



John Hilton featured on BBC's QI show

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Table tennis got the QI treatment as English European champion John Hilton featured on the iconic BBC comedy panel show.

In the most recent episode, entitled *Ruff and Reddy*, host Sandi Toksvig asked the panel of comedians: "What is red and black and a complete racket?" – the answer being table tennis rackets.

She explained that rackets may be any shape, any size or any weight as long as one side is red and one black – and Scottish comedian Susan Calman earned points by suggesting (as she had once been told at a youth club) it was something to do with using different sides of the bat to put different spins on the ball.

Toksvig then outlined a rule change in 1986 which stipulated bats must be red on one side and black on the other so that opponents were not disadvantaged by players using different rubbers of the same colour on each side of the bat.

With a picture of John on the big screen behind the panellists, Toksvig commented that he had won the European men's singles title in 1980 despite being "only the fourth best player at his local YMCA, let alone in Europe" as he was using a combination of rubbers which his opponents could not work out. This, she said, illustrated why the rule change was later made.

Speaking about being featured on the show, John said: "I guess they say bad publicity is better than no publicity – not that it was bad, it was all good fun and it's nice to get that bit of fun out of it.

"The thing about being No 5 in the world, No 1 in Europe but only No 4 at the YMCA was my baby. Over the years when people asked me, I went along with it and said 'oh yes, there were a lot of great players at the club' and it took on a life of its own!"

After the segment about John, the panellists then attempted an experiment involving throwing a bat in the air to see which colour was uppermost when they then caught it – leading to a discussion about items rotating around more than one axis.

The episode is available on BBC iPlayer until July 4 – [click here to watch it](#), item at 13:15 (registration and TV Licence needed). The other panellists are Tom Allen, Zoe Lyons and regular Alan Davies.

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