



Obituary: England international Peter Williams

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It is with much regret that we have learnt former England International, Peter Williams, has passed away.

Peter first started playing table tennis in Hatfield where he lived with his parents and sister, Judy, who too went on to become an England International and English Women's Singles National Champion before playing for the Netherlands.

The beginning of the family achievements were in an old wartime prefab, purchased and reassembled by their father in the grounds of the small hotel, Dagmar House, which the family owned and ran. It made a perfect games room and with enough space for a table tennis table the two youngsters practised for many hours. Eventually, a couple of teams were formed which played in the Welwyn and Hatfield Leagues until the family moved to Eastbourne when Peter was 16 years old.

While in Hertfordshire though, Peter received personal coaching once a week from Geoff Harrower and his wife, which laid such good foundations and were one of the major influences in his game. Peter went on to become Hertfordshire number 1 junior as well as playing for the senior county team and representing various leagues in the county at junior and/or senior level – Welwyn Garden City League, Hatfield League and St Albans League.

At the Hertfordshire Closed in 1963 Peter reached the Men's Singles final, the youngest player to do so, having beaten three seeds before losing to England International, Terry Densham. An impressive achievement for a 16 year old, he also won the Junior Boys Singles title that year and the junior title at the St Albans Closed.

Butlins Holiday camps must have been a highlight of Peter's summer where the *News of the World* Scheme was running and he was nominated as the Runner-up in Most Promising Player of the Year Competition in the summer of 1959 and in 1960 was the Boy of the Year Runner-up.

During this period, Peter played in several Open tournaments and had quite some success, winning both the Kent and Sussex Junior Open U13 Boys Singles in 1958/59 and 1959/60 and the Kent Junior U13 Boys Doubles in 1959/60 with Stuart Seaholme amongst other titles.

The move to Sussex resulted in Peter representing that county too, where he eventually was ranked as their number 1 player and also acted as Captain. He had more success at the Sussex Closed holding eight titles altogether between 1967–71 in the Men's Singles, Men's Doubles, Mixed Doubles and U21 Men's Singles. He also won multiple titles in the Eastbourne League.

Peter continued to enter tournaments and took titles at the Bournemouth, Buckinghamshire Letchworth, Gwent, Hastings Tigers, North East England and Portsmouth Opens at senior level. He remained holder of the last of these titles for many years, as the tournament was not held again for several decades.

The call for his first senior international came when he was 21, playing with Chester Barnes and Connie Warren against Israel on 21st October 1968 in Southgate, London. The team won 9–0 with Peter, as well as Chester and Connie, winning all their three singles matches. Further England caps were in the pipeline as Peter was selected for a tour of Ireland. The future looked promising.

However, disaster struck during a county match on 16th November 1968. Unaware that he had broken his foot during the match, Peter carried on playing and didn't get any treatment until 10 days later. The damage caused led to a slipped disc at the base of his spine and he was never able to fully train again. Looking on the bright side, Peter said that at least he remained unbeaten for his country and was never dropped! An amazingly positive attitude when his future international career was cut short. Peter did carry on playing eventually but never at the same level.

One of Peter's proudest moments during his playing career was helping his Sussex team reach the County Championships Premier Division in 1966 when he won all his singles matches in the 2nd Division South Play-offs. In 1967/68 with the score at 4–4 in three county matches against Middlesex, Yorkshire and Gloucestershire, Peter had to play the deciding matches and won all three, beating senior internationals on all occasions which resulted in his team finishing third in their division. For his contribution to the county, Peter was made a Vice-President in 1973.

On a lighter note, Peter told the tale of being asked to star in a 45-second television advertisement, playing table tennis and then downing about a third of a pint of Whitbread Tankard beer, one of a series featuring different sports. It took about eight takes by which time Peter was a little tipsy. Peter's manager at NCR (National Cash Register Company) saw it and asked him about it, his future wife Linda also saw it before they ever met. They eventually married on 8th September 1973.

At the beginning mention was made of Peter's sister, Judy, but the siblings weren't the only players in the family as Peter and Linda's younger son, Robert, also played to a good standard, representing Northamptonshire Juniors and Oxfordshire Senior second team.

Our sympathy and sincere condolences go to wife, Linda, his sister Judy, and all the family.

Harvey Webb adds:

"I came to know Peter in 1970 when we met socially at an event run by the National Cash Register Company where we both worked, albeit at different locations. This was after his accident had curtailed his England career and, as a joke, I told him he could always come and play for the Company TT Team in the Willesden League. Peter respectfully declined the offer but went on to say that he would happily visit the club and provide some coaching.

"I thought that he was returning my joke, but I was wrong, he was being serious. That summer he made several trips to our club on practice nights and I have to say that by just being able to practise against him put around 5 points on my game and that of my team-mates. His ability, even though slightly hampered by his foot, was inspiring, as was his general demeanour. He was truly a gentleman.

"Our paths would cross again in the 1990s when I was working for a Recruitment Company in Bournemouth and Peter came to us for some advice and I hope I was able to return the kindness that he did for my team 20 years earlier."

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