

CHARLIE JACQUES

Charlie Jacques was certainly one of, if not the, best defender ever produced by Leicestershire. He has, sadly, passed away in a nursing home but will be fondly remembered by many people associated with local table tennis from the 60s and 70s in particular.

Charlie came through the ranks quickly during the late 1950s and became a virtual ever present in the County Senior team for many years, as well as spearheading the Leicester League's Midland Counties Men's First Team, again for many years. He was County Champion numerous times.

Always competitive he was extremely fit at his peak with a majestic defence on both wings, particularly his forehand which was all but impossible to penetrate. If anyone anywhere in the World needed a defence then show him or her Charlie's forehand defence to emulate, they could find nothing better.

He was competitive, his own man and totally dedicated to the sport, but he was also a first rate team man. When I was county junior captain I could call on Charlie to help at any time, looking after an individual, a table, a whole group and he would always be there with first class help and support. He had come through the ranks so he knew how important it was to encourage in the right way.

He was a constant joy during my long stint as the League's Press Officer and telephoned me most weeks with all sorts of information – always positive and always about how well his rivals were playing or had played. I remember once he was top of the averages undefeated but rang at 1am just after his latest match had finished to tell me two players had beaten him. Bleary eyed I composed my next copy before going back to bed.

His battles against Ernie McLeish, the fiery Barwell attacker, are legendary. Their tussles in the finals of both the Leicestershire Closed and YMCA Open were more exhibitions than anything else, watched avidly by big crowds cheering every shot.

He was my inspiration and became a good friend. Sadly I retired, then he retired and we lost touch. Last time I saw him was about six years ago when he popped into Knighton Park one Tuesday afternoon. I offered him a bat but he had said he would never pick up a table tennis bat again after retiring.

Hopefully, wherever he has gone, someone will offer him a bat and he will accept and show them how a great sportsman performs.

John Bowness.