

Volunteers given the red carpet treatment

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John Mullis receives his award from the Countess of Wessex. Picture by George Blonsky

Two stalwart volunteers who have given years of service to table tennis have been given the royal seal of approval.

Paul Bovett and John Mullis were among the recipients honoured at the Torch Trophy Trust Awards, which recognise outstanding achievement by hardworking volunteers in sport.

A total of 18 volunteers from across the country received their awards from Sophie, Countess of Wessex at the Army and Navy Club.

Bobby Charlton, who is the Trust president, was also in attendance, as were a number of other sports stars.

Mr Bovett, who is 77, has been a player and club administrator in the Bridgwater area of Somerset for decades, including 35 years coaching in local schools.



Paul Bovett receiving his award from the Countess. Picture by George Blonsky

He attended with his wife Carol and son Leon, plus Jos Kelly, who nominated him and whose nine-year-old son Bertie Paul describes as the best prospect he's seen in his coaching career.

He said: "It was wonderful, we all enjoyed it immensely. There was a good mix of winners and a lot of the people were a lot worthier than me.

"The Duchess presented the trophies and walked around our groups to chat, which was really nice, and Bobby Charlton came over to talk as well – he's a very nice person."

He was also delighted to meet former England cricket captain Chris Cowdrey and Christine Truman Janes, a former Wimbledon finalist and French open champion.

Mr Mullis, who is 76, has been secretary of the Croydon League for 29 years and is vice chairman of the Surrey TTA.

He said: "It went very well and we were all given a very nice little memento.

"The Duchess was very nice, very interesting to talk to and was genned up on many things. She was very natural, as was Bobby Charlton, who came round and did some chatting."

Sir Bobby said: "We have honoured these volunteers at the Torch Trophy Trust Awards because of their incredible contribution to our great sporting nation.

"These volunteers are experts in their own field and we are pleased to bring attention to their tireless work.

"Volunteering is more often than not a thankless task but we must remember that without volunteers' grassroots sport simply wouldn't be able to function. Giving their time means more than turning up on a Sunday morning – as praiseworthy and important as that too is."

Paul Stimpson

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