



Obituary: Graham Parkes

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Player, administrator, umpire and friend. Graham Parkes had many roles in his table tennis career. He was a near-constant presence in the Clacton & District League for the last 40 years and it was the greatest of shocks when we learned of his death, three days after he collapsed during a table tennis match.

It says much of Graham's attitude to the sport that, twice before, he'd suffered serious injury and illness whilst playing table tennis. But he had a quiet determination to continue and, despite those problems, he bounced back with his customary resolve and good humour.

'Never give up' could have been one of his life's maxims. In the current season, where his team was bottom of Division One by some margin, Graham never conceded the fact that his opponents, although more able, were unbeatable and, when he was on the table, he fought all the way despite the odds.

The simple fact was that Graham enjoyed playing table tennis. Whenever the entry forms for the Closed Tournament were issued, Graham's was usually the first one to be returned and, invariably, he entered every event he could, often taking part in seven events over a busy Closed weekend.

During his time in the League, Graham played for the CYC, Great Holland and Windsor Clubs but, for the last twenty-five years or more, he was a stalwart of the Brotherhood Club.

When he joined the League, he played in the bottom Division – at that time Division Five – but his ability was quickly recognised and soon he was playing in Division One. And whilst he was never disgraced playing in the top-flight, he was probably most at home in the Second Division.

Graham never hankered for trophies but, over the years, he was no stranger to silverware. He was a Division Three winner with Great Holland D in 1983, and a member of winning Brotherhood Division Two teams in 1994, 2017 and 2019. He also had success in the Closed Championships, taking the Division Two Singles title in 2000, and the Division Three Singles in both 1989 and 2014.

And that's not to mention runners-up medals in the Senior Combination Tournament (1983), Drawn Doubles

Tournament (1991), the Closed Consolation Singles (1997) and Handicap Singles (2015).

It's perhaps ironic that last season was one of his most successful in table tennis, when he captained the Brotherhood I team to the Division Two title and as well as leading them to victory in the Handicap Knock-Out Cup, a notable 'double'.

Graham often took on the role of Team Captain and, over the years, had several spells as Match Secretary for Clacton's Men's, Ladies, Mixed, Veterans' and Super-Veterans Inter-League teams.

In recent years, Graham took on more responsibility within the League, becoming a Management Committee member in 2012 and, in 2014, League Vice-Chairman. And in 2017 when the Tournament Officer post became vacant and there were no volunteers to take the job, Graham stepped up to take on that role as well.

Graham was also a well-respected International Umpire. He was good enough to be invited to officiate at the European Championships when they were held in Birmingham in 1994 and the 1997 World Championships in Manchester. And, although he had retired from umpiring by the time of the 2012 London Olympics, he took part in the table tennis event as a volunteer helper.

His knowledge of the laws of table tennis also made him something of a guru for local League players who often consulted him about matters of the law. And his quiet authority and knowledge meant Graham was often called on for umpiring duties at major finals at the League's Closed Championships and Knock-Out Cup Final.

Graham was not a person to push himself forward but he was always there in the background, ready to help, or provide advice or an encouraging word, in his typical quiet manner. And although it may be trite to say, it's patently obvious that Graham will be greatly missed, whether as a player, administrator or friend.

However, Graham will be missed most by those closest to him, and our heartfelt thoughts are with Pat and her family at this time.

At his own request, Graham's funeral will be a private occasion. But his family has arranged an afternoon where all are welcome to get together to raise a glass to celebrate his life and memory. This will take place at Clacton Golf Club on Monday 17th February between 2pm and 5pm and all Graham's table tennis friends are cordially invited to come along to share happy memories of a true gentleman of table tennis.

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