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Picture by Elliot Walker

Stars Lee Bartlett, Jed Stone, Alan Stokes and Tom Good.

Top surfers make case for Government funding

WITH British athletics currently facing a massive backlash over its failure to turn Lottery money into medals, the English Surfing federation is now calling for a slice of the Government's cash cow.

In the wake of Great Britain's dismal showing at the World Championships in Helsinki, several of Cornwall's highest profile wave riders have spoken out in protest at their consistent refusal to aid the sport in its development.

Today, table tennis, orienteering, softball and rounders all qualify for funding, unlike surfing – which is not deemed to be a development sport by the Government.

This despite latest statistics showing that a quarter of million

British people take surfing lessons every year. Compare that to British athletics, which will have around £7.2 million to spend in the lead-up to the Beijing Olympics in 2008.

In New Quay last Thursday, the English Surfing Federation (ESF) were joined by four generations of Cornish surfers in calling for change.

ESF head coach Rob Barber said: "We do a great deal here at the ESF, all aimed at ensuring young surfers get access to the opportunities they need and we don't have any official backing – all of that takes a huge amount of energy.

"At the moment, we're struggling to find the finance to back the English surf team to compete in the

European Championships later this year, which seems ridiculous as we have some really talented surfers coming through.

"Every year we and the BSA exhaust all avenues for potential Government and sporting body funding and while it does often seem like an ongoing battle, we'll continue to push forward and do all that we can as a governing body for the sport."

Current English champion Alan Stokes believes that there is a very real danger that young surfers will slip through the net without financial aid.

"Becoming a professional surfer is a real struggle. Without any sports body funding or sponsorship from a key brand, very few will

make it on either a domestic or international level," he said.

His views were echoed by current English Legends and Cornish and Open Masters champion Jed Stone.

He said: "You cannot underestimate the value of grass roots work in British and English Surfing and it's really important that young surfers are supported and mentored.

"Top sports that already have lots of commercial support such as football, cricket, rugby and tennis do get this financial backing and it's about time things changed."

Lee Bartlett added: "We don't drink and we don't smoke. Surfers are professional athletes and deserve to be treated as such."