



Schools stalwart John thrilled to receive major award

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A lifetime's contribution to school sport led to a date with royalty as John Arnold was presented with the Emeritus Award by the Sport & Recreation Alliance.

The Earl of Wessex presented the award, at the SRA's Annual General Meeting yesterday.

John was nominated by Table Tennis England after more than half a century of service to schools table tennis, including as President of ESTTA from 1989 to 2017.

Sandra Deaton, Chairman of Table Tennis England, read the citation before the Earl made the presentation in front of 150 delegates at the event at Imperial College, London.

"It was a lovely occasion and I'm obviously thrilled," said John, who was awarded the MBE in 2012 for services to school sport.

"Part of me is embarrassed too because when you looked around the audience, you thought most of them could be standing where I was."

In his acceptance, John spoke of the privilege of working with schools where sport, alongside music and drama, had an impact on the ethos of the school and enriched the lives of pupils. He also spoke about the privilege of working with teams of people.

John also credits several people within the table tennis family for passing on their knowledge to him.

He said: "When you look at the great people in table tennis who I've learned from in terms of organising events, people like John Wright (World Championships referee), Tony Chatwin and Steve Welch – if I've achieved more, it's because I've stood on the shoulders of giants and learned so much from them."

John's service to the sport begun when he took up his first teaching post in his native Macclesfield in 1963 and encouraged others to join a schools' league which led to the formation of the Cheshire Schools' TTA, of which he became General Secretary.

A move to Wakefield in 1968 followed the same pattern of building up inter-school table tennis. He also, with others, drove forward the establishment of the West Yorkshire Schools' Association.

In 1973, he was co-opted on to the ESTTA Executive Committee. He was elected General Secretary in 1975, Chairman in 1978 and President from 1989/2017 – the latter combined with the role of Development Officer.

Following the successful organisation by ESTTA of the International School Sport Federation (ISF) Table Tennis World School Championships in Birmingham in 1993, he was invited to chair and set up the ISF Table Tennis Technical Commission which has organised biennial events in 10 countries, including China. He stood down in 2010 when he was made an Honorary Life Member of the ISF.

His interest in school sport in general resulted in his acceptance in 2001 of the Chair of the National Council for School Sport (NCSS), the umbrella body of National School Sport Associations. He held this post until 2014.

In 2017, ESTTA merged with Table Tennis England and John remained involved as Deputy Chairman of the new Schools Committee for the year of transition, stepping down from his role at the end of the 2017/18 season. Fittingly, his last event was the Schools International Championships, hosted by England in June 2018 and at which a presentation was made to John and his wife Margaret in gratitude for their years of service.

Despite this rich history, John says his highlight always remains the same – playing on a rickety table against a PE teacher at Broken Cross County Secondary school in 1963 and being asked by some pupils if they could play.

“They asked ‘can we play against other schools?’ and the rest is history,” said John.

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