

ITTF – Johnny Leach Obituary

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Posted On: June 09, 2014

Johnny Leach MBE, a two-time World Singles Champion, has passed away at the age of 91, he was England's last surviving World Champion.

Mr Leach, a former world no. 1 who won the Men's Singles in Stockholm, Sweden 1949 and Vienna, Austria 1951, was also part of the 1953 England team who won the World Championships (Swaythling Cup) in Bucharest, Romania during a glittering international career.

A former President of the then English Table Tennis Association (now Table Tennis England) and Honorary Life Vice President of the organisation, he was inducted into the ITTF Hall of Fame in 1997.

Born on Monday 20th November 1922 in Dagenham, Essex, Johnny Leach didn't pick up the sport until he was 17 years old when he was helped by his father to make rapid progress through the junior titles.

As with so many other sportsmen at the time, his progress was halted by the outbreak of the Second World War in 1939. However, despite serving in the Royal Air Force in Northern Ireland, he found himself playing partners in the forms of England internationals Jack Carrington and Ron Crayden. The trio would practise together and provide exhibition matches until hostilities ceased, whereupon he became England's no.1 player.

Able to fully re-establish his career, Johnny Leach embarked on becoming a World Champion and achieved this on three occasions. As a singles champion in 1949 and 1951 and as part of the England team that won the Swaythling Cup in 1953. That team included Richard Bergmann, Adrian Haydon, Brian Kennedy and Aubrey Simons who also sadly [passed away recently](#).

In total he collected 16 World Championships medals (three gold, five silver and eight bronze) during his career having been the only player who participated in all ten immediate post-war World Championships.

During his career he won a host of Men's Singles titles including open international tournaments in Wales (1947), Ireland (1948), the United States (1950), Belgium (1950, 1957, 1958) and France (1951). Furthermore, on the international scene he enjoyed Men's Doubles success with Victor Barna, Richard Bergmann, Brian Kennedy, Ron Crayden, Aubrey Simons, Mike Thornhill and Sweden's Tage Flisberg.

Off the table he was just as successful, forming his own business selling table tennis equipment under the Johnny Leach racket and Halex ball brands. He also wrote several books on table tennis and was responsible for helping to establish the table tennis 'summer schools' – such to the extent that Butlin's Holiday Camps employed a table tennis coach in all their resorts during the summer holiday period.

His involvement in the sport extended to roles within the English Table Tennis Association where he became a Vice President in 1964, President in 1988–2011 and was given the role of Honorary Life Vice President in 2011.

During this time his services to the sport were recognised on a grander scale having been made an MBE (Member of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire) in 1966 by Queen Elizabeth II and was later inducted into the ITTF Hall of Fame in 1997.

With the passing of Johnny Leach, England loses both a table tennis champion and a sporting legend. His skill and commitment to the sport will be sorely missed.

Thanks to Ian Marshall for his contributions.

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