing an awesome game. From my own experiences, being a member of a popular university society is very rewarding; it means you can spend time with lots of like-minded people and it gives you a great opportunity to create long lasting friendships. This pack should help you do just that.

## The story of a successful society

I studied at the University of Warwick from 2004 to 2008. When I joined the table football society (from now on referred to as Warwickfoos), it was in its second year. The first year had been a success, created at the mid-year point before developing strongly by having playing sessions attracting 10-12 people each week. At the society's peak a few years later, there were 4 Garlando tables, 20-30 people playing every Thursday in the weekly DYP's (more on that later), and several of the players rising quickly up the UK rankings by placing highly in BFA (British Foosball Association) national tournaments. At one point, nearly 50% of the top 100 UK players were produced by Warwickfoos. I'm going to be referring to Warwickfoos a lot, mostly because it's where I have drawn most of my experience from but also because it became the most successful table football society in the UK.

Over the course of my time at Warwick I became more involved in the running of the society, joining the Exec committee as the Events Co-ordinator before moving up to President. Along with others I organised the weekly DYP's, university events and even 3 national and international tournaments held at the university. I also developed my skills on the table, rising up the rankings from a complete novice in my first year to at the time of writing now ranked UK number 2 and regular member of the GB World Cup team. I've been playing tournament foosball for a decade and can bring a wealth of experience and knowledge both on and off the table.

## Setting up your table football society

Firstly I am going to make a few assumptions:

- 1) You or your university currently have a table football table
- 2) You have somewhere to play on this table football table
- 3) You are eligible to register a new university society

Now that we've got the key fundamentals in place, it's time to get you started. Even if you don't know anyone else who wants to set up a table football society, it isn't that important. Often universities require a minimum number of interested people before you can set up a society, but if you don't know anyone who is actually keen then just ask your mates to do you a favour and declare their interest to enable you to get started.

Now that you have registered your society, the next thing to consider is your table and more importantly its location. As with most things recreational, location is paramount to gaining popularity. If your university is set up as a campus university, in which case you've likely got a few uni bars in one or two locations, obviously it is ideal to have your table football table in the main uni bar. Preferably the table is close to the bar with good lighting but away from the main dance floor and/or sick area to prevent it getting too damaged on club nights.

If you are at a uni where everything is spread out around town there could be multiple small locations for you to choose from and some may already have some sort of table.

If you find yourself in the unfortunate situation where the table is stuck out of the way in a corner in the dark then no one is going to play on it, and that is exactly what you can tell the bar manager when you ask him/her to move it to a better location. I would recommend you say that you are setting up a new society, that it will attract 10-20 people to his bar every week for a few hours who will be buying drinks/food and spending money playing on the table. It is in the bar manager's interest to increase bar income so this should go in your favour.

Now that you have registered your table football society, have potentially a few mates interested and have a table in a decent location, it's time to get a bit more organised.

## **Establishing a society committee**

Every university society and club has its own exec committee, primarily tasked with running and promoting the society for its members. At the most basic level, you need a few positions filled:

- President
- Treasurer
- Secretary

These 3 positions play the key roles in any successful society. The President is the leader, main organiser and drives the direction of the society. The Treasurer keeps tabs on any income from membership fees and sponsorship whilst budgeting for society expenditure and the Secretary binds it all together, communicates with the members and generally does all the odd bits and bobs. That's a general rule of thumb but as you're at an embryonic stage in your society's development it may be the case that each of you are playing multiple roles or there is a lot of cross-over, all of which is absolutely fine.

## **Getting the right table**

One final thing to do before you advertise your new society is to have a look at your current table and decide whether it fits your needs. A key thing to consider is whether the table has a glass top on or not. It is likely that it does, as this protects the playing service from spillages and damage, and also

stops people from stealing balls so it is normally favoured by bars. If this is the case, your bar manager will probably be reluctant to get this changed to an open top table. As a player, having a table without a glass top is preferable as it means you can see the ball and men properly without the glare from the glass. Additionally it means that if you want to practice any shots or passes and improve the standard of play you need to be able to reach into the table to place the ball where you need it. Ask your bar manager if you can have the glass removed (normally this is easily done by unscrewing the top panels on the side of the table). If he/she is reluctant then try to negotiate by suggesting the glass is removed just for society events. This is the compromise we reached at Warwickfoos which worked out well for everyone.

