

I have now played in the League for 50 years and it got me thinking back to the early days at my first club, Belvoir YMCA and how I got involved.

I started work straight from school in 1968 at "East Midlands Gas Board" in De Montfort Street. The EMGB Table Tennis Section appears to have been formed in the same year but I wasn't aware of it at the time and they played at Aylestone Road as the sports & social premises in Regent Road were still to be purchased by EMGB.

It was quite early in my working life at the gas that I met Andy Needham and it was he who got me into table tennis. He was already playing at Belvoir YMCA with his dad Ken and he suggested I give it a go. To get from LFE to Belvoir Drive would have been difficult but in 1970 I passed my driving test and got my first car so I started to go for practice sessions at Belvoir.

What a place it was though in those days. The houses and street lights on Belvoir Drive stopped well short of the car park and it was a very dark and foreboding clubhouse if you were the first one there. We played upstairs and there were several light switches on the way. The regulars knew exactly where they were but keen as I was to get first on the table I soon planned to be 2nd or 3rd to arrive.

Bert Hayes was the coach and I can also remember, as well as Andy and Ken Needham, Bob Davies, Dave Wagstaff, Bob Jordan, Alan Towe, Ken Tew, Bill Newbold (I think) being in the club.

Brother Dave joined me at Belvoir in 1971 and me, Dave and Andy had some enjoyable early years in the league. Andy was a very good player and often got a max while me and Dave learnt the ropes and usually chipped in for points. In fact one year we won Division 15 and Andy remained unbeaten throughout the season.

I can't quite remember how Andy came to stop playing but I do know brother Dave had started work at Grattans so started playing for them in 1974. I eventually left Belvoir to join Leicester Gas (now Regent Sports) in 1977 and Dave joined me there in 1984 after about 5 years at Grattan and a couple at Kirby Muxloe Sports. By the time Andy finished, Tony Lillicrapp had joined Belvoir and me and Dave played with Tony for a season.

We have been at Gas/Regent ever since but I will always remember the early years at Belvoir YMCA. My memories are fairly scant so if Bob Davies or Dave Wagstaff or any other Belvoir players can add flesh to the bone I would be very interested to read it as I don't know when Belvoir began or when it finished.

It certainly got me and Dave into Table Tennis for life and for that we will be always thankful.

John Dewsbury.