

Fiona Gillespie: Table Tennis Match Assessment and Summary

Briefing Document: Fiona Gillespie - WTTC Match Assessment (24 June 25)

Executive Summary

This briefing summarises Fiona Gillespie's table tennis performance during a Bristol Summer League, Division 2 match on 24 June 25 against three St Georges players. The overall match result was a 0-3 loss. The assessment highlights key strengths, areas for immediate improvement, and recommendations for future training, covering technical, tactical, physical, and mental aspects of her game. Fiona is described as a "rough diamond" with "most of the all round game... there," needing only "a good polish."

Main Themes and Most Important Ideas/Facts

1. Fundamental Issues and Their Impact

- Balance (Developing - Score 2): Fiona occasionally struggles with balance, being "on heels" or "unsteady," which is attributed to "thick soles on training shoes." This directly impacts her forehand, as she "occasionally throws the body to one side, leading to unbalanced hard to time FH down the line shots."
- Positioning (Developing): A significant issue is standing "too close to the table, when serving, when receiving and in general play." This proximity negatively affects shot selection, making it "much more difficult... due to time and angles."

2. Serve Performance – Consistency vs. Effectiveness

- Variety (Developing - Score 2): Fiona primarily uses three serves (FH back/side spin Tomahawk, BH side/top spin, FH pendulum side spin/backspin). While these have "a good level of spin," variety is limited.
- Effectiveness (Developing - Score 2): Despite heavy spin, the FH Tomahawk serves are "generally returned easily... as the placement of the serve was generally in the same spot with little variation." Point scoring from serves is low, though 3/5 ball attacks are

better from the BH side. Improvement was noted "towards the end of the evening when advised to use more side/topspin and incorporated the pendulum serve."

- Consistency (Competent - Score 3): Serves are generally consistent, with few faults, although errors increase when "annoyed."
- Recommendation: Increase variety of serves and, tactically, "If you have a serve the opponent gets back easy, and you're not winning points, then stop using it." Conversely, "If you have a serve that the opponent is struggling with, then punish them with it."

3. Forehand and Backhand Performance – Strengths and Weaknesses

- Forehand Drive/Loop Consistency (Developing - Score 2): Very good against low spin, but "almost every shot went into the net when there was heavier backspin" and "most shots went long or wide when counter top spinning." She rarely uses a drive or smash, relying almost entirely on topspin.
- Forehand Power/Speed (Competent - Score 3): Possesses "lots of power and speed," but "as the power and speed ramped up the accuracy and points scoring reduced."
- Forehand Placement/Angles (Competent - Score 3): Angles are "excellent," but shots often go "slightly long or slightly wide."
- Backhand Drive/Loop Consistency (Developing - Score 2): Described as "not confident," resulting in "weak, timid shots." Similar to the forehand, shots often go into the net against heavy backspin or long/wide when counter topspinning. She "Never used a BH drive/punch/flat hit."
- Backhand Power/Speed (Needs Significant Development - Score 1): Rated lowest for this aspect, being "Weak and inaccurate."
- Block/Push Consistency (Proficient - Score 4): A clear strength. Forehand block/push consistency is "excellent throughout," dealing with even "heaviest of backspin." Backhand push is also "excellent throughout."
- Recommendation: Develop "well placed slow and medium FH and BH topspin, especially against backspin" and learn "how to flat hit powerful FH and BH shots." Reducing "power and effort by half" on initial opening shots is also advised.

4. Strategy & Tactics – Lack of Pre-Match Planning and Inconsistent In-Match Adjustments

- Pre-match game plan execution (Needs Significant Development - Score 1): "There was no game plan evident."
- In-match adjustments/Adaptability (Developing - Score 2): While issues were spotted (e.g., looping backspin), Fiona "struggled to adjust."
- Exploiting opponent weaknesses (Developing - Score 2): Not initially demonstrated, but improved "after coaching to ditch the backspin serves and introduce more sidespin and topspin."

- Recommendation: "Look for your opponents weaknesses... Then apply the maximum pressure possible." Identify "easy to remember strategies" and think about "3rd and 5th ball attacks."

5. Mental Game – Resilience is Key, but Focus and Composure Fluctuate

- Composure under pressure (Competent - Score 3): Starts "Tense, Nervous and over-trying," leading to opponents establishing "a commanding lead that was never able to claw back." Gets better as the evening progresses, but "Allows frustration to creep in," leading to "shaky or gung ho" shots.
- Focus/Concentration (Developing - Score 2): "Drifts into and out of the game." A key example cited is losing "about 12 points in a row" after a large lead, ultimately leading to a game loss.
- Resilience (Elite/Exceptional - Score 5): The highest score awarded. Described as "Fantastic," demonstrating "Determination," "Tenacity," and "Never giving in." This is a significant strength.
- Body Language/Attitude (Competent - Score 3): Follows a "Lifecycle: Positive start > Makes errors > Loses points > Gets tense, annoyed and frustrated > Settles down once behind > Relaxes > Starts pegging back the lead."
- Recommendation: "Forget about winning the match, and focus on winning each point, a point at a time." Also, "Relaxing and focusing at the start of each set" is an area for immediate improvement.

6. Ability to Deal with Spin – A Mixed Picture

- Dealing with Backspin: "Excellent."
- Dealing with Sidespin: "Short serves: Very good. Medium Long: 50/50. Long: Poor."
- Dealing with Fast/Topspin: "Short serves: OK. Medium Long: Struggled. Long: Poor."
- Recommendation: Specifically address "Dealing with medium long, and long serves."

Key Strengths Demonstrated (Summary)

- Dealing with backspin
- FH and BH push
- BH sidespin and topspin serves
- FH pendulum serves
- FH topspin of the easy ball (perfect height, low spin)
- Determination, tenacity, and never giving in (Resilience)

Areas for Immediate Improvement (Summary)

- Positioning: Standing too close to the table.
- Serve Variety.
- Dealing with medium-long and long serves.
- Relaxing and focusing at the start of each set.
- Reducing power and effort by half.
- BH smash and BH topspin.

Recommendations for Future Training (Overall Goal)

- Fiona is advised to "Read everything above, every day, for a week. Like it was a test you must pass no matter what." Specific technical, tactical, physical, and mental focuses are provided, including:
 - Learning to play further from the table.
 - Developing slower, more controlled FH and BH topspin against backspin.
 - Learning to flat hit powerful shots.
 - Developing and applying game strategies, particularly 3rd and 5th ball attacks.
 - Maintaining good posture and balance, staying compact, and avoiding wild swings.
 - Focusing on positioning and distance during play, and concentrating on winning individual points rather than the overall match score.