No matter what table you get, it will require regular maintenance in order to keep it in its optimum playing condition, more of which I will come on to later.

## Promoting your society

### Your objectives

Without wanting to impart too much corporate jargon on you, you need to have some sort of idea as to what your society is going to do before you go and promote it. There are many different activities that a table football society can do, which I will go into more detail on later. Below are a few examples:

- Weekly playing sessions – this can be in any format that you want; the most important part of this concept is that it is regular. This maintains membership interest in your society as you are being active, and gives a regular opportunity for you to all hang out and get to know each other.
- Society tournaments – either internal or external
- Socials
- Singles ladder
- Friendly matches against other unis
- Charity events

These events will form the structure of your society and what your members will experience from being a part of it. At Warwick we set out our structure as follows:

- Fresher's tournament in the first few weeks of the academic year
- Weekly playing sessions (in our case, DYPs and/or Super Melee's )
- Singles ladder
- Society socials normally twice a term – usually a meal, drinks, night out, bowling, other activities
- An annual national tournament
- Uni team entered the national league

It's worth noting that we didn't do all of this when we first started off; this was something that built up over time. My advice would be to run three main things for your members – the fresher's tournament, the weekly playing sessions and regular socials.

## Getting society members

Members are the lifeblood of any university society and so ensuring that you get a good intake every year will be instrumental to ensuring your society's future. There are several ways in which you can actively go about gaining members:

### Fresher's Fair

It goes without saying but the annual Fresher's Fair (and Refresher's Fair if your Uni has these) is definitely the most effective and often easiest way to get in a lot of new members. Often each Sports Club or Society will have its own stall manned by their respective committees, who will be on hand to talk to the students, tell them about what their society does and see if they would like to join. Freshers can sign up right there and then or later if they choose. Having been involved in four of these events, there are a few things that we have learned over the years which should help you boost your intake from the freshers fair:

- **Stall Location:** Try to get the best possible location for your society stall. Best places to be are lining the main walkways so you get the most traffic.
- **Bring your table:** Always bring your society's table football table to the Fresher's fair (and make sure it is on free play). If you have your own table then this is a lot easier, as you just need to negotiate for the extra stall space, otherwise you will need the owner's permission to bring the table. Having a table there is great because 1) People like playing, even if just for a few minutes. Having the table there automatically brings in people who wouldn't have otherwise headed for your stall. 2) Whilst they are playing, it gives you an opportunity to get to know them, get them interested and get them signed up.
- **Staff:** Ideally you want one person manning the stall at all times, taking the names and registrations, another person playing on the table with potential new recruits, and if you can, it is a great idea to have a few of you walking around the room and gathering up interest.
- **Sell:** When you and your fellow committee members are talking to potential new joiners, it is important that you clearly tell them what your society does, what regular events are held, what the people are like and what social and fun activities you hold. Remember, each and every student will probably pass round most society stalls and speak to many different societies, all of whom are trying to sound as interesting as possible. By having a table at your stall you already have the advantage of an increased amount of traffic; now you need to capitalise on it by promoting your society as a fun friendly and sociable club to be a part of.

### Fresher's tournament

Holding a fresher's tournament is a fantastic way to get things off the ground each year. If your society already has a few decent older players that you believe are likely to beat your average bar player, then it is a good idea to run a fresher's-only tournament. This means that new players won't be put off by being consistently beaten. By running a fresher's tournament, it gives you a great opportunity to get to know the new faces, sign up any new players that didn't join from the fair, promote your weekly sessions, whilst importantly showing that your society puts on great events and allows people a chance to play table football for both fun and a bit of competition.

Make it free or heavily discounted for society members and give out small prizes for the winners (e.g. a crate of beer) – this will make it more accessible and you should be able to fund any prizes out of the membership fees your society will have received.

