



Obituary: Bobby Raybould, England international

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Former England International and National Champion, Bobby Raybould, has died. Bobby was born in Stratford, London on 8th December 1934 and was a prominent Essex player before going on to play for his country.

Bobby started playing table tennis when he was 14 years old and made the county team for the first time in 1951. He was an all out attacker, somewhat erratic but highly effective. Bobby started playing on the Open tournament circuit and his first recorded win was in the Junior Boys' Singles at the Surrey Open in 1951/52.

Like many of his era Bobby had to complete a period of National Service and like many other table tennis players he joined the RAF. Although his time in the RAF did curtail Bobby's opportunities there was still the occasional chance to play in some Open tournaments as well as playing in RAF representative matches, he also played in the RAF All England Championships in 1954, when, with Corporal Slater he was Runner-up in the Mixed Doubles.

On returning to civilian life Bobby became a regular on the tournament circuit and won innumerable titles for many years. His results led to a successful England senior debut against Ireland on 3rd January 1959, a match which was played in Leicester and which England won 10-0 with Bobby winning both his singles matches and his doubles match with Michael Thornhill. He also played against France later that year.

It was twelve months later at the first English Closed that Bobby reached the Quarter-finals of both the Men's Singles and the Mixed Doubles with Peggy Piper. Although an excellent singles player it was in doubles that Bobby excelled. He won over 40 Open senior tournament titles throughout the late 1950s and 1960s mainly in the Men's and Mixed Doubles events.

Although he partnered several different players his greatest successes were with Bobby Stevens, his Essex compatriot. The pair won the Men's Doubles title at the English Closed in 1962 and 1963; he also reached two Semi-finals at these Championships with Stevens in 1960 and 1964 and two Mixed Doubles Semi-finals with Jill

Rook (Mills).

The English Open saw further success with two Semi-final places in 1962 and 1963, again both with Bobby Stevens. In those same years, two Welsh Open championship titles in the Men's Doubles were added to the tally having previously become Mixed Doubles champion with Welsh player, Shirley Jones in 1958. It was at the Welsh Open that Bobby probably had his best singles win when he beat the legendary Richard Bergmann 19-21, 21-19, 21-19, an outstanding result.

Another memorable occasion was at the English Open at the Empire Pool, Wembley when Bobby was leading the World Number 1, Toshiaki Tanaka, by two games to one and 17-13 but eventually lost closely in the fifth end.

Excellence in sport certainly ran in the family with Bobby's brother being a British swimming champion. As well as excelling at table tennis, Bobby was also an incredibly good cricketer and on one occasion he played against a touring West Indian side which included a young Gary Sobers, Frank Worrell, Sonny Ramadhin, Alf Valentine and Everton Weekes. Bobby was 103 not out.

A good friend and fellow player at the time was the actor, Terence Stamp, and they travelled the tournament circuit together on several occasions, they remained friends throughout Bobby's life. Bobby is described in Stamp's book, 'Stamp Album' as "a wonderful player, exciting, erratic; a leftie". Bobby had an explosive backhand smash which was rumoured to have been taught by Victor Barna himself.

Former England international and President of Essex County TTA, Stuart Gibbs, lived next door to Bobby as a child and said, as Bobby's mother left the house early to work on the London buses, he was given the job of making sure Bobby was awake to go to work.

Stuart added: "The problem I had was that I also had to wake about six people sleeping on the lounge floor and after a short while I got to know these people and found out that they had all been practising table tennis at a local club called Fellows Cranleigh.

"Although the names meant little to me at the time, all of them, but more importantly Bobby, were responsible in many ways for changing my sporting life – those people sleeping on the floor included the superstars (in no particular order) Johnny Leach, Micky Thornhill, Diane Rowe, Ray Dorking and on one occasion Richard Bergman).

"Thanks for everything Bobby – you were my star, rest in peace."

Laurie Landry, former International player and ETTA Honorary Life Member, remembers Bobby as being "very friendly, very keen on the game and a marvellous doubles player, with Bobby Stevens they were the best doubles pair in the country for a long time, they were really brilliant".

One of the top players and characters of his era, Bobby's name will live on in the record books. Our condolences go to his wife, Pat, and all the family.

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