



## Obituary: Harold Evans, journalist and 'ping pong nut'

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Newspaper editor, historian, author and in his own words “a ping pong nut”, Sir Harold was perhaps best known during the time he was editor of the *Sunday Times*, where his journalistic investigations helped mothers who had been affected by the thalidomide tragedy receive compensation, as well as exposing Kim Philby as a Soviet spy.

Sir Harold later moved to New York and remained in America, marrying the iconic Tina Brown, editor of *Vanity Fair*.

Not bad for a youngster born in Salford who first dipped his toe in journalistic waters as a 16 year old in Ashton-under-Lyne.

As well as journalism there was one constant throughout Sir Harold’s life and that was his love of table tennis. He started playing during the war on top of his Aunt’s Morrison shelter in one of her rooms with his younger brother, Fred. He later played at Manchester YMCA, where amongst others; he played with and against England international, Ron Allcock.

When the English Open was held in Manchester in 1947, the two paired up in the Men’s Doubles where they lost in the Round of 32, unsurprisingly, as they came up against Johnny Leach and Jack Carrington. In the Men’s Singles, Harold had a similarly tough draw when he met the French champion and World Championships silver and bronze medallist, Maurice Bordrez – Harold didn’t win. Harold and Ron, who died earlier this year, remained lifelong friends.

Harold’s two passions were combined when he was the table tennis columnist for the *Manchester Evening News*, he also edited Ken Stanley’s book “*Table Tennis: A New Approach*”, published in 1959.

The table tennis thread continued and the ETTA benefitted when Sir Harold’s influence resulted in sponsorship to run the *Sunday Times Super League*. This was a very high profile tournament which ran for two seasons between

1973 and 1975. It was a show-case for the top players in England. There were six teams of three players – the captain, one senior player and one junior player. All teams played each other in a series of five matches played at venues of four 3 Star tournaments plus the English Championships. The prize money for the winning team was £300 (just over £3,000 at today's rate). In addition £2 was paid to the winner of every set played.

The six captains in that first year were Brian Burn, Tony Clayton, Desmond Douglas, Alan Hydes, Nicky Jarvis and Denis Neale, all top internationals. All remaining team members were or went on to be senior internationals too. It was an innovative series and with 18 of England's top players a real feast for the spectators. To give the tournaments a bit more kudos, Michael Parkinson was the guest presenter at one of the matches.

As Doreen Stannard, ETTA Past President, said, "Harold was very good for table tennis". Doreen was very much involved in the Super League series as Treasurer and in charge of umpires and stewards. Doreen tells of nearly causing a major incident in The Times offices where a match was being played. One of the light bulbs went out over the table and it was suggested someone hopped up onto the table to change it. You could almost feel the building shake at this, what seemed like an innocent suggestion, as it would have brought the wrath of the unions down and probably caused a major walkout.

Later while in America, Sir Harold became good friends with US table tennis entertainer legend, Marty Reisman. Marty persuaded Harold to start playing again using bats pre-sponge to help preserve the purity of the game. All this time literary articles regularly came from the pen, or more likely from the keyboard of Harold. One of his last was for the very quirky book "Everything You Know is Pong" by Roger Bennett and Eli Horowitz in 2010 in which he describes how he wasn't in favour of sponge and preferred the elegance and style of the hard bat era.

Harvey had contact with Sir Harold in 2009 when he wanted information for yet another table tennis article and at that time he was still playing with Marty Reisman, both using pimped rubber bats in his good-sized basement. Another contact was with Ken Muhr, when he was ETTA Information Officer, who had lengthy correspondence with Sir Harold for some time in the 2000s and found him very natural, chatty and unpretentious – "most unlike a major figure in international journalism". His love of, and interest in, table tennis remained to the end.

A great man and definitely a table tennis nut.

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