In terms of format, you want people to go there and have fun rather than get knocked out straight away so something like a big group stage followed by a knockout chart is appropriate.

### **Uni tournament**

This can be a separate tournament for your non-fresher members or (probably the best option) for all members. By having a fresher's-only tournament it means that they feel a special and thought of, but you can't neglect your other members either so running a similar style tournament for them is important too.

### **Maintaining momentum**

Now that you have been to the fresher's fair, received a good intake, organised and held a fresher's tournament and a uni tournament, you should have gathered some good momentum and interest in your society. By now you will have probably identified who are the keener foosers amongst your group. It is now more important than ever to make the effort to maintain what you have worked so hard to build. The best way of doing this is to regularly promote your society, and the easiest way to do that is to have something regular to promote. This is why running regular weekly sessions is so effective in building up your membership base. At Warwick, we would hold a regular weekly session every Thursday evening, which was always advertised via email to members on the Monday before. You will have picked up all your members' email addresses from the fair.

On the rare occasions during the week when you are not playing on your table, someone else from outside your society might be having a casual game or two. This is a great advertising opportunity. Put a sticker on your table advertising the weekly sessions, or posters all around it and the area, or at the bar even. Just because the fresher's fair is over doesn't mean it is too late to get people signed up, so make the most of your table's potential advertising space by plugging your society as much as you can.

## **Communicating society activities**

### **Website**

Don't have the time or skills to create your own website? Don't worry; there are plenty of free website builders out on the market designed exactly for what you are looking for. Do a quick search for website builder and you can have your website up and running in a few hours.

### **Facebook**

It goes without saying really, but these days Facebook is where everything is happening. Everyone is on it, so if your society doesn't have a Facebook presence then it can be hard to get noticed under the ton of other things happening on there. Create a Facebook Page for your society, link it to other like-minded societies, invite all of your new fooser friends, and then create and run events linked from your Page.

### **Email**

Every student has their own student email address, and regularly checks their inbox. Don't spam people, but instead if you are going to promote say a weekly event, send out an email a few days in advance as a reminder and maybe recap on last week's results and banter.

## Running society events

### Regular society playing sessions

People join societies because they want to meet people and do something interesting during their free time. If you can provide something for your members on a consistent regular basis then your society is going to be a big success. This is where table football lends itself perfectly to an evening playing session, especially if you have managed to get your table situated in a bar. There are also two types of people in your society – those that play to win and those that play as a social activity. You will need to cater for both these types.

There are all sorts of events you can run, from singles to doubles to a combination of both. In my experience, the best event to run on a regular basis is a weekly DYP league. DYP stands for “Draw Your Partner” and as the name suggests, each week you get paired up with a different partner for that evening at random. This fulfils one of the main criteria that people will want from your society – the opportunity to get to meet new people. The best format is to have one big group, where each team plays each other once, with the team topping the group winning that week’s DYP. This ensures everyone will get a good number of games, which is particularly important when playing in a DYP where the strength of a player’s partner is down to the luck of the draw.

The second aspect that people are looking for is something to do on a consistent and regular basis. Make your DYP’s every week, Thursdays have always seemed very popular as people playing uni Sports will tend to be busy on Wednesdays and Saturdays. You can choose to run each DYP as its own standalone event, or you can choose to link them together by creating a league. This adds a more competitive element to the events whereby points attained from previous weeks contribute to your overall individual league standing. For those that care about that sort of thing, they will want to keep turning up each week to improve or maintain their league position.

You will of course have members that are not so bothered about competition, so as long as their needs are catered for by still maintaining a fun and friendly atmosphere then the weekly DYP league is a nice balance. One slight variant that we added to the DYP’s at Warwick was to ensure that you had to have a different partner each week – this meant that the league was fairer and that everyone really had the chance to play with everyone.

Other options for regular weekly sessions are Super Melee – very similar to a DYP but in this instance you will get a random partner for each game you play, doing regular doubles or singles matches, running a “Swiss” style group stage (where the team you face in your match will have a similar win/loss record to you), adding in fun events like 2 ball rollerball or speedball.

