



Obituary: Steve Welch, renowned official

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It is with great sadness that we learnt of the death on Saturday of Steve Welch. Steve was one of the foremost officials in recent times and his list of appointments is long and impressive.

Steve's road to high level officialdom began in 1996 when he qualified as both a County Umpire and a Tournament Referee. In 2000 Steve became a National Umpire and then a National Referee two years later.

The international scene beckoned and success in 2002 resulted in Steve becoming an International Umpire and in 2005 an International Referee. As an added string to his bow Steve gained a Tournament Organiser Level 3 qualification in 1999.

The pinnacle of Steve's achievements were twofold: as a Deputy Referee at the Beijing Olympic Games in 2008 and four years later when he held that same position on home soil at the Paralympics in London. Other significant roles were Referee at the British Para Open in Sheffield, 2011, Six Nations School Championships, 2010 and Senior Six Nations Championships, 2014.

Added to these were foreign appointments as Deputy Referee at the European Championships, 2007 and China Open in 2010. Steve held further Deputy Referee roles at the last two English Open Championships in 2009 and 2011 in Sheffield.

As well as high level refereeing Steve never forgot his roots and was seen at myriad tournaments throughout England, Scotland and Ireland. A staunch supporter of the Grand Prix series, Steve was a regular referee around England as well as in Scotland.



Steve with the officials at the School Games in Loughborough last year

Several National Championships refereeing positions came Steve's way and he was the referee at the UK School Games from its inception and also the Junior British League referee. Junior 4* events also benefitted from Steve's presence and he was a regular at Clifedale Chandlers and East Midlands tournaments.

Steve was additionally involved with disability events and again he was a regular presence at many tournaments including the BPTT National Championships, Irish Wheelchair Open, 2007, and Merseyside Para Open (Disability GP), 2016 amongst others.

At so many of these events Steve was accompanied by his wife, Margaret, who not only supported Steve but held positions in her own right.



Steve and Margaret Welch at a tournament in 2008

Steve's presence and influence stretched much farther afield in the administrative side of table tennis. He held several positions on TTE Committees including Tournament Committee Chairman, Administrator of the Sanctions Scheme, Co-Chairman of the Tournaments Approval Panel (TAP) and Member of the National Championships Committee, Competitions Committee, Ranking Policy Committee, NURC/TOC and Calendar Working Party.

At county level, Steve was Vice-Chairman, Treasurer and Umpires Secretary for Yorkshire. Steve's financial acumen led him to become Table Tennis Scotland's Financial Director and Treasurer of the AETTU. Steve was also an ETTU Technical Committee Member.

Steve's passion for table tennis meant he was not only a top official and administrator but a player as well at Local League level and a regular participant in the annual AETTU tournament.

Steve was rightly honoured for all his work and achievements – by Table Tennis England in 2010 when he was presented with the Ivor Montagu Award for his services to the Junior British League and in 2012 when he was made a Vice-President. In 2016 at the Sports Officials UK Awards, Steve received the 'Pat Smith School Sport Officials Award' for revamping the UK School Games.

What an incredible record of dedication and service to table tennis, it will take many people to fill the huge gap left by Steve's passing.



At the British Open Para Event in Sheffield in 2011. From left: Mick Strode (Dep Ref), Steve Welch (Referee), Isabelle Beumier (Dep Ref), Francesco Nuzzo (Dep Ref). Picture by Diane Webb.

It is not just for his achievements that Steve will be remembered, all those who came across him will miss his presence, quiet and unobtrusive but always in charge. A modest man with a most delightful chuckle.

A great family man, our thoughts and condolences go to Steve's wife, Margaret, daughters and grandchildren.

On behalf of Table Tennis England, Chairman Sandra Deaton said: "I worked very closely with Steve and the work he did for table tennis was phenomenal. It will be a void that will be almost impossible to replace.

"As well as his international and national achievements, he was my treasurer in the East Midlands region for 15 years and the region have got a lot to thank him for.

"It's such a shock and a very sad time and our sympathies go to Margaret and the girls."

There have been many other personal tributes to Steve, including the following.

Stuart Sherlock, International Referee, Chairman of TOC, TTE Vice-President:

"A great servant to table tennis England and a great ambassador for our sport. Steve had two great loves in his life; his family and the sport, he and his greatest supporter, Margaret, both worked endlessly for.

"Most people do not realise how much Steve did behind the scenes. A nice and friendly man who liked to help people.

"Steve will be greatly missed by all his friends both officials and players alike. Rest in peace Steve. A privilege to have known and worked with you."

Harvey Webb, TTE Honorary Life Member and Co-Chairman of TAP:

"I will remember Steve not only as an expert and knowledgeable official but also as a highly principled man and a true friend."

Richard Hudson, TTE Vice-President and Yorkshire CTTA Chairman:

"Steve was already well known and highly respected by many of the Yorkshire players when he moved from Lincolnshire to Hull and joined the Yorkshire Committee as Treasurer for the 2012/13 season. He was also the Deputy Chairman and Umpires secretary from 2013 and was instrumental in getting a number of new umpires for the county qualified (myself included)! He will be sadly missed by all those involved in Table Tennis right across the country."

Details of the funeral arrangements will be advised.

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