

Grand farewell for 'the Chief' at Bounce

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ITTF President Adham Sharara recollects his acquaintances with Richard Yule

Former Chief Executive of the English Table Tennis Association, Richard Yule, was given a grand farewell at a surprise celebratory retirement party in Bounce, London.

The fantastic occasion, arranged for weeks under great secrecy, included a host of colleagues (both old and new), players, officials, family and friends with whom Mr Yule was able to enjoy some nostalgia, re-acquaint himself with old friends and listen to accolades and recollections of his career.

'The Chief', as he's affectionately known, said: "This has been an unbelievable day that I will treasure forever. To see so many people past and present from all over the world has just blown me away. I was so surprised and am so grateful."

His table tennis career was long and illustrious, taking up the sport at about 12 years old. His career really began to blossom following his breakthrough aged 17 at the Perth Open, however, it was nearly not to be as, on the morning of the tournament, it was snowing heavily and his lift had decided that it was too dangerous to drive.

Unperturbed, resourceful and determined, he put on his wellies and hitch-hiked, arriving late but nevertheless making an impact by beating Stewart Downey (Northumberland) and reaching the semi-finals. This proved a stepping-stone in his senior career for Scotland and he went on to serve them with great distinction winning 285 caps, thus making him the most capped Scottish sports player of all time.

Mr Yule's table tennis achievements were too numerous to mention at the gathering, however, as a summary the guests were reminded that he was an eight-time Scottish National Men's Singles Champion, numerous times Men's & Mixed Doubles Champion, won the Scottish Universities title, many domestic Open titles, and a bronze medal in the Men's Singles at the Commonwealth Championships in Cardiff.

In 1971 Scotland hosted and lost 5-3 a friendly to the mighty People's Republic of China. Yule beat Liang Ko Liang (former world No.2) and former world champion Tsi En Ting. In 1974 at the Spanish Open Mr. Yule won the Men's Singles, Team event and Mixed Doubles with Grace McKay. He played in six World Championships, seven European Championships and six Commonwealth Championships – in the process beating three England No.1s – Chester Barnes, Dennis Neale and Nicky Jarvis.

He retired from national level play in 1985 and shortly after in 1989 he was awarded the Harry Baxter award for services to Scottish Table Tennis.

He then became a Scottish National Coach, a National Coach of Ireland and ran national training camps in Belgium. In 1985 he joined the Scottish Table Tennis Association as Director of Coaching & Development and ten

years later he become CEO of the ETTA.

In 1997 England hosted the World Championships, which was the largest single sport competition ever held in England. Just two days prior the Championships Mr Yule became the Tournament Manager due to the sudden illness of the late Mike Watts. His crisis management skills and diplomacy contributed to saving the day. In 1997 Mr Yule received the AK Vint staff award for his heroic efforts in Manchester.

In 1998 he supported Alan Ransome in the planning and submission to Sport England of the ETTA World Class Programme. Unprecedented funding to the tune of £1.28m per year for eight years when Sport England invited governing bodies to dream their dream.

Respect for Mr Yule was worldwide and the lists of guests in London was impressive. 143 attendees at the retirement party included ITTF President Adham Sharara, former Performance Director Michel Gadat, former English No.1 Matthew Syed and famous English entertainer Michael Barrymore.



Michael Barrymore takes the stage with 'The Chief'

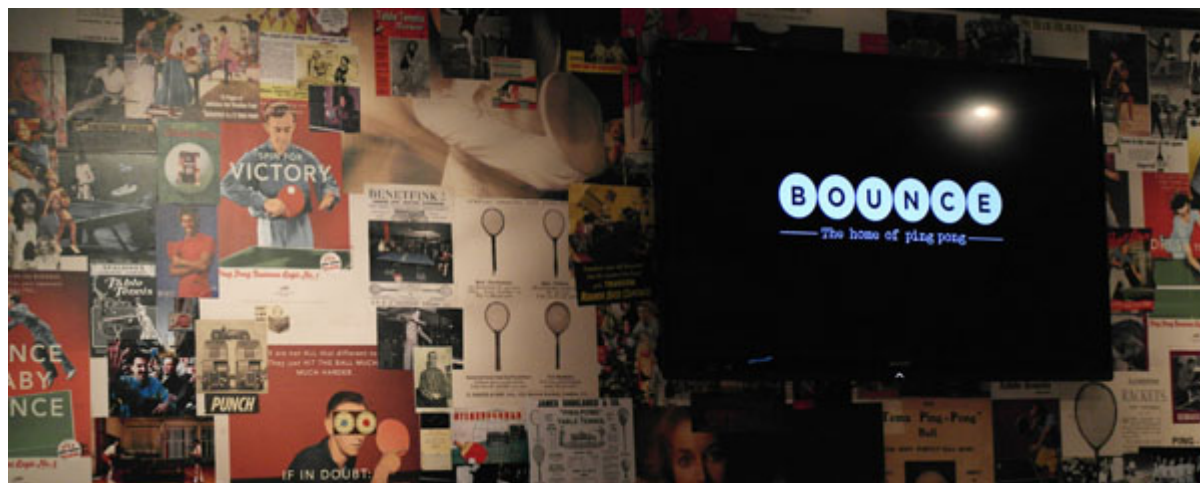
ETTU President Stefano Bosi also showed respect for Richard Yule's great career despite being unable to attend: "Although not being with you physically, I'm very much involved with the party organized to celebrate your retirement and I wish to recommend you to restart TT and practice a little bit more your 'forehand' ...Concerning the backhand ... It is not necessary," joked Bosi.

In the letter Mr Bosi stated: "I remember so well your backhand, when you were blocking my topspin...We were both very young and probably no one of us, at that time, was thinking we spent our life to table tennis. Yes, a life to the sport we were dedicating our youngness. The day any one of us decides to stop working, looks like a window opened on a new life. I'm sure there are plenty of things you would have been happy to do, but you didn't.

Well, it's now their turn, to enjoy 'normal' life, your innermost feelings and best friendships more. Of course, after years and years of intense work as ETTA Chief Executive, it's time to take some rest, but never stopping to enjoy our beloved sport. I'm sure you'll not make us miss your support, your experience, your cleverness, as table tennis has never been our job, it's our life.

On behalf of the European Table Tennis Union, I've the privilege to address our warmest 'thank you, Richard' for all what you did and will do in favour of our sport. Personally, I feel extremely proud of your friendship and I can perceive the emotions you're experiencing tonight."

Milica Nikolic



Bounce provided the perfect background for the retirement party

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