You can choose to have prizes for the winners of the DYP each week or maybe just for the league overall. The important thing is to make people feel that they have achieved something and get rewarded for it.

## Singles Ladder

If you're going to run a weekly DYP league, then your members are going to be playing a lot of doubles matches. But some will prefer playing singles, so you can add in a singles ladder as well. You may be familiar with the "ladder concept" from other games like 5 a side football. A ladder is essentially a league whereby you can challenge the people above you. Depending on your position in the ladder, you will be able to challenge the person a certain amount of places above you. However, each player can only play once over a period of time (say one week), so each player needs to get their challenge in early to have a chance of climbing the ladder. This system is relatively easy to administer as it is up to the players to challenge each other, and they can arrange between them their own time to play their match. All you need to do is update the ladder every week and remind players when the challenges are open. Simple stuff.

## Socials

Socials are incredibly important to the success of your society. Organising regular society socials has to be near the top of your list of priorities, and many societies often have a person on their exec dedicated to organising social events. This is a fantastic way to get to integrate new members into your group. The type of social is entirely up to you. Often it is dictated in part by the preferences of your members. Examples include a society night out, meals, bowling, paintball, football; any activity which has a team element is always good for bringing people closer together. Try to organise at least 2 or 3 society socials per term if possible.

## Creating a sustainable society

### Establishing future committee members

Unless you plan on doing a "Van Wilder" and enclosing yourself in the uni bubble for the next 10 years (not a bad idea admittedly), eventually you and all your other exec members will leave your society and join the list of uni alumni. It would be a great shame if all of your hard work and effort that went into creating an amazing table football society frittered away as soon as you left. It would also be great whilst you are still at uni to have plenty of help, resources and enthusiasm from other members who want to help out. The key to the future of your society lies in you being able to establish future committee members.

Throughout the course of your first year it will become apparent as to who are the keen players and who are the keen organisers (or both). Both of these sets of people are invaluable to your society and you need both to preserve its success. If you are lucky enough to have people keen to organise things, make sure that you provide opportunities for them to do so as this will fuel their enthusiasm for the future. Some people like to organise and run events, and arguably are more interested in doing that than actually playing, winning or improving their game, so make sure they can do this if they want to. You can do this by delegating various tasks, providing them with plenty of autonomy, let them take over certain things, etc. They might see things differently to you and you might disagree on how things should be run but if they are going to be at uni for a long time after you are gone it is better to have a working society in place for the future than none at all.

Of course, you may be in the unfortunate position where there are no obvious candidates willing to take extra responsibility and you don't see anyone jumping out and looking to take over when you have left. This is especially rare over the course of your 3-4 year Uni stay but it can happen. In this case you will need to try to work with what you have got. It might be that people surprise you and develop into that sort of individual if they are encouraged to do so. This is certainly what we found at Warwick and if you have a larger team of people like this, they can still make a big success of a society as a group.

## **Improving the standard of play**

This is something to address once all the above has been achieved, as it is not critical to the success of your society or its future. If you have only played table football before down the pub or in school and have had no exposure to "professional" table football, you will be amazed at how good some people can get with a bit of practice. This can be something you and/or some of your members may aspire to.

## **Words of caution**

There are some dangers in encouraging this too much though as it does create some problems, as we found out at Warwick. When I joined Warwick, the standard of play at the society was pretty much the same as at my school – some people had a shot, most just hit the ball as and when they could, and a few were incomprehensibly bad it was almost funny. No one put any real practice in to get better (we had no idea that such a higher standard existed). This made it extremely easy to fit in straight away. I was winning matches from the start, and besides one or two players everyone was at a similar level. Over the course of my first year, a group of us decided to get a lot better (I will explain how below), and by the end of my first year there were 10 or so of us who had progressed more than the other 15-20 less keen players. This was fine in itself, however it meant that when the next batch of freshers joined the following October, the standard between them and us was huge. It was now very rare for a fresher to be able to win matches regularly against 2<sup>nd</sup> years at the beginning, and undoubtedly this will have put some off (if people lose all the time, they are not going to have fun no matter how not in to the competitive aspect they are). This then creates a divide – some freshers will see this as an opportunity to get better and practice, whilst others (the majority) will drop out.

