

**I am still a young coach and can learn a lot here**



*Jean-rene Mounier is a coach, who is only 33 years old and has come a long way already. He is the chief coach of the French top division team Levallois SC TT, which plays with Butterfly equipment now for six years. This year the most successful French team started with a very strong team and is leading in the French Pro-A-Series at the moment. Butterfly player Michael Maze changed at the beginning of the season from the German Butterfly Club Borussia Duesseldorf to the Club just outside of Paris and made the headlines in France. Read about interesting aspects of Jean-rene Mounier's work, his philosophy and why the French Pro-A-Series becomes stronger and stronger in Europe.*

Mr Mounier, you have been working for the French top club Levallois SC for four years and you are their chief coach. A remarkable career, isn't it?

**I wouldn't say remarkable. I simply had the interesting opportunity to come to Levallois and found brilliant working conditions. For me it is an ambitious project to work here. I am a young coach and can learn a lot here. Especially working together with top players is something which you don't learn from one day to the next. That is a long term process and I am very happy that it went very well up to now.**

Levallois is not just any table tennis club but the most successful one in France, comparable to Borussia Duesseldorf in Germany. It is not only because of the many national and international titles but also because of its size. How many teams are entered this season from Levallois?

**On regional and national level alone there are ten teams. In fact the club is not only hunting titles but Levallois also works a lot with children and youngsters in general. We have a solid club structure from management down to the organisation of training and competitions. Our club has a long history and many people are connected with it. In the future we want to continue going in the direction of combining top- and general sport.**

This season you have got a very strong team with Michael Maze, Peter Karlson, Damien Eloi, Christophe Bertin and Rodolphe Despres. What are your targets?

**Indeed, this is a very strong team. Therefore our target can only be at least one title on national or international level. But that will be difficult enough, because our top players are not always available.**

Which means?

**Let's take Michael Maze, a relatively young player with international ambitions. We can't expect him to play all our matches. His interests as an individual sportsman and ours as a team sport must fit together as good as possible, so that both sides can move forward. That is a global point of view. The same applies to Karlson and Eloi. The case is a little bit different with Bertin and Despres, who both come from our own junior department. We have to help them to improve and promote them.**

Practically that means that Maze and Karlson more or less only turn up for the matches, whereas the three French players train in Levallois or at the French training centre, which is also in Paris. How does that work?

**I don't see myself as a coach of Michael or Peter. I am the coach of the team. It is my job to prepare the team optimally and to organize it. Naturally that includes training sessions, which we can manage before. Apart from that I must have good contact to Michael's home coach Peter Sarts and communicate with him, whereas Peter Karlson works for himself, so that I can talk to him directly. Naturally this is easier, but it is also a great chance. The players worked well together during the pre-season and**

**enjoyed playing with each other. Now I must form a strong unit out of them exactly at the right time for the matches.**

Not only Levallois has strengthened their team for this season. Altogether the highest French league become continuously stronger during the last years and should be the second strongest league in Europe after the German Bundesliga. What is the reason for that?

**I think the main reason is the fixture list for competitions. There are more and more fixtures for top players, so that they can't take part in all league matches on national level for their clubs. In France the Pro-A-Series is played on Tuesday nights. That makes it a lot easier for the players to combine this with their other competitions at the weekends. Apart from that the pressure is not as big as in the German Bundesliga, because in Germany the clubs finance themselves mainly through sponsors and they want to see top results all the time. That increases the pressure on the players and they also want that the players to practice and play in the clubs all the time. That doesn't suit the players nowadays. In opposite the French clubs profit from public sport aid through towns and regions. That doesn't mean, of course, that our players are hobby players. The pressure is high here too, but different than in Germany. Many players, who played in Germany said that. Therefore steadily more top players come to the French Pro-A-Serie.**



Does the strengthened Pro-A-Serie attract more attention of the French sport media?

**Altogether the presence of the media concerning the league above regional level on TV and in the press is poor. That also accounts for Paris and surroundings. There are simply too many offers. In the regional media, though the clubs and table tennis is getting good coverage. That is always depending on the PR work of the clubs.**

What about the spectators in the league?

**In the province we sometimes play in front of a full house. The number of spectators is definitely increasing.**

Who is watching Levallois?

**On average games there are about 400, for top games it may be 1000.**

**Obviously it is very difficult for our club, which has belonged to the top for many years. Therefore we must always find new ways to remain attractive. We went such a way by signing on Michael Maze, because the interest of the media in such a young player and his radiance was enormous. You have got to do something. Last year we organized the „Grand Prix“ of Levallois, a prize money tournament with many top players, which attracted 2600 spectators.**

The spectators are surely not financing the Pro-A-Team. Who is the main sponsor in Levallois. The team is certainly not cheap?

**Absolutely not, and we direct our thanks to the city of Levallois, who support our engagement. But – and I said that at the beginning – the town doesn't only support our first team, but also general sport. Levallois has a sport support plan, which includes sports like fencing and judo. It starts in the**

**schools and ends in the clubs. Behind all that stands a social political idea, to take the children away from the streets into sport.**

How do you see the co-operation with Butterfly, the equipment partner of Levallois?

**I can remember well, when I came to Levallois in 2000, the co-operation with Butterfly started. I worked together with Butterfly before and so I looked at the change of equipment of Levallois as pure luck. Butterfly is world wide the table tennis trademark number 1, because the products are perfect. On top of that I appreciate the seriousness and reliability of the company as well as their very personal and humanly warm co-operation.**

At the end the obligatory question to you Mr Mounier. What is your greatest wish in table tennis?

**I would like to bring up a player myself, who achieves a medal placing at a World Championship or the Olympic Games.**

Thank you very much and good luck in the future, Mr Mounie.