



Obituary: Michael Close, a lifetime of service

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Posted On: June 27, 2018

Table Tennis England Honorary Life Member Michael Close, who had a long and distinguished career in all areas of the sport, has died at the age of 89.

Michael gave a huge commitment to table tennis over his lifetime and his involvement was wide and varied as a player, coach, administrator or officer.

Michael started playing competitively in 1946 and went on to represent the RAF during his National Service, where he played with Johnny Leach and Jack Carrington.

Middlesex and Buckinghamshire counties benefitted from Michael's skills too. The Bournemouth Open Championships in 1957/58 was where Michael picked up his first Open title in the Men's Doubles.

Michael played in and for the Worcester, Central, Chiltern, Civil Service and Watford Leagues; however, it was in the Wembley & Harrow League that Michael made a real name for himself. A stalwart of the Wembley & Sudbury TT Club, Vagabonds, and later Ruislip Cricket TT Club, Michael won 27 League Closed Championship titles in total (MS x 5, VS x 9, MD x 4, XD x 9) and represented the League for 26 seasons from 1951-1978 at senior level and also five years at veteran level from 1977-82, before retiring from playing with a knee complaint.



The Wembley & Sudbury winning doubles team in 1960-61, from left: Michael Close, Tony Hill, Ralph Lewis



1956 Wembley & Sudbury TTC Elvin Cup winners, Tony Hill, Michael Close, Laurie Landry

In 1956/57 Michael earned his ETTA Basic Coaching Diploma and as the qualifications changed over the years so too did Michael's coaching practices, keeping up to date with the changes and ultimately achieving the ETTA Level 4 Coaching Qualification.

Many, many players benefitted from Michael's coaching expertise during the extraordinary 53 years from 1953-2006 that he coached in the Wembley & Harrow League. Michael also gained his County Umpires badge in 1983.

A high-ranking Civil Servant by profession, Michael also held many senior table tennis officer positions from Local League to national level. He was Chairman of the Wembley & Harrow League from 1981-2006, President from 2006 and on the Management Committee continuously from 1954, attending every AGM until 2017.

Michael gave many years of dedicated service to Middlesex County TTA, of which he was an Honorary Life Member, holding several positions including Chairman from 1983, Coaching Secretary 1978-1994, Deputy National Councillor, General Secretary, Non-Playing Captain for the county teams and National Councillor from 2013.

During his time as Non-Playing Captain the Middlesex team had great success, winning the County Championships title eight out of nine years in the 1980s when the team included several England senior international players.

Michael also worked at a high level with the development of table tennis particularly in the London Region. He was the ETTA Regional Chairman (London/Greater London Region) from 1986-2013 and represented London on the ETTA National Development Committee from 2001-13.

Michael's involvement and leadership led to the significant development in the London Region during these years and included increased school participation, increased disability play, increased volunteer base, improved diversity and inclusion, expansion of the London Junior TT Scheme and assisting in the development

of the Mossford TT Centre.

Another string to Michael's bow was with the London Federation of Sport & Recreation where he was Treasurer from 1999–2009 and President 2009–12. This organisation made a special presentation of a '50 Years of Service to Sport Award' in 2009.

Understandably, this was not the only honour that Michael received. Table Tennis England made Michael a Vice-President in 2000 and the ultimate accolade of Honorary Life Member in 2016, both richly deserved rewards.



Michael receives his ETTA Vice-President's badge from Alan Ransome

At the time of his death, Michael was still actively involved at League, County and National level and was in post as Middlesex Chairman and National Councillor and as President of the Wembley & Harrow League.

This wonderful list of achievements tells only part of the story. The respect and affection in which Michael was held is shown by some of his closest colleagues.

Table Tennis England Chairman Sandra Deaton said: "I sat alongside Michael for many years during his unwavering devotion to our sport as both Regional Chairman and Middlesex National Councillor.

"He would always hold his own opinions and contribute to a debate at the point he felt it to be of relevance to those he represented. He was a wealth of knowledge in all aspects of table tennis and he had an ability to share that insight in a quiet and respectful manner. He will be greatly missed by so many and our thoughts go out to his family at this difficult time."

From Doreen Stannard, TTE Honorary Life Member and Past President, Middlesex Vice-Chairman: "Michael had such a wealth of experience in all aspects of our sport, it was a pleasure to work with him and Middlesex certainly benefited from having him as Chairman.

"Michael was a loyal member of the 100 Club who always looked forward to the annual get-together to meet up with old friends. There will never be another Michael Close, a hard act to follow and very sadly missed by all who knew him, RIP."



Michael and his wife Elisabeth at a 100 Club dinner in 2007 (courtesy Doreen Stannard)

From Tony Dias, Chairman of the Wembley & Harrow TTL: "Michael was a clever, inspirational, fair, encouraging and above all warm individual who has contributed to table tennis in Middlesex and the Wembley & Harrow League for a very long time. I will certainly miss his presence, witty anecdotes and good advice."

Steve Leven, General Secretary of the Wembley & Harrow TTL: "I first met Michael at coaching sessions when I was a youngster. Little did I know of his esteem at that time, but later, as he acted as my mentor on the Committee, I began to appreciate all that he had done and was doing for the sport."

"He was always available to offer advice and he realised that everyone in the table tennis community was acting for the love of the sport – none more so than himself, of course."

Michael will be missed by all who knew him and we are grateful for his lifetime of dedication and service.

Our thoughts and condolences go to Michael's family, his wife Elisabeth, his sons Martin, Roger and Roland and his grandchildren Anthony (a promising junior player) and Lydia.

Elisabeth, Martin, Roger and Roland warmly invite the table tennis family to Michael's funeral on Thursday 12th

July, starting at 11am at Christ Church, The Common, Chorleywood, Hertfordshire WD3 5SG. Family flowers only, please.

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