If the standard of play in your society gets too high, it becomes harder to retain your new players. This is obviously bad for the long term future of your society, but at the same time you cannot restrict your players from becoming better if they want to. So we tried to address this gap in a few ways:

- 1) Have a two-tiered weekly DYP league whereby players are split into two divisions according to results from the previous week. This means the strong play the strong and the weaker play the weaker, but it also means the DYPs become less of a social event as segregation doesn't lend itself to fun.
- 2) Encourage new players to develop their game. This can be rewarding for those that like to coach and for players that want to learn and is certainly something that you can look to introduce. However, you are only going to attract the super keen beans amongst your new



intake and this does not address the gulf in game between the majority of the new freshers and those that have improved

- 3) Ban certain shots during your weekly sessions. For those that have developed their game to a certain level, there are a few different types of shots you can do on the 3 bar that, for a fresher who has never seen any table football outside of his school before, will completely destroy him or her during a match every single time until a) he/she learns to defend against it or b) more likely, he/she gives up and doesn't play anymore. The main shots to consider banning are the snake shot and the pin shot. These two, especially the snake shot, are the easiest to learn and so anyone with a bit of practice time can develop this quickly and start winning all their matches against those that haven't seen it before. You can choose to ban these shots during your fun weekly DYP leagues and/or singles ladder, and let them only shoot it during practice sessions or uni tournaments for instance. Of course, your top players may not be happy about it, and maybe your weaker players might feel it is patronising. At the end of the day, you will be in the best place to judge whether this is necessary or not.

I have taken some time to write about the dangers of improving the standard of play in your society too much because I believe that it really is one of the biggest contributing factors to societies declining and having a cyclical lifecycle. All too often there is a group of players who all join at the same time with roughly the same ability, get better together and dominate that society but unfortunately put off the players in the years after them because they have got so much better. Then inevitably once that group leaves the society falls apart as there are so few keen players to replace them. It is up to you to find the right balance between serious and fun play. Just remember that if you want a sustainable society that is going to last after you have graduated you are going to need keen and enthusiastic freshers year after year.

If you want to improve the standard of play in your society, there are various ways you can do this:

### **Practice sessions**

At Warwick our society bought its own Garlando and placed it in a very popular student bar alongside some other Garlando tables. We arranged a deal with the bar manager whereby the society would split the takings of the table with the bar, providing a steady stream of income. We also gave our members the extra benefit of having access to a key to the society table so they could have free games. The bar was fine with this because it meant that our members would spend a fair amount of time playing, drinking and eating in the bar as they got free games. Having the ability to practice passes and shots on a table without worrying about paying for each set of 9 balls is essential if you want to get better. Ideally you will also have a table without glass on the top, to allow you to set up the ball in the right position with your hand to take the shot over and over again. If your table does have glass, this is easy to remove with a screwdriver – just ask the bar manager if you can store it somewhere whilst you are playing.

### **Joining a foosball league/playing local teams**

The British Foosball Association (BFA) organises regional leagues where you can play home and away matches against local opposition. This can be a great way to meet other foosers outside of your uni, learn about different styles of play and gain a lot of experience you will need if you are going to

become better players. There are also other universities with their own societies who are usually up for matches. I would recommend checking out the BFA website ([www.britfoos.com](http://www.britfoos.com)) for more details or asking the BFA committee ([committee@britfoos.com](mailto:committee@britfoos.com)) for local competition.

### **National tournaments**

Going to a tournament is arguably the easiest way to get better. You will meet and play against people of all different standards and will learn so much more by playing other players than just your society members. If you have people who are serious about getting better, going to a national tournament is essential for their development.

### **Further help and advice**

There is plenty of information on the BFA website and forum, and loads of helpful people in the foosball community who would be more than willing to help you get set up and provide any advice that you are looking for. The community is friendly and encouraging so you should have everything you need to help you at every step along the way.