

# John Henry Foster – 90 years today

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**My Granddad – My Hero**



It's not often you find someone with so much dedication for their sport but John Henry Foster is one such man and it's a triumph to his spirit that today (8th Feb) marks his 90<sup>th</sup> birthday.

For a man who has been involved in table tennis for well over 50 years including playing, coaching and inspiring others, there's not much he hasn't seen but, after battling both bowel cancer and heart attacks, it's lovely to have such a glowing tribute from his granddaughter, Caroline Smith.

Caroline describes what a great impact Jack had on both her life and the lives of many others:

"Until my mum married my dad we lived with Nan and granddad up until I was three years of age; what a privilege it was to have two such wonderful people have such a huge influence in my early years.

As soon as I was old enough to hold a table tennis bat, granddad got me started on the dining room table. He'd already bought his own son, Dave, my uncle, through the ranks. Granddad started playing table tennis when he lived in Fulham in London, impressing his colleagues with his topspin."

"After 3 children and a move to Lewsey Farm Estate in Luton, granddad was aware there was nowhere and nothing for young people of the area to do. He started up a table tennis club at the Lewsey Centre. Twice a week, two 2-hour sessions an evening, granddad unrelentingly made it over to the centre to coach the young people of Lewsey Farm Estate and beyond.

The likes of Jackie and Lisa Bellinger, Dave Sharpe, Dave Carples, my uncle and me, of course, and many more all owe our table tennis skills, either in part or completely to Jack Foster. The reason why the once youth of Lewsey Farm Estate and beyond can show off in a garage in Australia or pop to the local social club for a quick knock, or play for a team in our 30's, 40's or 50's, or coach other young people or even have represented the country, is all thanks to Jack Foster. For over 30 years he inspired, promoted confidence, encouraged fitness, improved skills and more importantly kept young people, in a relatively deprived area, off the streets."



"His commitment didn't stop at twice weekly coaching sessions – throughout the season, he'd be zooming up and down the motorways taking his players to tournaments, or driving teams around to different destinations to play league games."

"During his 60's granddad had bowel cancer, and there, with much regret to the local community, the chapter at the Lewsey Centre ended. However, granddad started a new chapter, playing and coaching at Farley Hill for the over 50's. He also occasionally helped out at Milton Keynes Table Tennis Centre with Keith Thompson.

In the last couple of years granddad has battled a couple of heart attacks and much to his distress is unable to play table tennis any more. However, it's clear granddad's youth and vitality exudes from within and the

yearning he possesses when I mention I'm off to play table tennis at the social club this afternoon is unprecedented. "

"If you have ever known, or met my granddad you'll know his kind determination, his sense of humour, his gentle confidence, his passion and his love of life. He has not changed at all.

Happy Birthday Grandad, I Love you.

Caroline Smith (Buckley)

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