JAMES DONALD RICHARDS 1935 - 2018

PRESIDENT OF COVENTRY AND DISTRICT TABLE TENNIS ASSOCIATION

PRESIDENT OF PHOENIX TABLE TENNIS CLUB

Don started his Coventry table tennis involvement playing for Stoke Guildhouse and was secretary of that club from 1962 until 1967 when he joined the GEC (COV) club for the 1967 - 1968 season. At that time his lifelong friend Barry Tayton had been secretary of the GEC (COV) club since 1965 and together they started to develop the club and coach younger players.

Linda Clempson, remembers “I first remember Don Richards when I started work at GEC Stoke in July 1969. I went over to the GEC club in the lunch break with a new colleague and started playing table tennis. Both Barry Tayton and Don Richards were there and started to coach us. They were both encouraging and I started playing league the following year. Without Barry and Don, I would probably not have continued to play table tennis”

The table tennis players in the GEC Table Tennis Club consisted of both GEC employees and non-GEC employees. However, in 1970 the GEC Social Club decided that non-GEC employees were no longer able to be members of the GEC club or play table tennis for them. The table tennis players decided to move en-bloc and start a club elsewhere and in the 1970 - 1971 season we started playing at the Charterhouse Working Men’s Club in David Rd.

On leaving the Charterhouse W M Club the club was renamed as “THE PHOENIX TABLE TENNIS CLUB” with Barry as the Secretary and Don as the Chairman. Finding a permanent club was very difficult so the players moved regularly, the Table Tennis Centre in Burnaby Road (72 - 73), the Rockland works, Eagle Street (1974), Stan Lenton’s premises in Foleshill Road (75 - 77), the Church Hall in Hocking Road (78), the Baptist Church Hall in Old Church Road (79) and Baden Powell Scout Hall in Sandy Lane (80).

In 1976, Don and Barry, now being very involved in the running of the Coventry and District Table Tennis Association, decided that communication in the league needed improvement. Their answer was the start of one of the first Table Tennis magazines in the country, “Peeping Tom”. Every month a group about 15 descended on the Stockham house for the weekend, writing league tables, player averages, match reports (Don) and anything else remotely to do with Table Tennis. It is a tribute to Don, after the passing of Barry, that the magazine continued every month until finally replaced by the Coventry web site.

Don and Barry arranged for the club to go to Lowestoft to play a local team there in a competition and we all stopped in B&B accommodation. Linda Clempson can remember playing Doubles with Don in that competition and how enjoyable members found the weekend.

In 1981 the club arranged with the Council to play in a wooden hut In Wyken Grange Road (previously an annexe for the original Tiverton School). Conditions were poor, and the roof leaked. Don and Barry organised teams of members to tackle improvements. Allan Stockham remembers swinging across the roof, joined by a length of rope to Barry Tayton, tacking new roofing felt. Something that would now break all Health and Safety rules.

This wooden building was burnt down after two years and then Don and Barry liaised with the Foundation for Sport, the Sports Council and Coventry City Council for a new building to be purpose built for Table Tennis. and the current building was born. When many works clubs failed during the depression of the 1980’s it was the Phoenix club that welcomed other clubs and protected the League from collapse.

Don was heavily involved with the Coventry Table Tennis Association, including organising the Annual Coventry Closed Championships and playing for the Coventry Veterans team in the Midland League. Although Don had very clear views as to the direction he wanted for local Table Tennis, he had a very caring side towards all players, especially the young. Don was very keen to develop young players and organised coaching, not only within the Phoenix club, but also across Coventry clubs and Warwickshire, encouraged players, even giving up his own time to run teams of youngsters, ferrying them to and from competitions all over the country. Don also ran courses for the ETTA to train more coaches. Many of those youngsters are still keen players, although somewhat older.

Above all, Don’s passion was the Phoenix club. Don put a lot of time and effort into keeping Phoenix solvent and set up an investment fund with his own money in the name of Phoenix Table Tennis Club and Phoenix still receive quarterly payments into their bank account from this investment. Don was always looking for ways to obtain investment for Phoenix and liaised with Coventry City Council to obtain Rate and Rent rebates, without which we would not have been able to keep Phoenix solvent. Don’s involvement in the club ensured that Phoenix Table Tennis Club had a future, and this enabled Table Tennis players both young and old to continue playing their sport at an affordable rate.

Don enjoyed playing Table Tennis and when illness prevented him playing anymore it was a sad loss to Phoenix. He continued to be the Chairman of Phoenix but could no longer play an active part in the running of the club. This has been a great loss to Phoenix and all the Phoenix members and Table Tennis players throughout Warwickshire owe a deep debt of gratitude to Don Richards