

John asked if I had anything I could write for Topspin, to go in his reminiscing feature, so I thought I'd give it a go. Mine doesn't stretch as far back as the oldies, but far enough ;-)

As a young lad, there were only two sports played in my little world. Football in the Winter and cricket in the Summer. Straight home from school and up onto the big green (now a very small green with the Western Bypass right through the middle of it). We'd be out playing football until dark (with a short break for tea). In the summer up there playing cricket all day. I was a member of the Boys Brigade (only for the aforementioned football and cricket, not any love of going to church). The BB was run on two nights, Thursday for uniform inspection and such stuff and Monday as a club night, where numerous activities were played, table tennis being one of them. I never bothered with the club night as playing the likes of snooker, darts and table tennis held zero interest for me. However, one Monday night in September 1978 for some reason I attended. The Captain asked me if I'd play in the table tennis team as they had a match in Hinckley that night and were a player short. Reluctantly I agreed to play, he said it doesn't matter that you aren't any good as it's only a game! Halfway to Hinckley before I find out the opposition have been champions for the last three years. Anyway, I played using a £1.50 pimped sponge bat and lost all three, gaining about ten points over six sets including a 0-21. Strangely enough from this one evening I got the TT bug. I played every match for the rest of the season, quickly improving and getting to be (what I thought) quite good! Within three seasons we managed to win the title (I was lucky in that one of my teammates (Mick Murphy) improved even more than me and went unbeaten all season, he also played later in the L&DTTL for Royal Mail and Abbots Road). Having left the BB, the only table tennis I played was in the sixth form, where despite getting a couple more O Levels my main claim was winning the table tennis tournament! There was one more occasion I played, when my brother in law who knew I was keen on it said he'd arranged a practice for me with a Postman who played in the league. So, I got dropped off at the back of High Street Post Office and met Mahendra (MK) Mistry who gave me a bit of practice. This was when I realised that I wasn't quite as good as I thought! MK said I wasn't bad but would have to practice a bit!

I didn't and it was five years before I played again, Summer of 1988 and one of my old BB teammates Darren Kilsby became a postman and asked if I wanted to play for Royal Mail as they were adding an extra team. I jumped at the chance, September came around and I got my handbook, saw there were twelve divisions and thought we'd have a good chance, until I spotted we'd been put in Division Nine! The division had a fair few good players Tim Smith, Shokat Makhani, Denley Andrews, with a good number graded over 140, needless to say despite a much improved second half of the season we were relegated, I got 45% which I was less than impressed with. Two seasons in Division ten followed, being champions and top player in the second one. That season ended with my only cup success, winning the Lillian Williamson Cup with Audrey Watson and Malcolm Taylor. With Royal Mail losing their venue I jumped ship to play for Birstall with John Pestell and Richard Anderson in Division 7 They'd lost their best player Tim Smith half way through the previous season, Tim only lost once in three and a half seasons and I'm sure would have ended up in division one at some stage. In four seasons there, with the addition of Kevin Sanderson and John Marriott we were promoted up to Division Four. Wanting to get even higher I moved to join Jason Woodfield and the aforementioned MK Mistry at Syston who had been promoted to Division 3. We won Division Three and then Helen Rainford joined us and Divisions Two was also topped, we made it up to the pedestal of Division One. Just for the one season mind.

Having started with 45% in Division Nine, I managed 43% in Division One. Getting that four seasons bug I left to play for GE Lighting with Chris Woodward and an opponent from my very first season in Shokat Makhani. We bettered my record at Syston with consecutive promotions to again reach Division One. It was much tougher this time around and relegation and 26% average is how it ended up. A combination of getting thrashed nearly every match and also not liking the change to 11 up saw me disillusioned and deciding to take a sabbatical.

I helped out at Syston in 2003-04, when Jason and his Dad Mal took a holiday to South Africa with Syston in their usual position of having ten matches to play in the last two weeks of the season ;-). Finally in January 2005 I emailed (not a fan of talking) Kev Sanderson and asked if Birstall needed a player. He said we do but not you, not really, I was welcomed back and up to last season I'd played fifteen consecutive seasons for Birstall/Regent. Elder statesman Charlie Bateman joined us when we became Regent One and hasn't done too bad!

Over the years I've played and lost to a fair few of the top players 😊.

My most played opponent is John Winsper, we've done battle twenty-four times, John won the first four but I've won nineteen of the last twenty!!! Not surprisingly John is also my most beaten opponent. Next up is former Leicester Taxes player Tony Nelson, who I've beaten fifteen times after losing first time up. Mike Lapworth of Knighton Park is my favourite player, fourteen wins no losses, (sorry Mike).

On the flip side I'm none from six against the inimitable Karen Smith (did manage a 9-11 once) and also Ali Ahmed. Most losses are against a fellow Martin B, Mr Brunning eleven straight losses before finally managing one win! I've also lost eleven times to Bruce Johnson although I have managed to beat him seven times.

Best win ever? I've beaten Andy Craven Griffiths, Harris McQueen and Richard Hayes and a few other decent players, but my best was in Division Three when I managed a win over Geoff Aldwinkle. Worst loss, well points wise it was Kevin Hall. He beat me 21-5 21-8 in Division One although even worse was when he beat me in the Elbow Tankard after a thirteen start he looped seventeen straight winners past me, I did manage to get to seventeen though ;-)

Nicest opponent, there's been a fair few, Fred Day, Bryan Hall, John Illiffe, Karen Smith but without question Allan Crowson, couldn't get near him at one time, luckily, he got old 😊

Martin