



Awards delight down by the Waterside!

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It was a double celebration for Waterside Table Tennis Club at the 2016 Hampshire & Isle of Wight Sports Awards, winning two of the top awards.

WTTC was awarded first place in Club of the Year, while Chairman & Development Officer Colin French was presented with the Service to Sport Award.

The event held at St Mary's Stadium, hosted by BBC South Today Sports Presenter Kris Temple, was a celebration of sporting achievement as well as a thank you to all the volunteers who work tirelessly behind the scenes in sport.

Waterside currently operates five nights a week and works with a variety of partners to encourage people to be active. The club has an extensive programme of coaching in New Forest and Southampton schools, resulting in many new young players being introduced to the game.

Working with the New Forest School Sports Partnership and with Sport Solent, a Primary Academy has been established at Testwood. Pathways have been set up to create opportunities for young players to develop, and several have gone on to play at national level.

The club has ensured they have accessible tables and have wheelchair players competing in the mainstream competitions. The club has also worked with Public Health in Hampshire to deliver the Never Too Old for Gold Event, seeing over 100 players in the over-65 and over-75 categories taking part in the competition.

The club's A Team has just won the Southampton Premier League for the third time in a row. With 16 teams spread across five divisions there are always opportunities for players at all levels.

The club is truly a 'club for all', catering for all ages and all abilities.

The finale of the evening was the prestigious Service to Sport Award to Colin French.

In Kris Temple's introduction he said that 'Colin's contribution extends far beyond just the club as he has helped to drive table tennis forward on a district, county and national level. He has had a major local and regional impact upon the sport in a number of roles.'

Colin joined the Esso Table Tennis Club in 1972 and 10 years later became the match secretary. He started coaching at Blackfield Junior and his wife Jan was coaching at Holbury Junior, within a couple of years the two schools became county under 11 champions.



Colin French at the presentation

Esso, although it had a number of successful adult teams, was just a one table venue with no opportunities for juniors, and so the search was on for a larger premises. In 1998, Colin established Waterside Table Tennis Club in the newly built St Andrews church hall in Dibden Purlieu, and became the Chairman and Development Officer, a position that he still holds today.

In 2005, Colin worked hard to gain funding to turn Testwood Sports Hall into a table tennis centre, and helped to raise a considerable amount of money for this to happen. In 2008, the centre was opened. The centre benefits the school, sports partnership, county and Table Tennis England and is open all year round.

Colin has also been a key individual in establishing the New Forest and Southampton Priority Zone for Table Tennis England. He has fostered relationships with the County Sports Partnership, Southampton and New Forest School Sport Partnerships, Solent University and Southampton Football Club, to ensure that a wide range of people get to have a positive experience within the sport, either as volunteers, officials or players.

He is the Chairman and organiser of the Southampton Schools league, Hampshire Schools Team and Individual Championships as well as organiser of the National Cadet League and National Junior League.

This the second year in a row that WTC has received awards. In 2015 the club was runner-up as Table Tennis England's Club of the Year. Match Secretary John Fox was runner up in the Unsung Hero category and Colin French was winner of the Adult Volunteer of the Year.

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