



Whole new ball game for England great Brearley

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Ashes-winning England cricket captain Mike Brearley has turned to table tennis for his latest sporting challenge.

The man who inspired Ian Botham to legendary feats against Australia in 1981 was looking for a way to stay active and was considering table tennis after seeing BBC programme *How to Stay Young*, which highlighted the physical, mental and emotional benefits of the sport.

A chance meeting with table tennis Olympian Matthew Syed and some Table Tennis England input led to an introduction to Hampstead Garden Suburb TTC, where Brearley, now 76, joined a weekly coaching session.

He is enjoying the sessions and says he would recommend the sport to anyone else looking to stay active for longer in life.

"I had enjoyed playing those few times I had played in my life," he said. "I'd seen the TV programme and thought it would probably do some good, physically and mentally, to play table tennis and I made a few desultory attempts to find a club in my area, but probably didn't make much of an effort.

"I then met Matthew at the Cheltenham Festival of Literature when we were put together to do a Q&A about sport, and through him got in touch with the club."

Brearley, who has also written about his table tennis experience in his diary for the *New Statesman* magazine, is enjoying learning new skills but says he has no intention to take the plunge into competition.

"It's a very quick game, very sharp. It's good fun, that's the main thing, and it's nice to learn something at my age," he said.

"I'm one of the worst players at the club and I think have probably played the least, so I'm not up to league standard. I've no ambition in that direction, but hopefully to improve and have the pleasure of getting a bit

better.

"It's the enjoyment of it that's primary, that and staying more active for longer in life."

Breareley is still a well-known figure in cricket and has recently published a book *On Cricket*, a series of essays in which he reflects on his lifetime in the sport. It is published in hardback by Constable at £20.

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