



Leicester League: Evergreen Karen Smith wins at ELCC

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I was very fortunate in the early 1970s to be, for a time, non-playing captain for the County Juniors when such players as Anita Stevenson, Susan Baxter and Sally Elsdon were around as well as, not least of all, Karen Rogers.

And that was just the top flight girls, we had some very useful boys as well. It was a superb team in depth, not least attributed to the efforts of coach, John Ellis.

Further to that, I was also very lucky that Karen's first excursion into Division One of the Leicester League was by way of my own Knighton Park team. Even in those times, especially in those times, it was obvious that here was someone special. And so it has proved.

Champions at all levels, national as well as local, have come and gone.

Throughout five decades Karen Rogers, who was to marry Richard Smith, just went on forever, and is still going strong having won for the fifth time the National League team title for Ladies, the JM Rose Bowl, this time with Lois Peake. In the past she has teamed up with Anita Stevenson, Suzanne Hunt, Julie Revill and Jose Bongers, starting in 1980, then 1981, 1983 and 2009, before this year.

Is there a secret to this everlasting success? No, it is there for all to see. Karen relies on three things – control, control, control. Yes, she has an excellent all-round game but the core element is control of, not least of all, what she will allow her opponent to do.

To list all of Karen's achievements would take far too much space. In any case, this tribute is not simply for what she has achieved on the table.

Many people achieve many things when playing but so few follow up with their attitude and dedication off the table – putting back into the sport what they get out of it. For example, Karen has been Treasurer for the County for well over 30 years, for which she received the Maurice Goldstein Award in 2004.

Loyalty is also one of her bywords. Her first club was Knighton Park Table Tennis Club when it was a tin hut with one table and two snooker tables. Through thick and thin she has remained steadfastly with the club, both from the playing angle and by becoming a valued member of the club's committee, holding the post of Treasurer for many years. She has seen the club grow to its present elevation from one table to the capacity of ten on club nights, in its relatively new premises.

But Karen's contribution is even deeper than that. Every year there are handicap singles events locally such as the Rose Johnson Memorial, Phil Reid Memorial etc. Every year Karen enters and every year she suffers what some might think of as the indignity of giving away a myriad of points all the way through each event. Despite this, perhaps because of it, each year she comes back for more and, along the way, has had a fair amount of success.

I could go on but I feel sure you have the drift by now. Karen Smith (nee Rogers) has been the very backbone of table tennis in the Leicester area – County, League and Club, for many years. She seems to be playing as well as ever and is certainly as keen as ever.

I will not be the only one by any means to be wishing Karen even more success in the future and for thanking her for what she has given us so far.

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