

John Bowness looking back.

I started playing TT when joining Mellor Bromley aged 15, playing my first year in the league that winter. My friend Keith Surtees and his sister, Betty, took me under their wing and didn't mind me playing 60 sets and losing every single one. The first set I played was 21-0, 21-1 (I got a net!). Being in the bottom division I became, officially, the worse player in the league. Time to act.

Being a very big admirer of Don Bradman I found that he had taught himself to bat by knocking a ball against a wall with a cricket stump for hours and hours, day after day.

So, time to act. That summer I placed the dining table against a wall and proceeded to knock a ball, slight backspin to bring it down to the table, for a couple of hours almost every day. 20 minutes backhand, 20 minutes forehand and 20 minutes alternately. By the end of the summer I was very good at playing against myself and keeping the ball going for an hour.

First match of the new season was at Great Glen. "Don't worry about your results", I was told by Keith and Betty, "just enjoy, as these opponents will probably top the division". Bear in mind that those two had been getting results anything from 6-4 victories to 6-4 defeats winning a few between them without my help.

What happened? I won three and we lost 7-3. But it does show what a bit of determination with no help from anyone else can do for you if you stick at it enough. Boring, but.....

When I became a coach, obviously with juniors as well but I also had two adult sessions each week, one at Saffron Lane and the other at St Matthews estate. Usually 12 in the class I used to set them homework of doing what I did. You could always tell the two or three who did it in that, within three or four weeks, they were inevitably well ahead of the others who didn't.

When anyone asks for advice, whatever their standard, I still suggest that doing that, any dining room type table plus wall plus patience plus tenacity gives you the ability to add a great deal of control and accuracy. In my opinion a must for the beginner.

John Bowness.