



'I won't let losing a leg stop my Commonwealth dream'

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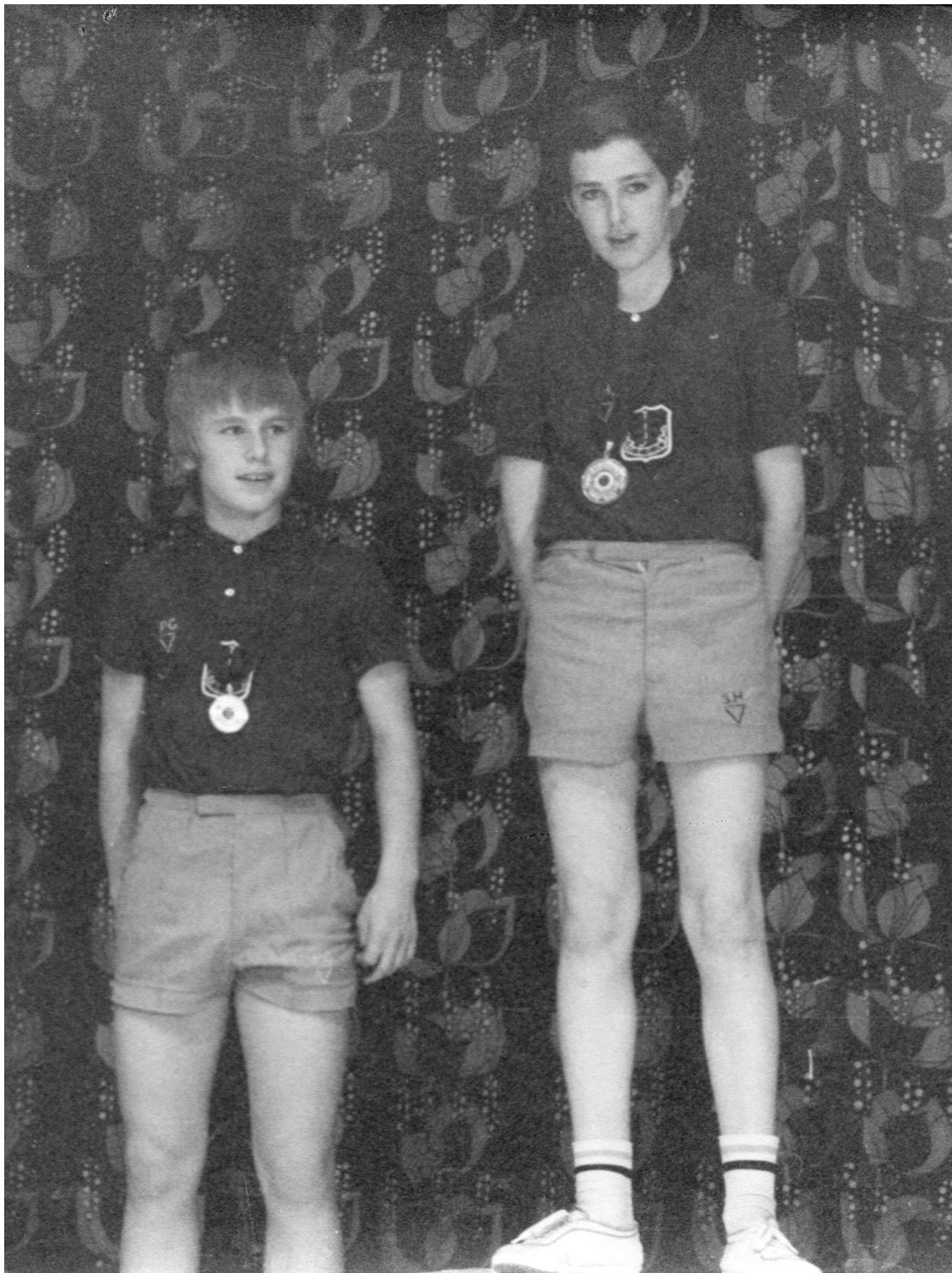
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When former England international and European champion Simon Heaps lost his leg to diabetes earlier this year, he had no intention of letting it curtail his table tennis ambitions.

Having made a rapid transition to the para side of the sport, he is already winning medals as a wheelchair player.

He has now launched a fundraising appeal to enable him to compete on the international stage once again and has set a target of appearing at the 2022 Commonwealth Games in Birmingham.

Simon, now 64, was European Cadet champion in 1970 and won a string of other tournaments, including the Junior Boys' Doubles title at the English Junior Open in 1972/73, in partnership with Desmond Douglas. He went on to represent England as a senior before retiring in 1979.



Simon on top of the podium at the 1970 European Youth Championships

He came back to the sport in 2016 and played in VETTS events, winning two gold medals at the Six Nations event in Guernsey and continuing to play until 2018, when his condition became worse.

He was in hospital in April and May this year, initially losing a toe but ultimately needing to have his right leg amputated just below the knee.

Simon, from Ferndown near Bournemouth, said: "It's been life-changing, but in the face of adversity, you've got to take things head-on. You either sit back and mope and don't do anything or you play with the cards you are dealt.

"I joined British Para Table Tennis from my hospital bed and arranged to get a specialist wheelchair in the middle of June.

"50% of people who lose one leg to diabetes lose the other one within five years, so I'm trying to do as much as I can now.

"I'm probably keener now than when I was 14 or 15, because I've got a goal and the clock is ticking.

"My wife Pauline has been fantastic, I'm eternally grateful. She's been fetching and carrying and has been a huge physical and emotional support. It was horrendous for her in the early days, but things are now getting better.

"All my VETTS friends say I have been an inspiration. I don't really feel that, but I'm going to go and work with some disabled kids at a local school and hopefully that will inspire them to see that I haven't given up."

Simon is being coached by top-20 player and World Championship of Ping Pong qualifier Matt Ware in Bournemouth and was featured on Meridian, the local ITV channel, on Friday.

[You can watch the film by clicking here to visit the ITV website](#)

One of his first tournaments as a wheelchair player was the BPTT Nottingham Para Open Grand Prix in September and he won two silvers – in doubles alongside GB athlete Dan Bullen and in the singles.

A three-day training camp followed in Sheffield with the British para squad, and he is now fundraising to attend the ITTF Para Copa Costa Rica next month as a self-funded player – where he will play alongside Bullen once again.



Simon Heaps at the British Para Table Tennis training hall in Sheffield

Simon is aiming to raise £20,000 through the GoFundMe website to pay for the trip and to finance his training and competition programme beyond that.

"From my point of view, I need to get to Costa Rica so I can be classified by the medical team and to experience playing against international competitors.

"I want to try to play for England at the Commonwealth Games in 2022 – though at the moment they haven't decided which events are going to be there. I'm likely to be in Class 5, which is very competitive with Jack Hunter-Spivey and Dan Bullen, but if there is a team competition then there is a chance.

"I've set myself the target of raising £20,000. It sounds a lot, but it's around £7,000 a year and going to Costa Rica is going to cost about £2,300. Beyond that, Matt's coaching time is going to cost £4-5,000 a year."

[Click here if you want to make a contribution to Simon's appeal.](#)

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