

BLACK NOTLEY COMMUNITY ASSOCIATION

It was the late Roy Franklin who first got a club going in Black Notley, a village he had lived in for many years. It was after chatting to a number of parents that he felt there would be enough support for a club at the community association which both played in the Braintree League and encouraged some of the younger members of the village to take up the game.

It started modestly with one league team in the 1993-94 season featuring Roy himself with Paul Chinnery, Neil Thompson and Nick Readhead. Roy initially took on the coaching role but it was his acquisition of former Chelmsford men's singles champion Mark Sweeting that really started things moving. Sweeting was a renowned coach in county circles and under his guidance, various young players began to blossom.

Thirteen-year-old Mark Palmer was the first of the juniors to make his league debut in the club's second season when they added a B team in the fifth division. He quickly showed that being in a wheelchair was no bar to playing top class table tennis. He twice won the cadets' singles, was runner-up in the junior singles and later became national champion in his disability group.

Two years later a complete team of juniors turned out for Notley D – and promptly won division six by a 16-point margin. Lee Daines, Matthew Staines, Leanne Bentley, Becky Metson and Vicki Stredder had arrived. They were 12, 11, 11, 10 and 9 respectively. It was the year the league witnessed a nine-year-old on finals night as Stredder and Paul Davison most improbably carried away the mixed doubles trophy.

At the end of that season the Black Notley club as a whole were awarded the new league trophy for service or achievement, the only time it has not gone to an individual.

The following year Paul Chinnery took over from Roy Franklin as club secretary and further help arrived in the shape of Martin Bawden, formerly coach of the England cadet squad, who joined the club's coaching team. He also played for the A team alongside Chinnery, Thompson and Tony Stredder and helped them to the division two championship. At the same time Daines, Palmer and Bentley jumped up three divisions and finished fourth in division three, with some help from Sweeting who took his bat out from time to time. Like Vicki Stredder before her, Leanne Bentley rewrote the league's record book by winning the ladies' singles at the age of 12. Debutants in the lowest division that year included Lizzie Heath, Matthew Wellington, Jed Clarke and Kerry Bentley.

The club – and league - suffered a major blow when Bawden died of a heart attack at the age of 43 in January 1999. But the club continued to flourish, and in the 1999-2000 season entered seven teams. They added a large number of new signings, including the whole of Colne A, the previous year's champions - Steve Kerns, Dave Birkett, Paul Cicchelli, Steve Elmes and

Graham Farmer - who carried on where they had left off and gave Notley their first league title.

More juniors continued to be introduced to the league including Sam Walker, Jon Medcraft, Sophie Cudlip, Alice Barnett and Sarra Wang, whose mother Lucy also joined and went through the season unbeaten in division two. Sarra made rapid strides and soon left the league behind, becoming undoubtedly Notley's most successful product when she reached the semi final of the ladies' singles in the English championships in 2008.

The A team departed again the following season to join the new Netts club leaving a first team of Lucy Wang, Russell Forde, Neil Thompson and Gary Copsey.

The club's ranks were swelled over the next couple of years after Witham FC folded after 24 years and most of their players opted to make the five-mile trip up the road.

By 2004, with Erica Metson now holding the secretarial reins, they had reached ten teams. Kerns and Farmer returned from Netts and formed a new A team with Daines, Richard Hiskey and Alastair Brown. They were denied the title both that year and the next by Rayne A but took it back again in 2006 after adding the formidable Peter Hayden to their ranks, in addition to Ian Brown, Jon Hill and Ken Lewis.

Hayden left to form a new club at Cressing for the 2006-07 season and took the title with him, only for Notley to take it back again the following year. They won it again in 2010 but have had no further successes.