

## **All Our Yesterdays – 50 Years Ago, Number 7 – John Bowness**

I had a look at the Elbow Tankard of 50 years ago last time to say what a shame that this year will be the first time since inception it will not be staged. 50 years ago we had ten groups of 6 teams and it was very competitive with no less than seven of the first eleven recorded results at 5-4. It was a simple nine sets being played back then.

I was looking for players' names I mentioned in my reports who are still playing and I didn't find many. One I did find was our old friend Derek Butt who is still plying his trade in division five. Back then Derek was winning three in helping Okemrap to a 5-4 victory. If you look at the team name backwards you get an idea who they were.

However, I also wanted to look at other things including the All-England Under 13 Girls Championships when someone who is still playing at a very high standard locally did very well to win the English title.

Karen Rogers (now Smith) was one of eight regional finalists to be split into two groups in Wolverhampton with Karen winning her opening set against Sandra Harding (Letchworth) 21-16, 21-14 before seeing off Guildford's Nicolette Leslie 21-6, 21-13. Her final group match found Gillian Taylor more of a problem which was eventually overcome 21-15, 16-21, 21-8.

The final was against a surprise package in that Dagenham's Elaine Tarten had beaten the pre-event favourite, Judith Walker, to provide the opposition, and it was typical Karen. Having won the first 21-9 her opponent shut up shop and the first point was one needing over 100 shots altogether, a war of attrition. At 13-13 Karen's tenacity suddenly began to pay off and she got home 21-14

Going back to the Elbow Tankard I found another player still playing who was performing well back then in Geoff Hancock (now with Abbots Road) who won three for Emboys against Maggyites but in a lost cause as his team lost 7-2.

Lowly (in the Leicester League) Nattarg found themselves up against a top Division One player turning out for Three R's in Paul Randell who was playing with his mum and dad (hence three R's). Paul won all three in a 6-3 defeat despite giving away anything from 14 to 17 each game.

50 years ago was the time the league moved from the A and B streams, apart from Division One, to a more straightforward 1-2-3 etc. By now the league had grown to 17 divisions with more clubs and teams expected to join.

The original set up was to try to get better teams higher quicker than normal but such had been the increase in divisions that another way had to be found. With the new set up no less than four teams would be promoted and relegated from division five and below so that those exception teams would soon move up to their proper slot.

It actually worked a treat for the better teams going up but was not an overwhelming success for those going down, although spaces were normally found for teams not wanting to go down too quickly.

Around about this time the League had its Annual General Meeting with the officers elected being, President: Cyril Frith, Chairman: John Ellis, Barry Hobson was just taking over as General Secretary while Bert Hayes was Treasurer. Midland League Secretary: Derek Butt and a certain Mr Bowness was Press Officer.