



Obituary: England international Ronnie Allcock

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Ronnie Allcock, England International, passed away on 20th March. Ronnie, born in Moston, Manchester on 16th April 1929, first started playing table tennis when he was 15 years old and was coached by Stan Proffitt at that hotbed of table tennis in the north, Manchester YMCA.

Such was the strength of the players at the YMCA that Ronnie was selected for England, Lancashire and Manchester before he made the YMCA's 1st team.

It wasn't long before Ronnie's talent was recognised at the YMCA shortly after joining and he played his first representative match in the Lancashire League for Manchester 'A' against Blackpool on 25th November 1947, winning his Men's Doubles match with S Levy.

Two years later and Ronnie made his county debut for Lancashire against Warwickshire. Much of the intervening time had been spent in the Army carrying out his National Service although some tournament play had been possible. One successful occasion was at the East of England Open in September 1948 when Ronnie reached the final of the Men's Singles having beaten the talented youngster, Michael Thornhill.

After leaving the Army, Ronnie, practised daily to make up for lost time in the forces and this proved to be invaluable as he made his mark on many tournaments in the North and Midlands. His results brought him to the attention of the England Selectors and Ronnie made his international debut on 10th November 1949 against Ireland in Belfast. The team won 8-1 and Ronnie won his Men's Singles and Doubles with Wally Poole.



The England team which played Ireland on 10th November, 1949. From left: Johnny Leach, Peggy Franks, Ron Crayden, Molly Jones, Ronnie Allcock, Wally Poole

His last international appearance was in 1958 against Yugoslavia in London, a challenging fixture which England lost 7-3. Despite losing his singles matches, Ronnie with Johnny Leach overcame the Yugoslavian pair to take the doubles.

The Wilmott Cup proved a popular and rewarding competition for Ronnie and his Manchester League team-mates as they won three times, in 1956, 1958 and 1959, they were also runners-up in 1951 and 1957. Most of the players in the finals and many earlier rounds were senior internationals and so it was a considerable achievement to be so successful.

The English Open proved another rewarding competition with Ronnie's most successful year being 1956 when he was a semi-finalist with Adele Wood (later Mrs Pettifer) and reached the quarter-finals with Cliff Booth. Altogether he played in seven Open Championships between 1947 and 1961, in that first Championships Ronnie played with Harold Evans, who later went on to be the Editor of the Sunday Times and with whom Ronnie had a lifelong friendship.

A regular on the open tournament circuit, Ronnie had many successes in singles and doubles as well as in the junior age category at the beginning of his table tennis career. He often partnered Ronnie Baker and Adele Wood and also Jean Titterington and when in 1953 Jean suffered horrific injuries in an accident on the way home from a match, Ronnie was there to play in a benefit match for the 18 year old. He beat Johnny Leach in this match or, as described in the press, gave him a drubbing 21-12, 21-15. Five years later, he was a participant in another benefit match, this time for the Manchester United Air Disaster Fund.

Manchester was Ronnie's home city where he won at least eight titles in their Closed Championships, no mean feat when there were frequently at least three internationals as well as at least nine county players in the Men's Singles events, with total entries of 500.

He gained his coaching qualifications in the city and they proved of great success with perhaps the highlight of his time as a coach being at Butlin's Holiday Camp in Filey in 1956 where he met his future wife, Tina, who was working as a Redcoat in the entertainments department as a dancer.

Ronnie carried on playing table tennis for over 30 years but at the end of the 1973/74 season decided to call it a day despite still playing in the Premier Division in Doncaster. A strong attacking player with what was described as probably the hardest hitter of a table tennis ball in the world.

The words of former Scottish International, Brian Kean, much better describe Ron and are a wonderful tribute to him: "I was greatly saddened to hear of the passing of Ron Allcock who was one of a breed of Manchester's and England's great players.

I first saw Ron at the YMCA in Manchester who along with top players like Jack Clayton, Derek Schofield, Jeff Ingber, Benny Casofsky, Vince Hankey and Kevin Forshaw, all players of the highest quality and a great inspiration to players of my generation.



Benny Casofsky and Ron Allcock signing autographs in 1951. (From Ron Allcock Collection)

"One of my vivid memories of Ron was seeing him use what can be best described as a bath sponge bat. This was a bat that was thicker than Piers Morgan's skin and would defy current regulations by a couple of inches. One of its overwhelming features was the silence when striking the ball.

"It was however quickly superceded by the advent of the reverse rubber bats which still prevails today (albeit with great chemical enhancements).

"I become more acquainted with Ron when on behalf of the Manchester League provided coaching sessions at the Greengate and Irwell Rubber Company. It was at these sessions I first met a larger than life character in both personality and appearance called John Hilton from Hyde Lads Club.

"I often get into heated discussions with fellow committee members in our local league over their lack of commitment to youth development and ask them to give the thought to legacy they will leave. Ron, along with all the aforementioned, were a great inspiration to my generation and rather than treat us as threats to their status they engaged and encouraged us and one couldn't ask for a better legacy."

Ronnie spent his later years in Cleethorpes with his wife, Tina, and we offer her and all family and friends our sincere condolences.



Ron Allcock pictured in 1954-55 with Diane Rowe, Rosalind Rowe and Ken Stanley. (From Ron Allcock Collection)

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