

VIETNAMESE GEORDIE



Obituary: Vietnamese refugee who settled in England

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Chu Van Que, the former world No 40 who made his home in England after arriving as a refugee from Vietnam, has died at the age of 73.

Also known as Van Chow, he was born in Guangdong, China, the middle of five boys in the family. He left home at 14 for Vietnam due to famine and in the same year he started playing table tennis. His talent was soon spotted and he was selected for training for the national table tennis team.

He was then sent to China for further training, where he played with some of the world's top players including the world No 1, Zhuang Zedong. At the peak of his career he had a world ranking of 40.

In 1973, he met his wife to be, Thanh. They married in the same year and had three children. In the 1970s, they were made refugees and fled to Hong Kong. By the late 1970s, they were accepted to live in Britain and were housed in Newcastle.

In an interview with a local councillor he was asked about his skills and talents. His reply was simply 'I am a professional table tennis player.' He was sent to watch some top players in action and was surprised with the standard of playing. He was then offered a job as the county coach on the condition that he excelled in competitions – which he did.

In November 1980 he became the first unseeded player from Northumberland to win a major table tennis tournament. Chow secured the men's singles title in the famous Colgate North of England tournament. He made the front cover of *Table Tennis News* in November 1980 and was nicknamed the 'Vietnamese Geordie' – but in fact he was actually ethnic Chinese.

Like many Chinese players from the 1960s, Chow played with the traditional Penhold with a short pimple rubber. He custom-made his own bat for greater strength and speed. He would charge on every shot with great

precision and dazzling footwork.

His passion for the sport never ceased and he continued training throughout his life to maintain his fitness. Even at the age of 68, he was a regular at the Central London League and was unbeaten. He gained 83% in division 1 as recently as the 2016/17 season.

His skill spoke louder than words and he was well respected amongst players of all ages. At the age of 70, he still had fast reflexes and co-ordination and vigorously practised with players including Tin-Tin Ho.

Tin Tin said: "He was so kind as well because he gave me very wise advice when I was younger, training in Morpeth. Also he was incredibly fast and had impressive skills.

"Those of us who trained at Morpeth would always expect to see him there every week, enjoying the sport. His memory will live on in the table tennis community, yet he will always be remembered as the kind and humble 'old man' – the phrase he used to call himself as he beat those who challenged him! I give my deepest condolences to his family and friends, and it was an honour to have met Van Chow."

In 2015 at Morpeth Table Tennis Club, he met up with Desmond Douglas MBE and club members had the pleasure of watching the two renowned veterans in action.

Chow was taken ill in November 2017 and sadly passed away in Hammersmith Hospital, West London last month. He is survived by his wife, two daughters and a son, as well as three grandchildren. He often spoke of his family with great fondness and, like table tennis, they held a special place in his heart.

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