



How Friday Photos got James focused!

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Former top county player James Vasco has rediscovered his love of table tennis after a 15-year break – and it's all thanks to seeing himself in Friday Photos!

Our weekly trip down memory lane, which is also a chance for us to fill in gaps in our photo archives, featured James on June 5, in a photo of a Junior British League line-up.

It was taken in the mid-90s, when James was playing out of Taverham TTC in Norfolk and busy on the local league and national tournament scenes, reaching the heights of No 2 in Norfolk and winning the Norwich Junior Championship.

He also played for Ipswich in the JBL and appeared in a few matches for Norwich Todd Foxwood in the Senior British League.

"I played not only in the Norwich & District League but also in the Wymondham, Beccles and Dereham leagues, and I attended summer schools run by Skylet Andrew and Jackie Ballinger," said James.

"I gave up playing football to put all my efforts into table tennis. I used to travel the country to play in junior tournaments and I played JBL for Ipswich, as there was no team in Norfolk."

But he stopped playing in 2000 because, as he puts it: "I was playing pretty much every day, with league matches, training and weekend tournaments and it got to the point where I saw it as a bit of a chore and wasn't enjoying it any more."

He had no plans to pick up a bat again, until a fellow member of that JBL line-up, Rebecca Sparkes, spotted the Friday Photo and dropped him a line on Facebook.

"I hadn't touched a bat and didn't have anything to do with the game but Rebecca saw the article and contacted me via Facebook and sent me the link," said James. "I copied it on to Mark Whortley, who's also in the picture, and the conversation started about the old days.

"It ended up with me contacting Dale Ajeto at Wensum TTC and he was very welcoming and very proud of his club.



James Vasco back in action at Wensum TTC

“Now I’m playing in the top division of the Norwich & District League and I’m absolutely loving it again.

“A lot of people have been very complimentary and say it doesn’t look like I’ve ever been away, but it doesn’t feel like that – I still have times when my opponent’s half of the table looks like a postage stamp and mine like a football pitch!

“But if it hadn’t been for that photo, I wouldn’t have thought about playing.”

There is another knock-on effect of the photo – James’ 10-year-old son Myles and seven-year-old daughter Amelia have also both joined the club and both love playing.

But there is one aspect of the photo which slightly makes James wince – the long hair he sported back in the JBL days.

“When I had my long hair, it wasn’t quite long enough to put in a ponytail, so I wore a baseball cap on backwards to keep it out of my eyes,” he said.

“I remember being frogmarched to the referees’ table at one event and standing there while they trawled through the rule books to see if it said anything about it.

“I wasn’t wearing it as a fashion statement, it was to keep my hair out of my eyes. One of my opponents said he had no problem with it and eventually I was allowed to carry on.”

James has no such problems now, although there are one or two things which he is having to adapt to.

“I can’t get used to it being only 11 points and two serves each,” said James, “and not being allowed to hide your serves.

“Before, I wouldn’t wake up until I was 14-11 down whereas now in the same time I can be two sets down before I work out what’s going on.”

Our regular Friday Photos feature will be back next week

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