

All Our Yesterdays – 50 Years Ago, Number 6 – John Bowness

A LOOK AT THE ELBOW TANKARD

55 years ago, having put the grading system in place in the Leicester League, John Ellis, Chairman of the league at the time, and myself sat down to plan an ambitious summer handicap competition that a number of people had been asking for over many years.

One or two handicap competitions had been tried but the trouble was that in trying to cater for such a diversity of top of division one to the very bottom division meant that games up to 31 and even 41 were used. There are obvious defects.

The gradings help in the first instance but then we decided to try a another route. In the end it was simple in that taking three players: A, B and C. The first two (say) play in the top division while player C plays much lower down. A is a fair bit better than B with the latter receiving 6 points. Thus far if C received 15 points from B then he would need to receive 21 from A the old way – up to what number?

By having a tapering system (still being used today) then to player C there was virtually no difference playing against A or B so, keeping it simple, A gives B 6 points while A and B would both give C 15 (or it might be 15 and 14 respectively). It has worked a treat over the years.

50 years ago such were the entries for the Elbow Tankard that there were ten groups with six teams in each, 60 teams in all to show how popular summer table tennis was back then. The competition started as the normal season finished and closed as the new season began, no gaps.

Alas, this year, 2020, will be the first time the competition will not have been staged and, being one of the instigators (**EL**lis / **BOW**ness = ELBOW) it has made the current situation even sadder.

As an aside I played for many years in the competition before taking my break from table tennis without winning it but managed it at last seven or eight years ago with Martin Pember and Chris Parmar-Saville. I am sure John Ellis was looking down giving me a thumbs up.

One of the major problems with handicaps is taking into account the rapidly increasing ability of the younger element. Juniors get better very quickly as they gain experience along with coaching. I notice over recent years that junior teams have largely dominated in local handicaps.

All those years ago I put into the gradings a factor for taking care of those who were fast improvers by comparing their opening grading with both their first half of the season results and then their second half. For some reason that went by the board some years ago but, at the time, it did draw the youngsters back nicely into the fold as it were and nullified some of their advantage.

With the current situation almost certainly curtailing a proper league this coming season I can see an Elbow Tankard type competition being one way to go when we can to some extent play competitively. Maybe even just two per side. Perhaps not a handicap competition as they are not everyone's cup of tea (or tankard of ale) but certainly using the gradings to sort out the divisions or groups in the short term.

Next time I shall have a look at results in the Elbow Tankard 50 years ago.