

SPOTLIGHT ON.....ROY HARPER

by John Bowness.

Until this season when modern technology got in the way Roy Harper was a Divisional Secretary, and a very good one at that with very well written reports and immaculate records. He had been in that post for over 50 years after a League Committee meeting at the Leicester YMCA in the very early 60s when Mick Davies grabbed him and said: "I have just the job for you".

Roy's involvement with table tennis began in 1950 when, as a young man of around 20 and having just been demobbed from the RAF, he went back to his job with the Post Office as a telegrapher dealing with telegrams – now that seems a very high tech job to me. His boss was, himself, a very good player by the name of Harold Ball. As soon as Roy showed some interest Harold immediately signed him up to play for the Post Office in the league.

His first year saw him teamed up with Bob Bishton and Gordon Walters, their home base being the main Post office in Bishop Street, eventually becoming Telephone House on London Road before a short spell in High Street.

And here are some players, many of you will know, one or two still around, who Roy played with: Terry Highton, Mick Davies, Malcolm Taylor, Tony Gil, Peter Cox, Dick Stephenson, Stan Ford, Richard Hough, Richard Rimmington, Peter Walker, Audrey Watson, Derek Butt, Dave Linthwaite, Norman Hughes, Ken Hathaway and Trevor Taylor. Not all in the same season, I hasten to add and, as Roy says: "Whew, was it something I said?" And what happened to Uncle Tom Cobley?

One important note needs to be slotted in here. In Roy's Post Office days his son, Gary, also played BUT IN A LOWER DIVISION. Roy's capitals, it's a private joke. Well, at least it used to be.

Roy's next club was British Shoe Corporation with his team mates now being Dave Silvester, Dave Bray, Paul Webster and Derek Butt – old Derek keeps butting in. Roy was always content to play in the upper part of the middle regions, the highest division he played in being four, but he was always difficult to beat.

In his personal life Roy met and married his beloved Peggy and it was Peggy who pried him away from the sport around 1990 when she took him line dancing which just grew and grew until they were at it three or four times a week. Not only was time short but spare energy seemed to be lacking a little. Roy also ran (and still organises if anyone is interested) a Whist Drive as it gave him a chance to sit down, although he still plays tennis once a week.

As he says he has met some lovely people over the years whom he has played both with and against as well as many fine people on the League committee. He took his grandchildren, Dan, Mitchell and Jack Henry to Knighton Park and Abbots Road for coaching but, alas, although they enjoyed it they didn't take up the sport.

I asked Roy: If you could give anyone advice who was just beginning to play, what would it be? Answer? Just enjoy your match, win or lose, especially if it's a close result, all the better. Respect the team that you are playing against and also have a few laughs.