



John delighted to take path from Parlour to Club

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Ping Pong Parlours are not just somewhere anyone can turn up and play table tennis for free, they can also be a launchpad into playing the sport more often, and a route into joining clubs and leagues.

The example of John Warley and his playing partners shows just how easy it can be to make the step from Parlour to club.

John 'discovered' the Parlour in Bolton while recovering from a heart attack and back surgery and soon became a regular, often challenging two teenagers – Ryan and Rhys – who were fellow devotees.

With the pandemic meaning a period of enforced absence, John was keen to get back on the table as soon as restrictions started to be lifted – however, the Parlour has not yet been able to open.

But thanks to Hilton TTC in Horwich, John has been able to safely return to play, taking Ryan and Rhys with him and finding kindred spirits in a different setting.

John, aged 74, said: "I used to play when I was about 18-19 and I wasn't bad – I was in a team in Cheshire – but I moved to the Midlands and I gave it up.

"Years later, I was recovering from a heart attack and a spine operation and I walked past the Parlour and I thought to myself 'oh, I used to play 50 years ago, I wonder if I'm still any good?' So I went in.

"I'd been going to a gym after my heart attack and I was quite happy going on the treadmill – it was a bit boring, but I needed the exercise. Then I found the Ping Pong Parlour and after that I didn't want to go to the gym.

"Before long I was playing regularly and I spent four or five hours a day playing table tennis. That to me is better than any workout.

"I've met a lot of people from all over the world and all different backgrounds in the last 18 months. It's really helped me. I've met some wonderful people and I just love table tennis.

"There's two lads, Ryan and Rhys, and I starting playing against them on a regular basis and we got quite a good rapport going, but all of a sudden it was closed because of Covid.

"I had a look on the Hilton website and thought I might start playing when they reopened, and I've been going for three or four weeks now.

"It was so good, because I was playing people I'd never played before and I thoroughly enjoyed it. I played against four of the members who were all league players. It was very welcoming.

"Ryan and Rhys are going too and Ryan's really keen. Over the last 18 months they've both become really good players and I like to think I've had something to do with that."

Although the club has had to temporarily close again because of local lockdown restrictions in Bolton, John is looking forward to continuing to play there.

He said: "I'm sorry the Parlour's closed because it's been a Godsend for me and helped me no end. But when we went to Hilton we got on really, really well and I'm looking forward to going back."

Jean Smart is treasurer and caretaker at Hilton TTC, which last season had 24 teams in local leagues.

She said: "Everybody's welcome at our place – we don't ask where they've come from, we just try to accommodate them.

"I think the Parlours have been a good idea. It puts the idea in people's heads that they can play locally and it's good to get them exercising and give them something to do."

Keely Armitt, Head of Mass Participation at Table Tennis England, said that providing opportunities for people to play in more locations is a key part of our work, but it is also important that they have a route to move into a club or competitive setting if they wish.

She said: "As our social and recreational programmes become more established, we are seeing some wonderful examples like this of how the sport and whole table tennis community can benefit from them.

"There's undoubtedly more that we can collectively do to encourage and drive long-term participation in the sport, if we are flexible and can make suitable opportunities available to people."

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